

## **Making a Case for Pasifika Principals in Aotearoa New Zealand Schools: A Samoan Perspective**

Why are there so few *Pasifika* teachers in Principals positions in New Zealand Schools? Are Pasifika teachers actively being encouraged to aspire to leadership roles? Do those who are identified as leaders early nurtured, supported, coached and mentored to achieve that goal, or are there hegemonic factors that disadvantage them in the promotion and selection process, namely social class, negative stereotyping, discrimination or ultimately the decisions made by Boards of Trustees!

According to Ministry of Education (2009), out of a total of 2411 Principals 1.1% were of Pasifika descent. At the same time around 10% of the student population were of Pasifika ethnicity. Predicted figures suggest that by 2021 the Pasifika student population will be around 17% (Ministry of Education, 2009). Incidentally 82.6% were of European/Pakeha descent and 13% were of Maori origin.

Diversity of students in New Zealand schools is not reflected in Principals roles although research in the last twenty years shows minority leaders can make a significant contribution to students learning outcomes (Alton-Lee, 2001; Auva'a, 2008; Bishop, 2002; McFarlane, 2005; Robinson et al. 2008). The continued under-representation of Pasifika teachers in Principals positions in New Zealand schools may therefore be depriving Pasifika students of positive cultural role models that could make a difference to their education achievement and success at schools.

Pasifika is a term used by the Ministry of Education (2004) to describe all those who still identify with the South Pacific Islands because of ancestry or heritage. It is a term of political convenience as most Pacific people refer to themselves as Samoans, Tongans, Cook Island, Niueans, Tokelauans and others. It is also acknowledged that there is diversity among Pasifika people themselves. Some come from families who have been in New Zealand for several generations, some are newly arrived. Some were born in New Zealand, others in the Islands. Some know their language and live the culture, others do not. I could add mixed marriages but I won't! What they do have in common is their heritage and connection to the Pacific Islands.

It should be noted that many initiatives have been attempted and some have proved too challenging (New Zealand Pasifika Principals Association, 2008). According to Robinson et al. (2008), leadership can make an impact on the educational achievement and life opportunities for Maori and Pasifika children and their communities. It therefore seems appropriate to implement a plan to build critical mass of Pasifika leaders in Principalship roles.

For all their efforts it appears change has been very slow. This is difficult to accept considering the two vulnerability student groups (Maori and Pasifika). This is mainly due to their poor academic performance compared to other ethnic groups. The implementation of Ka Hikitia (Managing for Maori Success, 2008-2012) and the Pasifika Education Plan (2008-2012) targets Maori and Pasifika to support the government's vision in improving the situation. There are no other ethnic groups who get support! Why??

The thesis is making a case for improved Pasifika Principals representation as research shows it can have a positive impact on student learning and improve whanau and community participation and partnership. Pasifika values and beliefs are important to Pasifika children, whanau and community. There are advantages in having a Pasifika principal who brings their own pedagogical knowledge,

adds cultural value and provides a positive role model for students and communities. There are also disadvantages.

The thesis will also explore Pasifika leadership as an additional model as an alternative to the industrial, business model of leadership which was foisted on all schools as one size fits all mentality. Pacific people know who their leaders are in their community. More importantly from a cultural perspective they also know how leaders should behave and what to expect from their leaders! It may be expecting too much to see that model replicated in schools, in the classroom, in the playground, in the community and in the Principals office.

The traditional Samoan Matai (chief) concept of leadership has much to contribute to education e.g. fa'aaloalo (humility and respect), tautua (service), tofaliuliu (flexibility), soalaupule (shared decision making), communal collaborative team work and affirmative reciprocal relationships. According to Holmes & Holmes (1992), 'it is someone who reflects every positive attitude of good leadership'. It is an effective leadership style in relation to indigenous cultural leadership being inclusive, consensual and collaborative. According to Fullan (1993) there is a ceiling effect to how much we can learn if we keep to ourselves. The ability to collaborate is becoming one of the core requisites of post modern society.

This is encapsulated in the Samoan proverb "O le ala ile pule o le tautua" (Huffer & Alfred, 2000). Translated it means the way to have authority, leadership or power is to serve others first. So from a Samoan perspective one must serve the aiga (family) and extended family first before receiving a title/leadership.

This study will review the literature and examine the reasons for this assumption. The qualitative methodology will examine their epistemology and pedagogy of Pasifika leadership model through Talanoa (narratives), surveys, interviews and listening to the stories and experiences of current and former Pasifika Principals where the researchers' role involves listening more and talking less (Seidman, 1991). The Talanoa of their journey may give direction and insight for future leadership policies. Some key findings may provide clues and links to improving the leadership landscape for Pasifika

This study will also highlight areas that may assist in identifying appropriate Pasifika educational leaders and improve learning outcomes for Pasifika and minority students.

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### **Author Notes**

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Max spent almost four decades in the Primary Education sector and has been Deputy Principal or Principal of schools in many provinces including Auckland, Hamilton, Rotorua, Kawerau, Ruatahuna, Taranaki, Hawkes Bay and the King Country.

### ***Questions:***

1. Are we wanting to find out why Pasifika teachers are not aspiring to Principals positions?
2. Are Pasifika teachers happy to remain classroom teachers?
3. Are Board of Trustees a barrier to selection for Pasifika Principals?