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Correspondence should be addressed to: Rosemary De Luca and Toni Bruce, Editors, School of Education, Private Bag 3105, The University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. Email: deluca@waikato.ac.nz and/or tbruce@waikato.ac.nz

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THE 'PASIFIKA UMBRELLA' AND QUALITY TEACHING: UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO THE DIVERSE REALITIES WITHIN

TANYA WENDT SAMU

School of Pasifika Education

The University of Auckland

ABSTRACT *The New Zealand Ministry of Education recognises that the most important challenge facing teachers today is the ability to manage simultaneously the complexity of learning needs of diverse students (Alton-Lee, 2003, p. v). It also holds the view that for quality teaching to occur, teachers must be responsive to diversities between groups of learners as well as within groups of learners. This paper aims to enhance educators' understandings about the intra-group diversities of Pasifika and to signal the implications for teaching and learning.*

KEYWORDS

Pasifika students, Pasifika diversities, Quality teaching

INTRODUCTION

The New Zealand Ministry of Education, through its Best Evidence Synthesis Programme (BES), has recognised that in the context of New Zealand schools the most important challenge facing teachers is the ability to manage simultaneously the complexity of learning needs of diverse students (Alton-Lee, 2003, p. v). Diversity in schooling in this case is characterised by differences in socio-economic background, gender, special needs, disability, giftedness, home language and ethnicity. The Ministry is of the view that for quality teaching to occur, teachers must be responsive to such diversities (Alton-Lee, 2003).

The BES Programme recognises that diversities are found within ethnic groups as well. It has directed those who are contracted to develop syntheses of evidence-based research to be mindful of the following:

Teaching needs to be responsive to the diversity and the diverse realities within groups, for example, diversity within Pākehā, Māori, Pasifika (the Pasifika umbrella) and Asian students who are arguably the most diverse *ethnic* group categories by cultural and linguistic heritage. (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 21, emphasis added)

This paper aims to explore the forms of diversity under the Pasifika umbrella, and to identify and discuss related issues that are of critical importance for the teaching and learning of Pasifika students in New Zealand schools. The author contends that quality teaching for Pasifika learners requires the development of

teachers' and educators' in-depth, contextualised knowledge and understanding of their Pasifika learners. I argue that this is a pre-requisite for the overall process of developing the most effective, site-specific and tailor-made pedagogical response plan possible.

This paper begins with a brief explanation of the term Pasifika education and a description of Pasifika people as a multi-ethnic grouping in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This is followed by a discussion of the term 'quality teaching' in relation to the term 'responsiveness to diversity'. The paper will then address its overall aims.

PACIFIC EDUCATION / PASIFIKA EDUCATION

In the context of New Zealand, Pacific education simply refers to the education and development of people of Pacific cultural heritage and descent resident in New Zealand. Over the past two to three decades, the formal names or labels that institutions and government organisations such as the Ministry of Education have applied to this multi-ethnic minority group have ranged from Pacific Islanders, Pacific Islands and Pacific Nations to the more recent term of Pasifika. Pasifika is the term used by education institutions because *Pacific* translates into *Pasifika* in several of the Pacific languages spoken in this nation (Ministry of Education, 2005). However, the use of the term *Pasifika* or, more precisely, *Tagata Pasifika* is more about the power to name rather than simple translations, in my view: "The fact that as a term, it 'originated' from us, is of no small consequence because being able to define ourselves is an issue of control" (Samu, 1998, p. 209).

I support this view by drawing on Māori researcher and theorist Smith's (1998) arguments regarding the way that using others' constructions is disempowering and takes away a marginalised group's ability to set the terms for self-definition and identification (Samu, 1998).

PASIFIKA AS A MULTI-ETHNIC GROUP WITHIN AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

As a multi-ethnic group, Pasifika are made up of more than six cultural groups, with heritages rooted in the islands nations of the South Pacific. According to the 2001 census, half of Pasifika peoples were Samoan, an increase of 34% since the 1991 Census. The next largest groups were Cook Island Māori (22.7%), Tongan (17.6%), Niue (8.7%), Fijian (3%) and Tokelauan (2.7%) (Statistics New Zealand, 2001). There are other Pasifika communities within New Zealand that are smaller in terms of size but also strive to maintain cultural heritage and identity; for example Tuvalu, the Solomon Islands, Kiribati and French Polynesia.

