



# 8 Teachers' professional learning and practice with multilingual Pacific/Pasifika learners in Aotearoa New Zealand

*Rae Si'ilata*

## Introduction

This chapter reports on a research project and on a related professional learning and development (PLD) initiative, contracted by the New Zealand Ministry of Education to provide PLD to teachers in schools, and to support them to create opportunities for multilingual Pacific/Pasifika learners to use all of their linguistic repertoires in English-medium/mainstream classes. The overarching purpose of the research project was to identify the specific actions of effective teachers of Pasifika learners in English-medium elementary (years 1–8) schools in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) that led to acceleration of students' language and literacy learning and achievement, ultimately enabling the promotion of equitable outcomes and their success at school.

The chapter first outlines the context of the research: Pasifika learners and peoples within the milieu of Aotearoa NZ followed by a brief discussion of government policy relating to Pasifika languages in schools, and notions of success for Pasifika learners in NZ classrooms. Pertinent literature relating to bilingualism, biliteracy, and translanguaging is shared, as is the pedagogical Va'atele Framework developed by Si'ilata (2014), which identifies specific dimensions of effective practice for Pasifika learners. Several Va'atele dimensions are exemplified through the sharing of two vignettes which illustrate how teachers' practice can change as a result of their engagement in PLD that takes into account the resources that multilingual learners bring with them to the classroom, and that honors the cultural practices of their students. The vignettes are illustrative of the findings of a larger body of work that is of importance to educators working with multilingual learners in linguistically diverse classrooms worldwide.

Since the mid-19th century in the nations of the Pacific, colonial education systems have privileged the use of settler languages (English, French, and Spanish) as mediums of instruction over indigenous languages. Postcolonial education systems across the region continue to show little commitment to the development of bilingual/biliterate educational goals or to the use of Pacific languages as mediums of instruction. As a result, language loss has occurred at alarming rates both in the Pacific and in NZ, a nation with three official languages: te reo Māori, English, and NZ Sign Language (NZSL). NZ has a multilingual population, particularly in larger metropolitan centers, with Tāmaki

Makaurau/Auckland, NZ's super diverse city, having one of the largest Pacific populations in the world:

Auckland is New Zealand's most culturally diverse city, with over 100 ethnicities and more than 150 languages spoken on a daily basis. Thirty-nine percent of Auckland residents were born outside of New Zealand and 51 percent of Auckland's population are multilingual. The learner population in Auckland and New Zealand is rapidly becoming heterogeneous, as is evident through the diversity of learners' ethnicity, language, heritage, and immigration status.

(Education Review Office, 2018)

In most public domains, English is the dominant language of communication, while heritage languages are spoken mainly in community language domains. Te reo Māori is used predominantly in Māori language domains both for ceremonial and communicative purposes, in Māori-medium education, and increasingly in wider societal contexts. In 2013, the six most common languages spoken in NZ were: English (96.1%), te reo Māori (3.7%), Samoan (2.2%), Hindi (1.7%), Northern Chinese (including Mandarin) (1.3%), and French (1.2%) (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). Despite Pacific peoples having the highest proportion of children aged 0–14 years (Ministry of Education, 2018), many NZ-born second- or third-generation Pacific children no longer demonstrate productive communicative competence in their heritage languages. This is due to the English-only policies of the 20th century which saw widespread intergenerational language shift to the dominant language of English, and particularly to Pacific students' experiences of “sink or swim” English-medium/<sup>1</sup>mainstream classrooms. Although many Māori and Pacific students achieve well in Māori-medium and Pacific-medium education, they are overrepresented in English mainstream statistics which show that NZ has one of the largest gaps between those who achieve and those who do not, with Pacific learners constituting a significant proportion of those whose languages, cultures, and experiences are not always validated or utilized within teaching and learning (Education and Science Committee, 2008; Education Review Office, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2018; OECD, 2016).

A critique of the existing English-medium education system with regard to equity outcomes for linguistically diverse learners (Alton Lee, 2003) and specifically Pasifika learners (Franken & McComish, 2003; Franken, May, & McComish, 2005) prompted a policy shift by the Ministry of Education from a predominantly English-only approach to the one that validates and promotes the utilization of linguistically and culturally sustaining pedagogies with emergent bilingual learners as a foundation on which to build English. This policy shift is evident in a number of official documents including the Ministry of Education's Pasifika Education Plan 2013–2017, which “puts Pasifika learners, their parents, families and communities at the center, so that all activities ensure the Ministry of Education and Education Partner Agencies are responding to the identities, languages and cultures of each Pasifika group” (2013, p. 3). Also, the ministry's (2018) Tapasā cultural competency document for teachers of Pacific learners suggests

that educational success is achieved when teachers recognize and build on what Pasifika learners and their families value and know, and then “integrate those understandings, values and knowledge into their planning and teaching practices” (Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 3). Despite this change in stance, a solid commitment to the development of Pacific bilingualism and biliteracy in ministry policy and practice remains absent. The Education Review Office’s (2018) report on responding to language diversity in Auckland recommends that the Ministry of Education “support the development and sharing of language resources, particularly for early learning services, to encourage children and their whānau (families) to use and maintain their home languages” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 6).

### *Pacific peoples in Aotearoa NZ*

Pacific peoples trace their heritages to distinct Pacific Island nations; however, they are identified by NZ government institutions under the umbrella Pacific/Pasifika terms “used to categorize trans-culturally diverse peoples from the Pacific region who now live in New Zealand, but continue to have family and cultural connections to Pacific Island nations” (Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 5). They include Pacific peoples who identify themselves with the islands and cultures of Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Tokelau, Tuvalu, Kiribati, and other Pasifika heritages. Although the term “Pasifika” has been used by the Ministry of Education since 2008, there has been a recent policy change to the use of the term “Pacific,” in line with the Ministry for Pacific Peoples which uses the terms “Pacific peoples” and “Pacific population.” These “overarching” labels, while somewhat problematic for individual Pacific nation peoples, could also be said to represent the multiple identities and language resources of mixed-heritage Pasifika peoples.

