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**Pacific Islands School Community Parent
Liaison Project Case Study**

Report to the Ministry of Education

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Pasifika
Education

RESEARCH DIVISION



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Pacific Coast Applied Research Centre

**PACIFIC ISLANDS SCHOOL
COMMUNITY PARENT LIAISON
PROJECT CASE STUDY**

2005

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PACIFIC ISLANDS SCHOOL COMMUNITY PARENT LIAISON CASE STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pacific Islands School Community Parent Liaison (PISCPL) project is one of a number of initiatives that originated out of *Vaka Ou: The Pacific Islands Labour Market Strategy* in 1996, as part of the Government's response to recommendations from the Employment Task Force (MoE RFP Document, 2004). The strategy was developed by a multi party working group including the Ministry of Pacific Islands Affairs, the Department of Labour, the Ministry of Education (MoE), the State Services Commission, Women's Affairs, Youth Affairs and the Education and Training Support Agency.

Vaka Ou had a focus upon significantly improving Pasifika people's employment and participation in the labour market through the effective use of education, training, employment, community and economic development policies. Further, it included a focus on supporting the roles of families and communities through encouraging their involvement in education contexts. Part of the strategy included the introduction of the Pacific Islands School Community Parent Liaison project (MoE RFP Document, 2004). The initiative was officially launched by the Ministry of Education in 1996 and since 1998, the PISCPL project has operated in conjunction with the School Community Iwi Liaison Project (SCIL).

The goals of the PISCPL project are to "foster and encourage a closer relationship between school and Pacific Island communities, and improve and increase Pacific Islands student achievement across the curriculum" (MoE RFP Document, 2004, p.2). The wider body of research (Comer, 2005; Epstein, 1995; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Ramsay, Hawk, Harold, Marriott & Poskitt, 1998; Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2003) that explores home-school relationship building models, suggests that there is a multitude of positive reasons to continue trialling and developing such frameworks. Parent¹ involvement generally and Pacific Islands parent involvement specifically in this study, benefits not only students and schools, but also the parents themselves.

This case study provides evaluative data to the MoE on aspects of the PISCPL project that may suggest indicators for ongoing, enhanced school-community capability and capacity building. The project involved a Pasifika community liaison co-ordinator working across one cluster of four schools, with the goal of improving learning outcomes for Pasifika students, and increasing family and community engagement in learning.

¹ Throughout this case study the use of the term parent/s is intended to include caregivers etc

The research was guided by a qualitative case study design and used focus groups, face-to-face interviews, postal questionnaires and document analysis as the primary data gathering tools. The data are representative of one cluster of four schools, including two primaries, one intermediate and one secondary school. The process of analysis sought to describe the patterns of relationships amongst the various stakeholders involved in the PISCPL project, and the ways in which these have impacted upon parent participation, student achievement and school practices.

Analyses of the data indicate five key findings. First, the community liaison co-ordinator played a fundamental role in terms of the project success. Second, a number of initiatives were implemented across the cluster schools that increased Pasifika parent participation, enhanced staff capability and improved student participation, learning and achievement. Third, the project afforded benefits to all stakeholders including parents and community members, teachers and schools, and students. Fourth, sustainability is an ongoing area of challenge. Finally, a number of barriers to successful programme implementation were identified in the data.

The findings of the case study are significant for school communities who are seeking to integrate a theoretical and practical framework for building Pacific Islands school community parent liaison to enhance not only their teaching and learning environment and student achievement outcomes, but further, to transform families' lives.

INTRODUCTION

In many places across the globe in the twenty first century, the notion that parents have a key role to play in schools has gained increasing acceptance. This role is accentuated when the parents are from a different cultural background to that of the mainstream culture. However, even when schools expect and encourage parent participation, many educators do not appear to understand the human operational dynamics of such a relationship. For example, teachers may fear relational conflict with parents because of their lack of understanding of cultural differences, or they simply may not want them in 'their patch'. Similarly, schools may want parents to co-operate by ensuring their children's behaviour and attitude to schooling is appropriate, but resist involving the parents in discussions about school organisation, management, culture, teaching and learning (Comer, 2005).

These mixed, ambivalent, and/or disingenuous messages readily suggest to parents that they are unwanted, unneeded and/or, at worst, undesirable (Mapp, 1997). Consequently, parents feel disempowered and unable to participate and negotiate in their child/ren's education. They then become overtly or covertly, consciously or subconsciously resistant to involvement. In consequence, whilst many schools earnestly believe that they encourage and facilitate parent participation, they nonetheless find that parents do not respond or engage (Mapp, 1997).