Two-thirds of the total Pasifika population of New Zealand live in the Auckland region, which contributes to Auckland's claim to be the largest Polynesian city in the world. Wellington has the second largest population of Pasifika people resident in New Zealand with approximately 15% of that population. Other Pasifika people resident in this country have established smaller, but no less vibrant and cohesive communities in other cities and towns in New Zealand.

It is important to note that of the six main (in terms of population numbers) Pasifika groups, three have more members living in Aotearoa New Zealand than the home nation; namely the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau. The New Zealand-based communities of Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau peoples resident in New Zealand are vital off-shore communities, fast becoming critical locations of language transmission and culture for their respective Pacific nation homelands.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Pasifika made up the second largest minority of the New Zealand population, at more than 5%. However, in 2001, while the total percentage of New Zealand's population who identified with either one or more Pacific heritages increased to 6.5%, those who identified as Asian made up 6.6% of the total population. This has shifted Pasifika, albeit narrowly, to being the third largest minority group in this country (Statistics New Zealand, 2001). In terms of total numbers, just over 230,000 people identified as Pasifika in 2001. Pasifika total numbers have been increasing over the past four to five decades (the time frame for Pasifika peoples' location within New Zealand society). Much of the increase in population since the mid-1980s is due to natural increase and not immigration. More than half of this population (58%) are New Zealand-born and raised.

Pasifika, as a multi-ethnic group, has a higher birth rate than the national population and also has a higher average number of children per family. Consequently, the Pasifika population is a very young one. This is a feature that is expected to continue for some time. This has enormous implications for the education system and its various sectors. In 2021, the Pasifika population is projected to increase to 414,000 (an increase of 58%) and will make up 9.2% of the New Zealand population. Pacific children will make up about 17% of all New Zealand children then, compared with 11% in 2001. It has been projected that by 2040, the majority of students in New Zealand primary schools will be Māori and Pasifika, and that such a change will "... occur within the working life of teachers who are currently being trained or inducted into teaching" (Alton-Lee, 2003, p. 5).

Given that 60% of Pasifika peoples live in the Auckland region, the impact on early childhood centres and schools in this region will be immense.

QUALITY TEACHING AND RESPONSIVENESS TO DIVERSITY: INSEPARABLE NOTIONS

When the Ministry of Education of New Zealand considers quality teaching, it can be argued that the parameters for its discourse are set by comparisons of New Zealand with other OECD countries using data from international studies such as Pacific Islands Students' Association (PISA). New Zealand student performance on such tests is both very positive and very negative. In other words, there is a very significant range of outcomes. We have students who achieve very highly on such international tests, but we also have students who do not and are well behind those who do. According to Alton-Lee (2005), of these, "Māori and Pasifika students featured quite prominently amongst the students that performed poorly" (p. 8). Alton-Lee describes the education system of New Zealand as being one of "... high disparities in achievement by comparison with most OECD countries" (2005, p. 8). To be even more precise, New Zealand has the second highest ranking in terms of

disparity of the OECD nations. Quality teaching in New Zealand appears to be limited in terms of its effectiveness.

Further analyses by the Ministry of Education, particularly through its Best Evidence Synthesis programme of research and development shows that the cause of the disparity is *not* in the decile ranking of the school. Rather, "... there is marked variability within schools in teaching effectiveness ..." (Alton-Lee, 2004, p. 4). The difference in educational outcomes is the result of differences in the effectiveness of teaching within schools in New Zealand. This does not necessarily mean the difference between a poor teacher and a good teacher. Generally speaking, teaching may be good or of a high quality (judged as such because of student outcomes) but it may not necessarily be effective for all the different learners that are experiencing that teaching, because students who are different are not achieving the same favourable outcomes that other students are.

This means that we have an education system that serves many students well. So much so that we can confidently say our education system is a high quality one. However, our education system does not serve all New Zealand students well, particularly students of specific cultural and ethnic backgrounds. As a consequence of international evidence-based comparisons, we must acknowledge that our education system is a low equity one. Therefore, quality teaching in New Zealand has to be effective for all who participate. This requires diversity and difference to be at the very centre of the meaning of the notion 'quality teaching'.