Pacific peoples began migrating from their island homes into a prevailing English NZ postcolonial environment in the 1940s and 1950s. In particular, island nations that had been included in NZ’s Pacific colonial administration, such as Samoa, Niue, Tokelau, and the Cook Islands, comprised a significant proportion of the migrating diaspora. In fact, Tokelau remains a territory, and is part of the constitutional realm of NZ, with its citizens having full rights as NZ citizens. The Cook Islands and Niue also remain in free association with NZ having previously been NZ colonies from the early 1900s until the 1960s. All three Pacific nations have more of their people living in NZ than in their island homes. Children of those Pacific language communities that had been under NZ administration for a longer time period tended to experience greater degrees of first/heritage language loss. As a consequence, many NZ-born Pacific children today now speak Pacific varieties of English and possess varying degrees of receptive or productive competence in their Pacific heritage language. A feature of NZ’s existing Pacific population includes a growing proportion with multiple heritages or identities: 37.2% according to Statistics NZ (2013), resulting in increasing levels of cross-cultural relations within NZ society.

The Pacific Peoples ethnic group was the fourth largest major group in NZ in 2013, behind European, Māori, and Asian ethnic groups, totaling 295,941

or 7.4% of the total NZ population in the 2013 census. NZ-born Pacific peoples (rather than migrant peoples) totaled 62.3% of the Pacific population in NZ (Statistics NZ, 2013), and in 2018, the Pacific population reached 310,000 with a predicted increase to 650,000 by 2038 (Statistics NZ, 2015).

### *What constitutes Pasifika success?*

Within this research, success for Pasifika peoples and their children is considered holistically, relative to the multiple worlds they live in. Generally for Pasifika communities, academic success is not only about the success of the individual but is also reflective of the success of the family and the community from which they come (Ministry of Education, 2013; Si'ilata, 2014). To be deemed fully successful in Pasifika contexts, Pasifika children are encouraged to strengthen and build capability in the valued knowledges, and ways of being of their family/community domains, as well as the valued knowledge of school (Si'ilata, 2014). Ideally, success achieved in one domain should have benefits or "capital" in the other domains in which learners are socialized.

Education that enables Pasifika learners in classrooms in Aotearoa NZ to see their languages, cultures, and identities represented in the "valued knowledge of school" (Dickie, 2010; Franken, May & McComish, 2007; May, 2009; Si'ilata, 2014), and to be utilized as a normal part of language and literacy learning in their classrooms suggests that their perceptions of success will include, rather than exclude, their linguistic and cultural identities. The continued development of emergent bilinguals' languages and literacies not only enables learners to be successful in the worlds of their families and communities, but also has direct impact on their successful acquisition of English language and literacy (Baker, 2011; Cummins, 2008; Si'ilata, 2014).

### *Pasifika languages' policy*

Within English-medium education, the Ministry of Education now promotes the utilization of family language resources predominantly to support successful transition to English. A recent request for proposals for PLD services in the utilization of dual language texts for teachers of Pacific learners highlights this focus: "Evidence shows that drawing on all of children's cultural capital, especially that related to language and literacy can support [English] literacy learning" and "Teachers need to build on all of Pasifika children's language knowledge, skills and experiences to support English language learning and literacy" (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 6). There is also minimal systemic support for ongoing Pasifika language maintenance, or for biliteracy development through Pasifika bilingual/immersion education. Historically, the Ministry of Education provided Pasifika language texts (Tupu Readers) in the five main language groups of Reo Māori Kuki 'Airani (Cook Islands Maori), Vagahau Niue (Niuean), Gagana Samoa (Samoan), Gagana Tokelau (Tokelauan), and Lea Faka-Tonga (Tongan); online support through the LEAP – Language Enhancing the Achievement of Pasifika website (McComish, May, & Franken, 2008); language learning material for new learners of those

languages, but not necessarily speakers or members of those speech communities (Ministry of Education, 2009b); and PLD provision for Pasifika bilingual teacher aides (Ministry of Education, 2007; Si'ilata, 2007). In 2014, the Ministry of Education began producing Pacific/English dual language books in Gagana Samoa (Samoan), Gagana Tokelau (Tokelauan), Lea Faka-Tonga (Tongan), Reo Māori Kuki 'Airani, and Vagahau Niue (Niuean) to support Pacific children's early literacy development and their transition into grades 1 and 2 English-medium classrooms. However, there has been no development of instructional reading material in Pasifika languages to enable biliteracy development within Pacific-medium or bilingual learning contexts within schools. It is necessary, therefore, to consider notions of Pasifika success within English-medium education where the majority of Pasifika learners are schooled, but firstly to consider the particular linguistic resources that Pasifika multilingual learners bring with them to school.

### ***Biliteracy development***

Pasifika multilingual learners are able to draw on language resources that include their receptive and productive capabilities in their Pasifika heritage languages, as well as a repertoire of sociolinguistic registers in their English language proficiency. When students are supported to access their common underlying proficiency (Cummins 1980, 2000), their bilingualism, biliteracy, and academic development can develop simultaneously rather than sequentially (Baker, 2011; Garcia, 2009). The implications of the common underlying proficiency construct require teachers to actively *teach for transfer* of linguistic, metacognitive, and metalinguistic knowledge. The theoretical rationale for this teaching for crosslinguistic transfer originates from several sources. Hornberger (2003) proposed that both literacies are interconnected in the unconscious mind of the learner, cannot be separated, and have to be viewed as a single biliteracy system. This means that rather than ignoring what students know in their heritage language, teachers in English-medium contexts should draw on, make links to, and build on students' language, literacy, and curriculum content knowledge in their heritage languages and show students how to transfer skills, strategies, and content learned in English to their other language (Cummins, 2007, 2008, 2011).