Whilst parental involvement cannot be enforced through administrative mandates, research to date indicates that interventions and initiatives designed to improve the home-school partnership have increased levels of success when the provision of social services is used as a starting point for growing relationships (Comer, 2005). The building of respect and trust is pivotal to any partnership

building. As parents feel that they are welcome and can contribute to something of value in the school learning community, then they can begin to collaborate in the work of the school and in the education of their children. In short, “low income, urban parents need compelling reasons to get involved in their children’s schooling” (Comer, 2005, p.39). The creation of inclusive school communities then, necessitates ongoing, co-ordinated, systematic efforts to involve parents.

The building of school-community-parent relationships in the context of Pasifika education, presents similar issues to those raised in the wider literature. Research by Koki and Lee (1998) that explored parental involvement in education identified a number of barriers to Pasifika parent’s engagement in school life. These included:

- a lack of cultural awareness amongst teachers
- a diminished valuing of school related activities compared to church and community events
- low priority given to parents by principals
- parental perceptions of being unwelcome and/or uncomfortable in school environments

Coxon, Anae, Mara, Wendt-Samu and Finau (2002), add the following barriers to those identified by Koki and Lee:

- lack of English fluency, particularly in decile 1 schools, precluding parental involvement
- lack of Pasifika parent involvement in school administration and governance, and therefore a lack of representation to express their concerns around their children’s educational performance
- cultural values such as respect for authority and high levels of etiquette that preclude parents questioning schools about their children’s educational achievement, thereby putting children at risk

Whilst the Koki and Lee (1998) study is useful in identifying barriers to Pasifika parent participation in mainstream school experiences, there remains a dearth of evidence based literature about the impact of relationship building between schools and their Pacific Islands parent communities, and enhanced student engagement, retention and achievement outcomes.

Initiatives that have been undertaken to date, that are providing some evidence of successful pathways to the participation of Pacific Islands parents within their school communities include Fusitu’a and Coxon (1998); Henderson (1996); MacIntyre (1999); Manuatu (2000); Mara’s (1998) report and the AIMHI Project (1998, 1999). This body of literature suggest a number of key elements that are integral to the successful building of school-community-parent liaison models. Mara (1998) summarised these elements and included:

- raising parent’s expectations through communication and information
- using parent workshops to focus on curriculum and learning
- providing frequent reports of student progress and achievement
- developing home-school relationships that respect cultural diversity and involve all
- extending learning time with homework, after school programmes and family workshops
- providing recognition of academic growth and achievement

- developing parent leadership skills

Furthermore, the literature (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Lieberman & Miller, 1999; Phillips, McNaughton & McDonald, 2001; Robertson & Allan, 1999; Timperley & Robinson, 2002) clearly indicates the pivotal role of staff professional development in building effective school-home relationships. As teacher understanding, knowledge and skill is developed around effective approaches to relationship building, there is evidence that collaboration between school and home can in fact become a living reality (Comer, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Guskey & Huberman, 1995).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design of this project was guided by a qualitative case study. The finer points of the case study approach in qualitative research are detailed by a number of authors (Burns, 1994; Cohen, 1995; Merriam, 1988; Robson, 1996; Stake, 1994; Yin, 1989). The purpose of this study was to assess the overall effectiveness of the PISCPL project within the bounded context of four schools comprising one cluster, and to explore the effects of the initiative on parents, schools, the community and student achievement and participation.

The focus of the study was upon discerning insights, making discoveries, understanding and interpretation from a variety of perspectives, particularly those of parents and the community liaison co-ordinator. A situational case study has been employed as an appropriate methodological approach because it presents, examines and interprets the specific personal experiences of some parents, teachers, principals and the community liaison co-ordinator across the cluster schools. The cohesive collation of all respondents' viewpoints provides valuable data for developing an understanding, and assessing the overall efficacy of the PISCPL project on parent, community and school relationships and on student outcomes. The case highlights phenomena, processes and relationships that may warrant further investigation, in addition to making a useful contribution to theory building.

Ethical Considerations

This research paid particular attention to the issues of confidentiality and informed consent within a Pacific research context. It was recognised that Pasifika parents are members of wider Pacific Islands communities that overlap in terms of age, gender, class and ethnicity (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu & Finau, 2001). In working towards the protection of both the research interviewees and the respondents involved in the project then, a Pacific Islands research assistant was appointed. This enhanced the credibility of the researchers, and facilitated rapport between the researchers and the respondents.

The data collection processes implemented throughout this inquiry have been guided by the ethical principles adopted by both the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic Ethics Panel and the American Anthropological Association. These included making the nature of enquiry overt; and explaining both orally and in writing that respondent's participation was voluntary, confidential, and that their anonymity would be maintained (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The protection of identity was effected at all times through the non recording of names on focus group data.