In English-medium/mainstream and immersion/bilingual classrooms, the "monolingual principle" traditionally has dominated, meaning that students' first languages have often been ignored and kept rigidly separate from the learning of English and content (Cummins, 2008; Si'ilata, 2004). In immersion classrooms, students were prohibited from using their stronger language if it was not the medium of instruction of the immersion program. Cummins argued that when educators are freed "from exclusive reliance on monolingual instructional approaches, a wide variety of opportunities arise for teaching multilingual learners by means of bilingual instructional strategies that acknowledge the reality of, and strongly promote, cross-language transfer" (2008, p. 65). This worldwide phenomenon of the "multilingual turn" (May, 2013) has had an impact, not only in the Bilingual Education field, but also in English-medium education in NZ where the Ministry of Education, schools, and educators now realize

the need for a more culturally inclusive approach to their linguistically diverse student population. Creative translation activities and “translanguaging” have a role to play within communicative approaches to language and literacy learning, “as a means of enabling learners to create multimedia texts that communicate in powerful and authentic ways with multiple audiences in both L1 and L2” (Cummins, 2008, p. 65). “Translanguaging” originated with Williams (1996, 2000), who used it in Welsh-medium education to name a pedagogical practice that switches the language mode – for example, reading is done in one language and writing in another. In essence, it teaches students to receive curriculum content input in one language and output it in another mode or genre in another language. It is not simply a translation of the same text form or mode of expression (Garcia, 2009; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2010):

Translanguagings are multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds. Translanguaging therefore goes beyond what has been termed code switching... although it includes it, as well as other kinds of bilingual language use and bilingual contact. Translanguaging... extends what Gutierrez and her colleagues have called “hybrid language use,” that is, a systematic, strategic, affiliative, and sense-making process. (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Alvarez, 2001, p. 128)

Creating translanguaging opportunities for students to leverage their whole linguistic repertoire is supported by teaching for transfer across languages. Cummins proposed five possible types of transfer across languages:

- Transfer of conceptual elements (e.g. understanding the concept of photosynthesis).
- Transfer of metacognitive and metalinguistic strategies (e.g. strategies of visualizing, use of graphic organizers, mnemonic devices, vocabulary acquisition strategies, etc.).
- Transfer of pragmatic aspects of language use (willingness to take risks in communication through L2, ability to use paralinguistic features such as gestures to aid communication, etc.).
- Transfer of specific linguistic elements (knowledge of the meaning of photo in photosynthesis).
- Transfer of phonological awareness – the knowledge that words are composed of distinct sounds (Cummins, 2008, p. 69).

Many researchers in the area of language and literacy development emphasize the importance of utilizing learners’ linguistic and cultural resources in teaching and learning interactions in schools (McCaffery, 2014; Ruiz, 1984; Si’ilata, 2014). Dickie (2010), for example, described the “out of school” literacy experiences of Samoan children “reading passages of the Bible aloud with perfect accuracy; and *tauloto*, which are passages from the Bible to be memorized” (p. 25). Dickie argued that Samoan church literacy practices maintained a strong focus on comprehension, as well as memorization, and that being informed about

these practices could enable teachers to link to and build on these strengths in their classrooms. Regardless of the language skills of multilingual (and other) learners, teachers should build on all of their linguistic repertoires as a basis for further teaching and learning. From the literature and the findings of this research, Si'ilata developed the dimensions of effective practice for Pasifika learners and the Va'atele Framework (2014).

### *Dimensions of effective practice for Pasifika learners*

Dimensions and indicators of effective practice for Pasifika learners were developed from the literature and from the research findings of the prior literacy intervention and research project mentioned earlier (Si'ilata, 2014; Si'ilata, Dreaver, Parr, Timperley, & Meissel, 2012; Si'ilata, Samu, & Siteine, 2017), and were used to analyze teacher practice. The 2012 study was a Ministry of Education commissioned research project undertaken with ten schools, ten effective teachers, and nine improvement teachers focused on effective teacher practice for Pasifika learners, and improvement in teacher practice as a result of PLD. It also specified dimensions of effective school leadership and PLD facilitation that supported teacher improvement, and elements of effective school–community partnership (see [http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/pasifika\\_education/literacy-professional-development-project-2009-2010](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/pasifika_education/literacy-professional-development-project-2009-2010)). Si'ilata (2014) focused on seven of the 2012 schools and the practices of five “effective” teachers and five “improvement teachers” in order to devise, with support from the research literature, dimensions of effective practice specific to Pasifika learners and the Va'atele Framework. The practices of five teachers who were seeking to improve their practice, and who joined the literacy project a year after the effective teachers, were investigated in order to understand how teachers could make relevant changes using the same dimensions. The particular leadership and facilitation practices that supported them to improve were also investigated. In addition, leadership practices that promoted reciprocal learning-focused partnerships between school leaders, teachers, and the families of Pasifika learners were examined (see <http://hdl.handle.net/2292/23402>).

The dimensions included:

- Knowledge of Pasifika learners.
- Expectations of Pasifika learners.
- Knowledge of Pasifika bilingualism, second-language acquisition (SLA), and literacy learning.
- Instructional strategies, including Pasifika languages as resources for learning.
- Pasifika connections with texts, world, language, and literacy knowledge.
- Partnerships with Pasifika families/aiga and community knowledge holders.

This set of six dimensions of effective classroom practice for Pasifika learners, each elucidated by two indicators (see Table 8.1), was used as a framework to consider all of the evidence collected (Si'ilata, 2014).

The description of effective teacher practice described in the dimensions and elucidated through the indicators was developed primarily through a top-down

process informed largely by the relevant research literature (Alton-Lee, 2003; Cummins, 1989; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Dumont, Istance, & Benavides, 2010; Hattie, 2005). However, these indicators were checked in a more bottom-up process against the practices of the effective teachers, who were known to be successful in promoting accelerated Pasifika student achievement in literacy. The six “dimensions of effective practice” for learners, in general, are described in *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1–4* (see Ministry of Education, 2003; 2005). In light of the research on linguistically and culturally responsive/sustaining pedagogies (Cummins, 2008; Ferguson, Gorinski, Wendt-Samu, & Mara, 2008; Gay, 2000, 2002, 2010; Gibbons, 2009; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Hollins, 1996; Hornberger 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2009; Paris, 2012; Si‘ilata et al., 2012; Sleeter, 2001; Williams, 1996, 2000), the six generic dimensions of effective literacy practice were modified by the author to make them more specific to Pasifika learners and to validate the utilization of their linguistic and cultural resources within the NZ education space. These Pasifika-specific dimensions were used as the overarching framework for the analysis of teaching practice, and form the lens through which the data from teachers and the observations of their practice have been analyzed and the results articulated. The way in which teachers demonstrated aspects of these dimensions is described in vignettes labeled Vignette 1 and Vignette 2.

### *The Va‘atele Framework*

The dimensions of effective practice for Pasifika learners were applied to a metaphor or model for Pasifika learner success: the *va‘atele*, or double-hulled canoe (Si‘ilata, 2014). To understand the metaphor in relation to Pasifika learners and their experiences at school, the double hulls and the voyaging of the deep-sea canoe are compared with Pasifika learners’ passage or journey through the schooling system as bilingual/bicultural people. Ideally, Pasifika learners would be in school settings that support the development of their bilingualism, biliteracy, and biculturalism, enabling success not only in the world of school, but also in the world of home and community. One hull may be seen to represent the language, literacy, culture, and worldview of home, while the second hull is representative of the language, literacy, culture, and worldview of school. The platform/*fata* built over the two hulls is a bridge that helps to hold the whole *va‘atele* together, thus enabling the hulls/*va‘a* to move through the water as one vessel, while also providing the stability needed to sail through any storm.

Teachers and leaders who employ the dimensions of effective practice for Pasifika learners in their practice are enacting the analogy of the *va‘atele* metaphor. These particular dimensions and indicators specify the teacher actions articulated metaphorically through the Va‘atele Framework, by providing the combination of proven principles and practices to support learning in both school and home contexts, and derived from the research (Si‘ilata, 2014; Si‘ilata et al., 2012). An analogy is drawn between each of the dimensions and the representative part they could be seen to symbolize in the *va‘atele* (see Table 8.1).



Table 8.1 Dimensions of effective practice for Pasifika learners applied to the Va'atele Framework

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Representative part of the va'atele</i>
Knowledge of Pasifika learners	1a) Teachers analyze and use English language and literacy data in their practice. 1b) Teachers analyze and use Pasifika home language data and family/cultural funds of knowledge.	The hull/va'a of the va'atele as the foundation of the vessel – the uniqueness of the canoe is specific to the hulls and the knowledge of the builder to craft it according to the conditions in which it will travel.
Expectations of Pasifika learners	2a) Teachers set high, informed expectations for student learning which build on Pasifika learners' aspirations and values. 2b) Teachers build effective teacher-student relationships that focus on learning and build Pasifika learner agency.	The mast/tila that connects the hulls/va'a with the sail/la, enabling it to withstand the strength of the wind and to act as a solid base from which to furl the sail.
Knowledge of Pasifika bilingualism, second-language acquisition, and literacy learning	3a) Teachers know about Pasifika bilingualism, second-language acquisition, and literacy learning. 3b) Teachers use evidence from student data and from practice to design learning sequences, and monitor progress in relation to Pasifika learners' language and literacy needs.	The sail/la that enables the va'a to catch the wind – combining the strength of the hulls/va'a and mast/tila, with the height of the sail, and the power of the wind to enable greater speed and success toward the journey's end.
Use of instructional strategies including Pasifika languages as resources for learning	4a) Teachers explicitly teach English language and vocabulary by building on Pasifika home languages and oral practices. 4b) Teachers explicitly teach strategies for written language, including use of Pasifika literacy practices.	The paddles/foc that are used by the paddlers to advance the va'a when there is no wind, and that use the water to generate the motion through which the va'a sails.
Supporting Pasifika connections with text, world, language, and literacy knowledge	5a) Teachers support Pasifika learners to make meaningful connections with Pasifika cultures, experiences, languages, literacies, texts and worldviews. 5b) Teachers provide opportunities for Pasifika learners to transfer knowledge, languages and literacies from one context to another.	The platform/fata that connects the two hulls so that they sail as one vessel, enabling the progress made with one hull to benefit the other hull.
Partnerships with Pasifika families/aiga and community knowledge holders	6a) Teachers collaborate with Pasifika families/aiga in identifying student learning needs and valued outcomes. 6b) Teachers build reciprocal relationships with Pasifika families/aiga and community experts to utilize their knowledge at school.	The keel/ta'e'ele running from stern to bow, which helps the va'a maintain its stability and straight movement despite the conditions – keeping the va'a “grounded” and secure.

Adapted from Si'ilata (2014).

## **Vignettes**

The next section presents two illustrative vignettes that report on the previously outlined interventions focused on Pasifika student achievement in seven English-medium/mainstream elementary schools. Vignette 1 describes the research project in which the Va'atele Framework was developed (Si'ilata, 2014). The vignette illustrates one of the two indicators under the "Knowledge of Pasifika learners" dimension, in order to exemplify what improvement in teaching for Pasifika learners might look like in practice, under this specific indicator (Si'ilata, 2014). The research in which this framework was developed was a national professional development project that was successful in raising student achievement in English literacy, particularly for those students in the lowest quintile and for Pasifika learners. The specific teacher and leader actions that ensured this raising of achievement and accelerating progress are described and elucidated.

Vignette 2 provides a further illustrative narrative of one of the Va'atele dimensions: instructional strategies, including Pasifika languages as resources for learning. It is based on research undertaken with teachers of grade 1 and grade 2 Pacific/Pasifika learners who participated in an NZ Ministry of Education PLD project that was focused on utilization of Pasifika dual language texts to support literacy learning at school (Si'ilata, Gaffney, Stephenson, & McCaffery, 2015; Si'ilata, Le Fevre et al., 2015).