Selection of Respondents

Potential respondents included parents, teachers and principals in each of the cluster schools and the community liaison co-ordinator. The initial contact emails/letters explained the nature of the research and sought the cooperation of respondents to participate in focus group discussions and/or postal questionnaire completion. Letters and accompanying informed consent forms were distributed to sixteen participants – three principals, three teachers, nine parents and the community liaison co-ordinator.

Table 1 Respondent data:

Principals	Teachers	Parents	Liaison Person
3	3	9	1

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data for this evaluation were collected from a total of sixteen respondents who attended focus group meetings, were interviewed, or completed postal questionnaires. To enhance the credibility and dependability of the findings (Anderson, 1998), the data were supplemented with material from milestone reports and document analysis of other relevant reports as forms of triangulation. The focus group questions were designed to glean qualitative information about respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of the project. On occasions, groups discussed issues raised in the focus questions in their first language – not English, and then used a fluent bi-lingual speaker to report back to the research team. One of the interviewers was fluent in understanding Samoan and was therefore able to assist with discussion and subsequent translation. The postal questionnaire, completed by respondents who could not attend focus groups or interviews, was an adaptation of the focus group questions that sought similar information. A loosely structured interview schedule was used for interviews that involved one interviewer and one respondent.

The form of analysis for this study was one of qualitative interpretation. Given the limited number of respondents, the findings were not expected to be conclusive, but rather, a reflection of a perceived context specific situation that warrants further investigation. Essentially, the analysis and interpretation of this data sought to assess the overall effectiveness of the PISCPL project within this specific cluster of schools, and to explore the wider effects of the initiative on various stakeholders within the school community within a set of conceptually specified analytic categories (Huberman & Miles, 1994). These categories were developed in two ways.

First, the interview responses were examined and analysed, and from this initial raw information, emergent themes or categorisations were identified. Quotes were clustered together based on their similarity and separated from each other according to their incongruity. From the groupings of quotes, elemental meanings were extracted, and criteria - based upon the research questions for each

group established. Second, the categorisations were defined in part through the analysis of the milestone reports. Five key findings are identifiable in the data and these are discussed in the following section.

FINDINGS

Whilst there are a number of similarities in terms of how the PISCPL project was implemented across the cluster schools, each school initiated practices that were contextually relevant and specific for their community needs. These initiatives ranged from curricular based activities, social service support, culturally based programmes, to relationship support for Pasifika parents and students. They also included professional development activities, communication enhancing programmes, and networking within and amongst cluster schools to support teachers. Each school was supported in the initiative by a community liaison co-ordinator who facilitated communication amongst project stakeholders.

A. Community Liaison Co-ordinator

All four schools shared a community liaison co-ordinator who had responsibility for day-to-day operational matters. The community liaison co-ordinator was a Pacific Islander who was appointed to work with the local community, teachers and principals. Their broad brief was to encourage local Pacific Islands communities to participate in, and make positive changes to the education of their children (Milestone 1). More specifically, the community liaison co-ordinator's role included:

- home visits
- responding to community needs
- facilitation of community needs
- effecting communication between schools and their respective Pacific Islands communities e.g. churches and other established Pasifika groups
- fostering parent participation in curriculum interventions e.g. reading programmes
- encouraging parent attendance at school events and celebrations
- facilitation of focused interventions to grow parent capability so that they could help in school related activities e.g. reading programmes, homework centres
- provision of professional development for staff to assist them to better support Pasifika students
- networking with other cluster community liaison personnel for the purpose of sharing best practice ideas
- co-ordinating with principals and parents to regularly discuss PISCPL initiatives and developments
- preparation of project reports

B. Initiatives

A number of initiatives have contributed to 1) increased Pasifika parent participation, 2) enhanced staff capability and/or 3) improved student participation, learning and achievement, in the case study cluster schools. Each of these initiatives and their impact on parents, teachers and/or students is discussed in the following.

I. Pasifika Parent Participation

Curricular Support

1. Study/Homework Support Centres

Each school in the cluster established a homework or study support centre as part of the PISCPL initiative. The purpose of these centres was to provide after-school support for student learning between 3.00 – 5.00pm. They were also intended to “keep students off the street and help them with their homework” (Milestone Report). The homework centres were staffed in some instances by parents and in others by school staff, or a combination of the two.

Parents and schools strongly supported the homework centres because they could see the benefits of students completing homework within a specific timeframe. Teachers highlighted the benefits of the homework centre in terms of the quality of work being produced. There is anecdotal evidence of student literacy improving through their attendance at the homework/study centre. Parents, teachers and the liaison co-ordinator attributed this to reinforcement of reading, spelling and times tables at the centre.

2. Home School Partnership Programme

This programme had a numeracy focus that aimed to raise student achievement in the context of the New Zealand curriculum. Teams of teachers and parents were trained to run workshop sessions for parents and families, that sought to empower them to help their children develop numeracy skills. One school in the cluster was part of this initiative, and a Pasifika teacher was the facilitator.

3. Pacific Islands Parent Reading Tutor Programmes

Parent reading tutor programmes operated across the cluster schools. These programmes were designed to help parents support children’s learning, both at home and in the classroom. A variety of programmes operated including “*Reading with your Child*”, “*Reading is a Partnership*” and the “*Home School Partnership*” reading programme. Some programmes provided accompanying videos which modelled reading strategies parents could implement when working with students.

4. Family Tutor Programme

This programme involved senior students serving as peer tutors/buddies, to both pre-school and school age siblings and/or students. Students were given professional development support by a range of personnel including Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs), literacy advisers, professional readers and story tellers, to help them in their role. These professionals role modelled effective reading, math and/or story writing strategies which the peer tutors trialled with their siblings and/or other students. Parents were invited to attend the peer tutor training sessions so that they could further support younger students' learning.

5. Literacy Programmes

The focus of the various literacy programmes across the cluster schools was upon comprehension skill development. The nature of the support ranged from one-on-one assistance provided once per week in one school; to one-on-one, paired, or small group reading four times per week for one hour using parent help; to reading in small groups with more able students providing tutorial support; to parents facilitating regular one-on-one reading sessions with students.

Social Service Support

6. Pacific Islands Parents' Fono

Fono are held in all schools, usually twice per month. Newsletters distributed by the schools inform parents about forthcoming fono. Fono serve a variety of purposes including discussions on: health and well-being issues; transition to secondary school; uniform and school policy/procedural issues; student mentoring programmes; academic matters; character building and leadership behaviours, and strengthening relationships. In addition, fono have included Board of Trustees (BOT) training and education, and specific sessions providing reading and math training for parents, so that they can better support their child/ren's learning at home, and as voluntary workers in the school.

The data indicate increased numbers of parents attending fono over the duration of the PISCPL project. They also highlight the benefits of the fono in facilitating networking amongst Pasifika parents.

7. Parent Access to School Facilities

Across the cluster schools there was evidence of an 'opening of doors' to Pacific Islands parents. For example, access to the internet and school library facilities was appreciated by parents. A 'suggestion box' in schools provides a vehicle for parents to convey ideas, concerns or needs in relation to Pasifika children, to school management personnel. These matters are then further discussed where appropriate, at fono, or other relevant forums.

Cultural Support

8. Samoan/Pacific Islands Parents' Association – “Pasifika”

This association is a parent support group specifically for Pasifika parents. It is “for all Island groups, not just one Pacific Island community” (Community Liaison Co-ordinator). Primarily the group serves a networking function for Pacific Islands parents, strengthening the sense of community. As one parent commented, “we are like a big family. We don’t always get on, but no-one is ever left out”. The group serves a range of purposes including fundraising to support the annual Samoan Independence Day; school camps, student graduation and the farewell dinner. The Parents Association addresses literacy and health issues through inviting guest speakers to talk about relevant, topical matters, thereby raising parent awareness.

9. Tagata Pasifika

The aim of the Tagata Pasifika group is to raise cultural awareness in the schools, and celebrate Pacific Islands cultures, values, heritage and identity. This is done through song, dance, art and crafts, umu, writing and guest speakers. Parents are actively involved as tutors in this initiative. All four cluster schools have been involved in two Pasifika festivals that have showcased Pacific Islands art, culture and music. The majority of respondents who participated in the focus groups or questionnaires for this study noted the positive nature of the celebration, its success, inclusiveness and affirmation of Pasifika values and perspectives. As a principal noted “Pasifika festivals have resulted in positive cultural identification.” It is notable that a variety of Pacific Islands arts were included in the festivals, not just those of one particular nation.

10. Cultural Icons in Schools

A commitment to reflect the diverse cultural population of the cluster schools has resulted in an increased visibility of cultural icons. For instance, signage is multi-lingual; notices and meetings are translated into a range of Pasifika languages; prayers and greetings are multi-lingual; there is Pacific Islands artwork displayed in the schools and regular Pasifika performances. These artefacts have given tangible expression of welcome to Pasifika parents and children coming to the schools.

Relationship Support

11. Home Visits

Community liaison co-ordinator visits to Pacific Islands family homes and the resultant relationship building has greatly enhanced parent participation in school activities. The data indicate increased

parent attendance and/or participation in school events such as parent interviews, celebrations, Board of Trustees, and as parent helpers. They also indicate increased parent confidence in being at school; and enhanced communication between home and school. Improved rapport between school and home has resulted in a reduction in the number of parents sitting in cars waiting for children and an increased number of parents feeling confident to go into classrooms and helping pack up at the end of the day, read to children and/or join teachers in the staffroom. As two parents commented:

before [I] just dropped off son...[now] I'm getting involved with teachers.