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### **Vignette 1**

The research in this vignette was located in literacy teaching and learning practices in elementary (grades 1–8) schools (Si'ilata, 2014; Si'ilata et al., 2012). Si'ilata et al.'s (2012) "Tula'i Mai" research study on effective literacy practice for Pasifika learners in English-medium/mainstream classrooms examined the practices of effective teachers of Pasifika learners and the practices of PLD facilitators and school leaders that enabled teachers to improve their practice with Pasifika learners. This research was situated in a larger nationally funded PLD project that aimed to improve literacy achievement in English-medium classrooms (Parr & Timperley, 2009). The project was funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Education and had a particular focus on addressing the learning needs of the lowest achieving 20% of students. Schools chose whether to focus on reading or writing. The PLD provider and the facilitators visiting schools were contracted to the Ministry of Education to meet five main outcomes that included: evidence of improved student achievement; evidence of improved teacher content knowledge; evidence of improved transfer of understanding of literacy pedagogy to practice, evidence of professional learning communities, and evidence of effective facilitation.

The approach taken when working with schools typically began with a needs' analysis to identify priorities for student, teacher, and leader learning. Student

achievement data were analyzed; observations of leadership and teaching practice undertaken; and other data gathered with teachers and leaders to develop a profile of a given school's current capability, and to ascertain areas for development (Parr, Timperley, Reddish, Jesson, & Adams, 2007; Timperley & Parr, 2009). External facilitators worked with school leaders to support them to coach their teachers and worked with teachers directly on agreed foci. They co-constructed professional goals and success criteria with leaders and teachers so that expectations around professional learning and practice were owned by, and explicit to all stakeholders.

Prior to this study, three cohorts of approximately 100 schools (2004–2005, 2006–2007, and 2008–2009) had participated in the PLD. Student achievement was assessed using the nationally standardized Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (asTTle) in either reading or writing, depending on the schools' selected focus. Substantial achievement gains were evident for the first cohort, but these data are not presented here because different assessment tools were used for the second and third cohorts. In the latter two cohorts, achievement gains for all students on average were 2.5 times the expected rate in writing and 1.5 times for reading in the second cohort (2006–2007), while the figures for cohort 3 (2008–2009) were 3.2 and 1.9 times expected rate, for writing and reading, respectively. What was most important was the progress made by the students who started in the lowest 20% of the cohort. For the second cohort, the lowest 20% progressed at around 5.8 times in writing and 2.4 times in reading and, for the third cohort, the lowest 20% progressed at 6.2 times expected rate in writing and 3.2 times in reading. A closer analysis of these students identified that this 20% included learners of Pasifika ethnicities. Pasifika as a group also made significant gains: 2.8 times expected progress in writing, and 1.7 times expected progress in reading, in the second cohort; and 3.3 times expected progress in writing, and 1.8 times expected progress in reading, in the third cohort (Si'ilata et al., 2012; Timperley, Parr, & Meissel, 2010;).

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## **Methods and data sources**

The study reported on in this vignette utilized a case methodology, supported by both quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to answer the research questions. Five effective teachers and five improvement teachers were identified and participated in the study over a two-year period. The research questions posed in this study were focused on inquiring into four areas:

- Effective teaching of Pasifika learners.
- Improvement of teaching for Pasifika learners.
- Leader and facilitator actions that enabled improvement.
- Leadership practices that promoted reciprocal partnerships between schools and their Pasifika communities.

The questions were:

- 1 What classroom teaching practices lead to positive educational experiences for Pasifika learners and were reflected in their literacy achievement?
- 2 What shifts in practice are evident through teachers' engagement in professional learning and development?
- 3 What school leadership and facilitation practices promote teachers' understanding and use of effective practices so that their Pasifika learners improve their achievement?
- 4 What school leadership practices facilitate the development of reciprocal learning-focused partnerships between school leaders, teachers, and the families of Pasifika learners?

This example highlights the progress of one particular teacher: Improvement Teacher 2 (IT2). The professional learning experiences and opportunities that supported this teacher to improve her practice will be considered. The observed or reported practices of all case study teachers were described in relation to the dimensions and indicators of effective practice for Pasifika learners, with examples drawn from the observations of their practice at Times 1, 2, or 3. The observed or reported practices of the improvement teachers described in the dimensions and indicators were categorized at Time 1 and Time 3 using a set of ordinal descriptors that considered the nature and extent of the practice, namely: no evidence, rudimentary, indicative, and strong. A category of “no evidence of practice” was designated when the research evidence with respect to the indicator was not sufficient to make a judgment. This does not necessarily mean that the practice was absent. An overall categorization of “rudimentary practice” was made when practice was in the early stages of being learned, or appeared mechanistic, perfunctory, and unresponsive to learners and families/aiga, or was reported in a vague, generalized way with no evidence to evaluate implementation. A practice was categorized as “indicative” when there was some evidence of a practice in a relatively robust form. However, the practice may have been inconsistent across sources and occasions. Practice was categorized as “strong” when it was consistent across the majority of sources and occasions, was responsive and adaptive to context and to learners, and almost all of the attributes of the indicators and dimension were present.

All case study teachers improved their practice against each of the Va'atele dimensions of effective practice for Pasifika learners. The following is an example of one teacher whose practice was chosen to illustrate improvement from predominantly rudimentary practice at Time 1 (T1) when she was new to the literacy professional development project, to indicative practice at Time 3 (T3), after two years' engagement in the intervention (Si'ilata et al., 2012). Although the teacher's practice improved against all of the Va'atele dimensions, this vignette illustrates the nature of her improvement against two dimensions only: dimensions 4 and 5, as sound examples of improvement in teacher practice. The facilitation of improvement by the PLD facilitator that enabled IT2 to improve her practice is also described. The pedagogical content knowledge that the facilitator and

teacher focused on and the particular actions employed by these school leader and facilitator in arranging and supporting the teacher's professional learning and practice are demonstrated using specific professional learning examples.

## Results

The example of improvement in IT2's practice is illustrative of two dimensions and two indicators:

*Dimension 4: Use of instructional strategies including Pasifika languages as resources for learning* – Indicator 4b) Written language, including Pasifika literacy practices.