[The] door at school is always open. [I] Come in and have a cuppa (sic), chat, [it's] like a second home.

12 Preschool

An on-site preschool in one school has enhanced both parent networking and home-school relationships. It provides parents with an opportunity to speak with other parents and develop a rapport that subsequently leads to parent involvement in school related activities.

Summary

Five practices appear to have been most effective in increasing parent participation including: Tagata Pasifika, Pacific Islands fono, home visits, Pacific Islands Parents' Association and Pacific Islands tutor reading programmes. The data suggest that while there was widespread awareness amongst the case study respondents that the PISCPL project was intended to raise the achievement of Pacific Islands students, the more immediate focus was upon the parents. As parents began to attend school related activities, initially in response to home visits by the liaison co-ordinator, and later, through attendance at fono, Tagata Pasifika, or Pacific Islands Parents' Association, they felt more comfortable to help in classrooms. Parents perceived themselves to be "growing in confidence and becoming part of the school teaching rather than just being a watcher" (Parent). Regular attendance by parents at meetings for the reading programmes was a "very big thing. I [parent] have learnt from being involved at school to enjoy helping my children with their homework...[I am] educating myself at the same time and find that very challenging" (Parent).

A number of PISCPL parents have become teacher aides, or Board of Trustee members. Two parents visited Auckland PISCPL schools with the liaison co-ordinator, and were able to report back to their schools about the 'big picture' and a strengthened sense of what works well for their own community. As these skills have been recognised by the cluster schools, it has "brought out things in parents that they never thought they could do" (Parent). Teachers fostered this parent enthusiasm for learning, commenting, "it boosted children's confidence [having] mums in school. They were proud to come to class because mum was there".

These findings support Comer's (2005) claim that social service provision is a key mechanism for relationship building. Home visits, fono meetings, the Pacific Islands Parents' Association and

Tagata Pasifika, are all examples of social service provision that has facilitated parents meeting in non-threatening environments. Not only have these initiatives provided parents with a reason to get involved in their children's schooling (Comer, 2005), but further, they have expedited parent confidence to participate in school activities. It was from these initial social service type activities that parent engagement in the parent tutor reading programme and homework/study centre initiatives grew.

II Staff Capability

1. Staff Professional Development

A range of professional development activities was initiated in the cluster schools to support and grow teacher knowledge, skills and understandings around working with Pasifika students, parents and communities. The professional development sessions focussed on approaches to culturally inclusive teaching in Pacific Islands contexts, using case studies which explored the characteristics of effective teachers of Pasifika students. For example, empathy, caring, respect, a passion to enthuse and motivate, patience and perseverance, a belief in students' ability and modelling appropriate behaviour (Milestone #4), were all explored in these workshops.

2. Communication

The staff professional development sessions also examined underpinning principles of cross cultural communication, and engaging staff, families and communities in effective communication practices. This was helpful in working towards a shared understanding of teacher, student, parent and community educational needs and visions. The liaison co-ordinator played a key role in facilitating effective communication between home and school. For example she took new parents and immigrant children into the schools and advised them of the norms and expectations underpinning school life. Reciprocally, the liaison co-ordinator advised teachers of parents' cultural expectations in terms of their children's educational experience. This intervention may have helped to reduce the difficulty teachers experienced in working with parents from other cultural contexts.

Wherever possible, communication between school and home is personal – verbal and/or visual, rather than in written format. This has been helpful for parents, as exemplified in one parent's comment:

Coming together as a group to talk about notices and responsibilities....so parents are aware of things...if [the school] just send out a notice [they] never know whether it is read.

Similarly, a principal noted that as teachers have developed an enhanced understanding of effective communication modes with Pasifika parents, the parents have become more involved in the learning

process, and are more comfortable to approach teachers with specific concerns. In developing such rapport, the “open door policy is now a reality” (Principal).

3. Networking with other Schools

Enhanced communication and sharing of ideas and practices with other cluster schools has facilitated positive networking amongst schools. This has been beneficial to teachers in terms of building a wider professional learning community network. As Stoll and Bolam (2005) commented, a key facet of creating and sustaining effective learning communities, involves networking both in and amongst schools. Developing a network amongst schools involves exploring possibilities, developing new approaches, deepening levels of collaboration, bedding down initiatives and implementing sustainable practices. Stoll posits that this process takes at least three years to effect. Clearly, there remains on-going work to do to maximise the potential of networking amongst the PISCPL cluster schools involved in this case study.

Summary

Three key elements contributed to the support and growth of staff capability in the case study cluster schools. These included professional development, communication and networking with other schools. Clearly, professional development that supports teacher understanding of a range of pedagogically inclusive approaches in a Pacific Islands context is a fundamental component of growing staff capability. Similarly, developing teacher understanding of effective modes of cross cultural communication is a key to enhanced capability. Networking both in and amongst cluster schools, has facilitated a sharing of ideas and practices that has further supported the growth of teacher capacity. The case study indicates that whilst there is still much to be done in developing staff capability in these areas, they are nonetheless, integral to the realisation of closer relationships between schools and Pacific Islands communities.

III Student Participation, Learning and Achievement

While each of the initiatives discussed in the following section have facilitated student participation, learning and achievement, their greatest potential is to be found in the impact they have had on relationship building amongst students, parents, teachers and the wider Pacific Islands community. Parents and older siblings supporting student learning through involvement in these various initiatives, with teachers/schools supporting parent educational experiences (for example as reading tutors), together provide critical foundations for strong, respectful, trusting, reciprocal relationships. Such relationships are pivotal to enhanced student learning and achievement.

1. Polynesian Clubs

These clubs are a tangible mechanism for Pacific Islands students to be involved in reflecting their culture/s in their respective schools. In doing so, students' cultural backgrounds and experiences are validated in their learning environment and this has supported student participation and engagement. Cluster schools' commitment too, and facilitation of student involvement in Pasifika song, dance and arts and crafts, has also provided a valuable cultural context for student learning.

2. Cultural Icons

Just as the heightened visibility of Pasifika cultural icons in schools encouraged parent participation, so too was this a positive influence upon student learning and achievement. As noted previously, when students see their culture reflected in their daily educational experience (Gorinski & Abernethy, 2003), there is evidence that they will be more likely to engage in the teaching and learning activities to which they are exposed.

3. Family Tutor Programme

As discussed in the previous section, the Family Tutor Programme offered a rich opportunity for senior students to serve as peer tutors/buddies to younger students, thereby providing strong motivational role-modelling

4. Mentoring Programme

The mentoring programme has been a successful initiative in the cluster. The broad aim of the mentoring programme is to empower and equip students to make positive life changing decisions; to realise their purpose and raise their standards in terms of academic achievement, school attendance, positive behaviour, character development, broadened aspirations through participation and interaction, and strengthened relationships (Milestone 4, 2004, p.3).

At a practical level, the mentoring programme has involved senior students working with younger students to provide learning support in setting relevant and appropriate goals and goal achievement strategies. This resulted in the following anecdotally reported outcomes (Milestone 4, 2004, p.16):

- improvements to student grades
- reduced truancy
- strategies for dealing with bullying
- enhanced student confidence, aspirations, initiative, responsibility and motivation
- increased student interest in higher educational opportunities
- increased student interactions with mentors and teachers around subject choice and homework

In sum, "mentors facilitate the exploration of needs, motivations, desires, skills and thought processes to assist the individual [student] in making real, lasting change" (Milestone 4, 2004, p.2)

5. Ex-Student Assistance

In one school, an ex-school student (now an 18 year old) assisted with the reading programme, thereby providing a positive role model in on-going learning to younger students.

6. Student Literacy Programme

This programme not only engaged parents as helpers, but further, it facilitated and supported student learning and achievement. The opportunity to have one-on-one and/or paired, or small group reading experiences was perceived by parents and teachers/principals, to be beneficial to student learning.

7. Homework/Study Centre

Similarly, the homework/study centres have been effective mechanisms for supporting student achievement. Not only have they provided a regular place for students to complete homework, but further, teacher and/or tutor parents have offered one-on-one assistance to students, particularly with literacy activities, but also in other subject areas. The building of relationships with parents and teachers was also a key to the homework/study centres' positive impact on student achievement outcomes.

Summary

In sum, the data indicate that student participation, learning and achievement have been enhanced in three key ways through the various programmes initiated under the PISCPL project. First, all four schools note that student reading has improved. Only one of the participating schools however, has systematically collected data to evidence this. Second, all schools reported increased motivation and confidence amongst students from Pacific Islands families. Finally, Pasifika students are reportedly "more confident reading and speaking in their mother tongue" (Liaison co-ordinator).

The most effective practice in terms of enhanced student achievement outcomes seems to be the range of reading programmes, particularly those that engage parents as tutors in the classroom. As parents expectations of their child/ren's learning increased, student achievement appears to have improved. As one parent stated "[I] do not want my children to be thick...I want them to succeed in life."

C. Benefits Of The Project

To a greater or lesser degree, all of the initiatives developed within the context of the PISCPL project and outlined in the previous section, have been beneficial to parents and the community, teachers and schools, and students. Key benefits for these stakeholders are outlined in the following discussion.

I. Parents and Community

Parents reported three primary benefits from involvement in the PISCPL project including: enhanced educational and social awareness, increased confidence and networking.