*Dimension 5: Supporting Pasifika connections with text, world, language, and literacy knowledge* – Indicator 5b) Transferring Pasifika knowledge, languages, and literacies

IT2 improved from rudimentary at T1 to indicative at T3 against Indicator 4b) Teachers explicitly teach strategies for written language, including use of Pasifika literacy practices, and Indicator 5b) Teachers provide opportunities for Pasifika learners to transfer knowledge, languages, and literacies from one context to another. IT2 was a teacher of a Years 5/6 class and demonstrated sound generic practice against these dimensions and indicative improvement in practice specific to Pasifika learners at T3. During the second year of the literacy project, she moved into a literacy lead teacher position with her role being to work with groups of students across the school and to provide leadership in teachers' literacy learning.

The first observation of her teaching was a guided reading lesson in which the students' purpose was to find clues and information in the text to answer questions. Although IT2 taught the technical vocabulary in the text to her students prior to the lesson, she only used an "initiation, response, feedback (IRE)" pattern, rather than providing opportunity for language generation by students through paired or group negotiation of the target vocabulary. Following the lesson, the teacher stated that she needed to ask more open-ended questions and provide opportunities for other ways to respond to questions, such as use of interactive tasks like "*Think, pair share*" or collaborative writing tasks such as "*answers on Post-It notes*." She became more aware of the need to provide opportunities for student talk and negotiation: *It is going to make me more conscious of stepping back and allowing that discussion time for children and also giving them a variety of ways in which they can respond to the text*. She expressed her belief in the importance of making connections with learners' linguistic and cultural knowledge, but this belief was not apparent in her practice until the next observation of her teaching.

During the second observation of her teaching, she focused on creating opportunities for her students to make connections between the world of the text and the world of home, their prior knowledge, and experience:

I tried to celebrate the fact that Leilani had actually been to Samoa and she brought some personal knowledge to it... Like with Mele when she

was comparing the way they live in Niue and the way they live here, she talked about hunting pigs and she was saying the challenge would be finding food...

IT2's belief in the importance of creating opportunities for her Pasifika learners to transfer knowledge from one context to another, and particularly from authentic learning contexts beyond the school was borne out by the dialogue that took place between IT2 and her students:

IT2: What else were you doing yesterday when we read the articles?

ANA: Being able to make connections to my own experience.

IT2: ...Leilani was able to go away and was able to give us some information about her grandpa, and the information she got when she went to Samoa and visited the area where that volcano had happened...

IT2 continued to actively create opportunities for her students to not only connect the world of the text with their own prior knowledge, but she also put herself in the position of being the learner and endeavored to create situations where the students were able to teach her new linguistic knowledge:

LEILANI: The houses are called fale.

IT2: Can you write that down for us because I don't know how to spell that? And tell us a little bit more about that, Leilani.

LEILANI: The ground is really hard and they get sore backs when they dig...

IT2: And what is the difference between that and a fale?

LEILANI: A fale is really more an outside house...

IT2: I didn't know that; that is really interesting. So when you say it is outside, do you mean that it is open?

LEILANI: Yes.

IT2: Excellent and it doesn't tell us that here, does it, but that is really great because you are making some connections that you are thinking about. So what do you think might be a challenge trying to build those on that ground?

LEILANI: It is hard for them to get the poles in. They use sticks to move it...

IT2: Thank you, that is really exciting.

By the third observation of her teaching, IT2 had continued to improve her practice and demonstrated explicit teaching of language and literacy through utilization of particular instructional strategies. She created opportunities for student talk, by providing a text that students could connect with using their first language (Samoan), by making links with their prior knowledge, by providing visual support to promote vocabulary acquisition, and by creating opportunities where students were able to negotiate their understanding of the text and vocabulary, and justify their opinions through "Think, pair, share" tasks. IT2

also expressed the importance of valuing students' worldviews even when that worldview might be different to one's own:

I think it is constantly valuing who they are and what they can bring and I think that is a really important thing whatever text you are reading, that your own world view doesn't dominate because everybody sees the text in a different way through their own experiences... I think when we are sharing a text everybody needs to have ownership. So if people notice something and they are bringing something that is different, then I think that is great. So yes, I guess it is something that I would encourage because my experiences aren't what are going to help them understand the text – it is their experiences.

IT2 created opportunities for students to use their first languages incidentally when connecting to concepts in the text (“turangawaewae” [place to stand] and “treasures”) and explicitly taught the academic vocabulary related to the learning intention and success criteria (finding clues in the text to support prediction through use of evidence). She was well positioned to refine her practice more specifically to her Pasifika learners through greater connection with, and utilization of Pasifika literacy practices.

### *Professional learning contributing to shifts in practice*

IT2 explained that her professional learning, over the previous six months, had included the analysis of data to inform teaching and knowledge development on the deliberate acts of teaching. She also articulated that the facilitator was particularly adept at monitoring, probing, and guiding the learning during the professional learning sessions, as well as providing guidance in the use of teacher resources to support self-regulating teacher inquiry and the development of new ways of thinking about teaching and learning:

I think what has been really invaluable over the last six months... is that we have gradually been building up a knowledge base and doing work with the facilitator and exploring data and using the evidence. But actually, we can't unpack that evidence unless we have got the knowledge of the processes and the content and actually what the bigger picture is. You know, in terms of: What are the comprehension strategies? What are the processing strategies? What is it that we actually have to do? Those deliberate acts of teaching so that we can actually teach the skills?

The final professional learning session prompted IT2 to consider specifically the language and literacy learning strengths (as well as English learning needs) of her Pasifika learners and whether she was creating sufficient opportunities for Pasifika learners to transfer knowledge, languages, and literacies from one context to another. IT2 talked about the significant learning that she had gained from

the professional learning session led by the facilitator, for both her teaching and literacy leader roles in the school:

I think this session had huge relevance because my role is just not with the students it is also with the teachers and ensuring that all the team leaders are clear around the ideas of how we can support our students. Because we have got so many bilingual students in our school, that honouring their first language and having the leadership team on the same page in terms of how we value and support these students – then the same message is going to come down to all the teachers so that we can all be on the same page.