1. Enhanced Educational and Social Awareness

Parents commented that a heightened awareness of the ways in which they can help their children with homework and reading or other curricular areas, has been beneficial. Not only has this enabled them to engage more effectively and constructively in the child/ren's educative journey, but they have also benefited personally from educational and social learning in the process. For example, one parent spoke of her increased awareness of better parenting options commenting "I have learnt not to teach children through fear...[I] was a very strict mother but not helping kids at all...[I] learnt more about myself and there is a regret that I didn't do things differently at the start, particularly with my two oldest children."

2. Increased Confidence

Concomitant with enhanced skill development afforded through the PISCPL initiatives, parents reported increased levels of confidence as they developed literacy skills. This in turn, helped in overcoming cultural shyness at addressing teaching professionals. One parent commented "[I] was ashamed to face teachers and principals but now I can sit here and talk to them." Another parent said "[I] can speak to [the] teacher in my second language [English] now because [I am] more confident." As a result of their increased confidence, a number of parents undertook training which in some cases led to employment. For instance, one school reported that four PISCPL parents are now paid teacher aides.

3. Networking

Parents reported on the benefits of networking with other parents in terms of strengthening the sense of community in the school. In particular the Pasifika meetings were perceived to be supportive "for all Islands groups, not just one Pacific Island community" (Community Liaison Co-ordinator).

II. Teachers and Schools

For teachers and the schools involved in this case study, three key benefits from the initiatives were identified.

1. Relationships

Enhanced relationships with parents resulting from the various curricula related initiatives, social service support and relationship building strategies implemented, has been a positive outcome of the PISCPL project. Teachers commented on their improved understanding of the Pasifika community generally, and Pacific Islands families specifically. Teachers acknowledged the benefits of increased understandings of Pasifika children's learning styles, cultural values, the integration of Pacific Islands languages into classroom routines and teacher currency with research and best practice methodologies.

The benefits to teachers from the social service initiatives were evident in improved student behaviour and engagement in the classroom. For example, the healthy eating programmes were particularly beneficial in this respect. Similarly the opportunity for preschool children to meet the teacher/school principal prior to starting school eased the home-school transition for 5 year olds. Teachers also found the increased presence of Pacific Islands parents as helpers in the classroom, beneficial.

As a result of involvement in the PISCPL project, teachers reported enhanced relationships with RTLBs and other professionals. These relationships developed as a result of co-operative planning endeavours, and other initiatives, which in turn assisted teachers to better support Pacific Islands student learning.

2. Homework Centre

The homework/study centres were strongly supported by teachers and schools. The completion of homework in a set timeframe, and the steadily improving quality of work produced has been particularly advantageous to the learning and teaching programme in the cluster schools.

3. Networking

Just as Pacific Islands parents found networking beneficial, teachers perceived the opportunity to work with other schools in the cluster, expedient. Networking offered support for teachers implementing new initiatives, as well as promoting inquiry mindedness (Stoll, 2005) and innovation within and amongst the cluster schools.

III. Students

The data suggest that student benefits from involvement in the PISCPL project focussed upon literacy enhancement and increased confidence.

1. Literacy Enhancement

Parents, teachers, principals and the community liaison co-ordinator reported that students evidence:

- an increased interest in books – that is, they take books home more frequently
- improved reading ability
- enhanced confidence in reading
- increased comprehension
- greater engagement in discussion and questioning about books

Further, fluent readers are tutoring younger, less able readers, thereby supporting school wide literacy improvement endeavours. One principal commented that “reading throughout the school has improved” while another noted s/he had “anecdotal and subjective data...” to support the claim that the school has “made some gains in Pasifika kids’ education in four out of six cohorts.”

2. Increased Confidence

Respondents noted generally that students had benefited from the PISCPL initiative through increased confidence and self esteem. One teacher commented that “the students [have] become more confident [and developed a] positive attitude to school and learning.” This observation was reiterated by parents as they noticed children responding to the reading programmes, homework centres, visits to the library and Samoan Capital Radio, health programmes, cultural performances, the fiafia (festival) evenings, visits from the community liaison co-ordinator and so forth. Students evidence pride and enthusiasm and “are eager to learn, eager to read. Some didn’t get reading at home...so having it here at school has been good” (Parent).

D. Sustainability

While ideally all the programmes implemented under the PISCPL initiative will be maintained, the milestone reports and primary data suggest that the homework/study centres and the reading programmes are, and have been, the most readily sustainable. Every initiative however, requires an enthusiastic advocate such as the community liaison co-ordinator, to readily maintain momentum. One of the cluster schools noted that parent involvement in school activities has continued beyond the timeframe of the project and the school intends to continue facilitating parent information and education evenings once per term.