Following the final professional learning session, IT2 talked about the factors that she considered important in a professional learning relationship between leaders, facilitators, and teachers:

I think the openness of the discussions during the session was evidence of a relationship of respect between facilitators, leaders and teachers and that there is certainly that feeling that we are all on the same page and wanting the best for our Pasifika learners... I think I have heard more balanced participation in this group than maybe we have had in the past. I noticed people are feeling comfortable to speak up in the group and I think that is really fantastic... Everybody has to really operate from a sense of problem solving and having that sense of integrity that whatever anyone says is okay, and that is where they are at...

In leading the professional learning sessions, the facilitator and school leaders were central to the establishment of a respectful, honest, and “problem solving” atmosphere, which enabled IT2 and other teachers to feel safe about participating in and contributing to the professional learning.

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## Vignette 2

The following vignette is drawn from pilot research undertaken through observations and interviews with year 1–2 teachers of Samoan learners who participated in a PLD project that was focused on utilization of Samoan dual language texts to support literacy learning at school (Si'ilata, Gaffney et al., 2015; Si'ilata Le Fevre et al., 2015). The vignette focuses on what enabled these teachers of Samoan children to change their beliefs and practices in relation to the use of Pasifika languages as resources for learning.

The overarching principle of the PLD project encapsulated in each of the workshop underpinning principles and outcomes was the integration of home and school “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez et al., 2005), and utilization of Samoan children’s language and literacy resources (Cummins, 2008; McCaffery, 2014; Ruiz, 1984; Si'ilata, 2014). This focus on utilizing Samoan children’s



funds of knowledge, rather than maintaining a focus solely on student needs as a basis for effective teacher PLD, meant that teachers were supported to view their Samoan (and other linguistically diverse learners) through an alternative and appreciative lens. Teachers were encouraged to engage in communicative bilingual approaches to language and literacy learning throughout the PLD program, which prompted reflection on their current practice and classroom environment. This vignette highlights improvement in teacher practice against Indicator 4b:

*Dimension 4: Instructional strategies, including Pasifika languages as resources for learning*

*Indicator 4b) Teachers explicitly teach English language and vocabulary by building on Pasifika home languages and oral practices.*

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### *Teachers' existing beliefs*

Before endeavoring to change teacher practice, it was first necessary to surface teachers' existing beliefs about how Pasifika bilingual children learn, and about what it means to "tap into students' funds of knowledge." Teachers needed to surface and understand their own tacit beliefs about the perceived value of making connections with bilingual students' funds of knowledge to support teaching and learning in the classroom. Some teachers expressed that they had previously taken a deficit view of Pasifika children's and families' lives and experiences, primarily their language/s, dialects, registers of English, and their particular literacy practices. The teachers participated in bilingual communicative group activities that positioned them as additional language learners, where they learned about "walking in their students' shoes." They were asked to read a Samoan text and engage in co-constructed talk that required them to both use the target language (Samoan) and English to complete bilingual text sequencing, retelling, and writing tasks. One teacher who participated in the activities subsequently reflected on the degree of cognitive challenge required to complete such tasks, and also that she had previously expected her emergent bilingual learners to cope with similar cognitive challenges every day in her classroom when learning to read or write in a second language (English). Her sense of dissonance and subsequent reflection enabled her to surface her deficit thinking about her students' English language and literacy capabilities, and bilingual resources. As she changed her attitude from deficit to additive, she noticed an immediate change in the children's literacy learning and progress:

The bottom line is I failed this child and I have changed. Now I am really emotional about this because if I failed him how many other children have I? And I've noticed that every single one of my children is now moving... I was given two children that haven't moved at all in another class, and then I got them. They are now moving. And this has all taken part in the last month or so... It's happened. I am proof of that and I am such a happy person because of that... And often we think we know it all. Actually, we don't.

I used to think I was a damn good teacher and you woke me up on that day. I had to have a really good check of myself and my teaching practices and what was working and what wasn't, and how I could change it and to this day it has affected me so greatly...

Many teachers expressed that they already made connections with students' prior knowledge, but the connections made were often limited to a brief discussion about children's prior "world knowledge" prior to reading. Few monolingual teachers were making connections with children's existing linguistic or first-language knowledge. Some teachers expressed the belief that it was better to keep the first language separate from the learning of English and that five-year-olds would get confused if teachers tried to teach more than one language at a time. This was a distinctly monolingual perspective/belief that was difficult to change, until teachers were put in the position of the emergent bilingual learner.

### *Teachers connected new knowledge with existing knowledge*

The workshops were run in a Pasifika way that synthesized Pasifika-specific knowledge with knowledge of effective SLA, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and literacy practices, in order to draw on and make transparent and explicit "better practice" principles and pedagogies. Teachers were able to see how they might incorporate Pasifika, bilingual, and SLA/ESOL practices within their existing literacy program. This was done by utilizing and practicing Pasifika interaction and literacy practices, and connecting them with language and literacy learning, such as use of:

- Humor.
- Storying and song.
- Co-constructed and collaborative group tasks.
- Tuakana/teina pairing (Māori words meaning older sibling/younger sibling in the family, applied in educational contexts to relate to more able/less able learners).
- Specific Pasifika language and literacy practices such as choral reading, memorization, and recitation in meaning-focused literacy tasks.
- Engaging in communicative tasks that required integration of receptive (input) and productive (output) modes in two languages.