E. Barriers To Success

A number of barriers to the success of the project were noted in the data. These include:

- *Language*

English as a second language has posed problems for some parents and schools. The challenge is to address this issue in constructive ways for the benefit of all parties.

- *Cultural hierarchies*

Some parents reported feeling uncomfortable being involved in their child/ren's education when they are not formally educated themselves.

- *Time*

A number of Pasifika parents work at night cleaning, or in factories, and are not able to help their child/ren with homework.

- *Cultural misunderstandings*

Parents collecting children from school early, a lack of explanation for failing to send children to school; not replying to school notices and not attending school meetings, are all examples of how cultural misunderstandings have the potential to impact negatively upon such an initiative.

- *Need for lead in time and parent training*

Parents expressed a desire to build parent to parent relationships by attending for example, the Samoan Support Group, before getting involved in taking reading groups, or the homework/study centre. Some parents perceived that schools were not listening to their voices in this respect.

- *Lack of clarity of communication*

A lack of clear communication and focused feedback from schools to parents about student specific learning needs, strengths and/or challenges has been problematic in some schools.

- *Sporadic school attendance*

Sporadic school attendance and a lack of prioritisation of school attendance has resulted in some Pacific Islands students missing out on reading recovery classes and other important curricular activities.

- *Funding*

In the same way that PISCPL needs an advocate/overseer within schools to ensure renewal and effective implementation, the project also needs consistent funding. Without a professional liaison person to be the 'face' of the school to the Pasifika community, to facilitate meetings and run workshops, these initiatives are at risk. Funding appears to have been, at times uneven, spasmodic and/or unclear. One school for instance, did not realise that there had been specific funding supplied, with the principal commenting: "The school did not receive any direct funding."

SUMMARY

In the cluster schools involved in this case study there was considerable discrepancy in terms of the scope and outcomes of the PISCPL project. The school that voiced the most enthusiasm for the project, with cogent stories from parents, the principal, teachers and the community liaison co-ordinator, had the widest range of initiatives, with robust systems in place to implement them. School personnel were able to articulate the programme's purpose, progress and performance; the parents used the terms 'partnership' and 'relationship' to describe the two-way exchange of learning and demonstrated an awareness of shared responsibility for their children's schooling success.

In contrast, personnel issues resulted in difficulties at the start up phase for some schools, and during the programme for others. Although in one school there were arrangements in place to utilise the expertise of the community liaison co-ordinator one day per week in this school's homework centre, and to support the parents' Pasifika group, because the liaison co-ordinator was based at another school, there appeared to be little sense of ownership of the project from the school's management team. The Principal was unfamiliar with the aims of the PISCPL programme, unaware of any evidence of enhanced student learning, and generally saw the homework centre as the only lasting outcome of the project.

A parent from the same school was however, considerably more positive about the project and is now a Board of Trustees member because of the programme. This parent, who attended cluster meetings, and continues to work toward empowering others, commented: "[We] had a few problems at the start but managed to carry on and have the co-ordinator facilitate a meeting and see [this] as a positive thing." This parent did also note however, that without someone at the school driving the programme and constantly supporting and inducting new parents, the momentum of the PISCPL initiative will not be sustainable.

The community liaison co-ordinator is pivotal to the success of such an initiative. This person's role is multi-faceted as the 'face of PISCPL'. The role includes visiting homes "sometimes like a social worker" (Community Liaison Co-ordinator) and encouraging parents to attend school meetings; teaching parents how to support children's reading; supplying resources in a range of Pacific Islands languages; organising and leading cluster group meetings; helping in the homework/study centres; speaking to staff meetings; and assisting teachers to connect with the community and communicate with families. It is important then, that the liaison person is someone of professional standing, as they are working with teachers, network school communities, and Pasifika communities to enhance educational outcomes. As one principal pointed out, the selection of an appropriate candidate requires "very careful thinking" to ensure the community liaison co-ordinator has the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes to effectively perform the role.

Parent empowerment was a clear outcome of the PISCPL initiative. As parents learned more about how to support their child/ren's learning, it has "brought out things in parents that they never thought they could do" (Parent). Similarly, enhanced student achievement, both social and academic has been realised as a result of the project.

In conclusion, it appears that where the PISCPL initiative has operated well in the case study schools, and where there is strong support from all stakeholders, there have been broad and measurable, positive outcomes from the initiative. Conversely, where there has been less school community buy-in, the efforts of the community liaison co-ordinator ensured that parents and children still received benefits. In these situations however, the long-term sustainability of these initiatives is far less secure. In the words of one of the PISCPL principals:

Liaison that's been established needs to be continued. Success is largely dependent on the right people and maintaining stability and energy. Continual re-educating / revisiting is needed, as parents move on and new parents come along.

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