Teachers who were Samoan or who had specific language and cultural knowledge in relation to Samoan children and their families were acknowledged within the PLD context and were utilized as role models for language learning within the group. The PLD workshops for teachers encouraged collaborative inquiry where the facilitators, teachers, families, and children were collaborating (enacting in practice the meaning of the words: *Gālulue Fa'atasi – Working Together*: the text series), inquiring genuinely into how teachers (and families) might utilize these texts with Samoan children in English-medium classrooms, where there were

usually a range of ethnicities present. Some teachers claimed that they were now more open to utilizing children's total language resource as well as family and cultural knowledge and experiences in the classroom. A number of teachers said that they had developed greater awareness about their children's bilingualism, and were now viewing it as a resource rather than a problem. Teachers supported their learners to connect their own funds of knowledge with the schema in the book, and enabled them to utilize the text structure to tell and write their own bilingual digital stories using iPads: the transcript below illustrates digital trans-languaging and negotiation of teacher and student identities as they engage in bilingual interactions around dual language texts:

[Teacher with new entrant five-year-olds creating their own digital stories about themselves using the dual language Samoan text as a structure]:

TEACHER: *Off you go, you guys carry on.*

CHILDREN: *Yay!* (Reading the story they have written on their iPad): *'O la'u 'ato ā'oga lea. Here is my school bag.*

TEACHER: *Okay do you maybe need to record that one again if you can't really hear it?*

CHILD 1: *You need to delete it.*

TEACHER: *Okay so delete that one. You guys have another go at the sound file.*

TEACHER & CHILD TOGETHER: *'O la'u 'ato ā'oga lea. (Here is my school bag).*

TEACHER: *Wanna play it and see what it sounds like?*

CHILDREN PLAY THEIR SOUND RECORDING: *'O la'u 'ato ā'oga lea. Here is my school bag. 'O la'u pusa mea'ai lea. Here is my lunch box. 'O la'u tusi lea. Here is my book.*

TEACHER: *Let's see if they've got their sound file* (plays the file). *Awesome. You guys are way ahead. Let's read it together* (uses the digital text on the interactive whiteboard to read with students):

TEACHER & CHILDREN: *What's this one? We can read this one; we're clever. 'O la'u tusi lea. And what does that one mean? Here is my book.*

CHILD: *How do you know how to do it?*

TEACHER: *Because Mrs Roberts has been practicing at home!*

CHILD: *Are you Samoan?*

TEACHER: *No sweetie, but I'm learning.*

CHILD 2: *She's English. She's from England...*

TEACHER: *Yes, cos even though I'm a teacher, I never stop learning either. I have to go home and do homework too.*

CHILD: *Cos you're a English. You're from England.*

TEACHER: *I am from England, yes.*

It became evident that the teacher's willingness to put herself in the position of the learner, to privilege the linguistic knowledge of the children, and to create opportunities for them to connect their Samoan linguistic and conceptual knowledge with their English language and literacy acquisition had a major impact on the children's willingness to utilize their linguistic resources at school.

The use of their linguistic resources had a direct impact on their English SLA and on their biliteracy development. They were also prompted to consider their teacher's and their own linguistic and cultural identities as a result of reading dual language texts together.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter began by providing an overview of the educational landscape for Pasifika learners in Aotearoa NZ, followed by an explanation of the Va'atele Framework and vignettes that illustrate two of the dimensions of effective practice for Pasifika learners, as one suggested way to reframe Pasifika success in English-medium education. For Pasifika learners at school in Aotearoa NZ or throughout the Pacific, enacting the metaphorical double-hulled canoe (or linguistically and culturally sustaining environment that privileges bilingual and biliterate goals over monolingual ones) is more likely to elicit effective outcomes than the single-hulled metaphor – whether the single-hull be “English only” language, literacy and cultural knowledge, or a single-hulled Pasifika-only language, literacy, and cultural knowledge. In order for Pasifika learners to be successful in these two worlds, they need to strengthen and build capacity and capability in both.

The hulls/va'a of the *va'atele* were of equal size and were sufficiently stable to enable sailors to transfer supplies and people from one side of the *va'a* to the other. This reflects the role that schools, leaders, and teachers play in supporting their Pasifika students to connect with, utilize, build on, and transfer the existing “knowledges,” languages, and literacies of their families from home to school, with their role being foundational to the successful connections made between these two domains. The connecting platform/fata enables the stability, continuity, and progress of the whole vessel, with each hull/va'a supporting the other, and the vessel in its entirety. Similarly, leaders and teachers, who are expert at supporting students to make connections between home and school knowledges, ensure that both languages and literacies develop and flourish, with the language and knowledge of home utilized to develop the language and knowledge of school which, in turn, is employed to further enhance the language and knowledge of home.

The vignettes detailed here provide only a snapshot of three principles that were illustrated in greater detail in Si'ilata's (2014) research regarding Pasifika learners' success at school. The development of inquiry-focused, collaborative, and success-oriented relationships increases the likelihood of:

- 1 Pasifika learners being highly successful at school: Their utilization of language and literacy as interactive tools in meeting the demands of the curriculum is fundamental to that success.
- 2 Teachers teaching Pasifika learners effectively, and in particular ways that connect with and build on their specific languages, cultures, and identities, to meet the demands of the curriculum.

- 3 PLD facilitators supporting teachers in adaptive ways that enable them to improve their practice, and to utilize teaching and learning approaches that facilitate Pasifika learners' success at school.

### *Significance and future directions*

Successfully enacting each of these dimensions and their indicators in the classroom with Pasifika learners was not solely the province of Pasifika teachers. These indicators were enacted in classrooms to varying degrees by the teachers involved in the research studies, with only two of the 15 teachers being of Pasifika ethnicity (Samoan). The findings of this research illustrate that any teacher, regardless of ethnicity, can improve their practice in creating opportunities for Pasifika multilingual learners to make the timely, meaningful connections that build on their languages, cultures, and identities in order to master the linguistic and cognitive demands of school. Further research into the systemic structures and effective classroom practices that enable English-medium teachers to work in linguistically and culturally sustaining ways to enable their Pasifika and (and other) multilingual learners to utilize their bilingual and bicultural resources at school is urgently needed. It is also essential that teacher preparation courses enable teachers in training to surface their own tacit beliefs about language, culture, and identity. These novice teachers require specific preparation in the utilization of linguistically and culturally sustaining/culturally revitalizing pedagogies, and in the creation of classroom environments that normalize and privilege multilingual children's linguistic and cultural resources, and family knowledge systems at school. Only then will these children and their families understand that success at school does not require their languages and cultures to be left at the school gate.

### **Note**

- 1 Aotearoa/New Zealand has two official education contexts and curriculums: English-medium, often referred to as mainstream education, and Māori-medium education. There are approximately 30 schools providing Pacific-medium education with minimal system support.

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