So, what is the real problem? Alton-Lee (2005) argues that the overall weakness of our education system in New Zealand is the inability to be responsive to the diversity of its learners:

The high disparities, the relatively high variance within schools in the New Zealand PISA results, and our rapidly growing demographic profiles for those learners traditionally underserved by New Zealand schooling, indicate a need for community and system development *to be more responsive to diverse learners*. (p. 8, emphasis added)

The Ministry of Education's Best Evidence Synthesis programme has developed what is described as a responsiveness to diversity framework. Sinnema and Aitken (2005) have explained what this means in the following way. They state that a responsiveness to diversity framework:

... places an emphasis on approaches that are efficacious in enhancing educational outcomes for all students. It challenges deficit thinking that locates responsibility for lack of achievement in the students or their families and also challenges thinking that assumes more able students will be able to cope without consideration of their special needs and abilities ...

One of the central concerns of a 'responsiveness to diversity' framework is to highlight pedagogical approaches that work for diverse learners *simultaneously*. In New Zealand schools, the typical learning context is one in which a group of 25-30 students are taught together. It is important then, when considering the magnitude of

influence to consider the impact on all learners, not just the students to whom the pedagogy is targeted ... (p. 13, emphasis added)

Other educators have developed theoretical frameworks for the effective teaching of diverse learners, frameworks wherein difference is the norm rather than a specialised add-on to what is being provided for 'normal' learners. An integral part of such frameworks are sets of principles. Gay (2000) describes *culturally responsive teaching*, whilst Hernandez Sheets (2005) talks about *diversity pedagogy*. Regardless of the names or labels, these are frameworks that do more than acknowledge and describe diversity. Each "... conveys a need to respect similarities and differences among human beings and to go beyond sensitivity to active and effective responsiveness" (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995, p. 8, emphasis added).

Responsiveness to diversity, in terms of the classroom, is about tailoring teaching to learner diversities in order to raise academic achievement. According to Alton-Lee (2004):

What students bring to the classroom is in turn influenced by their gender, families and wider affiliations and heritages and the extent to which these become resources in their school [centre] learning. There are substantial research literatures that show these aspects of learner identity and background to be integral to educational achievement or failure, particularly when there are cultural mismatches between the home and school [centre]. (p. 4)

In terms of Pasifika learners, a series of questions can be asked, beginning with: What do Pasifika students bring to the classroom? Then: How is what they bring influenced by the specific features of their particular forms of diversity, their families and their heritages? Last but not least: To what extent do the learning experiences and environments that teachers plan match (as opposed to mismatch) the specific Pasifika cultural ways of being of their Pasifika learners? The starting point involves teachers finding out more about what their Pasifika learners bring to their classroom, finding out more about what is underneath that Pasifika umbrella.

UNDERNEATH THE PASIFIKA UMBRELLA

This paper argues first that teaching that is responsive to student diversity requires teachers to have deep, contextualised understandings of learner diversities (Alton-Lee, 2003). Second, it argues that developing such an understanding of the diverse realities of Pasifika requires a closer examination of identity and the assistance of a theoretical framework to identify and explore the factors that have the most relevance and influence in shaping the realities of specific Pasifika learners, in relation to the processes of teaching and learning for which their teachers are responsible.

1. Deep, Contextualised Pasifika Identities

The use of the term Pasifika recognises the reality of more than half a dozen distinct ethnic and linguistic groups, each with their own unique social structures, histories,

values, perspectives and attitudes. As Mara, Foliaki and Coxon (1994) have pointed out:

It is important to keep in mind that 'Pacific Islander' is a blanket term used in metropolitan countries like New Zealand to identify people from a number of different Pacific Island countries (and their New Zealand-born descendants). Its use conceals and undermines the historical, social, political and cultural uniqueness of each Pacific Islands society. (p. 181)

However, a collectivising term such as Pasifika can be understood and used as a discourse that recognises, values and respects the various unique Pacific nations as well as drawing groups together. This is done in much the same way that the term *the Pacific Way* has been used in the Pacific Region for over thirty years. Crocombe (1976) argued that this term "... satisfies both psychological and political needs, in that it helps to fulfil a growing demand for respected Pacific-wide identifying symbols and for Pacific unity" (p. 1). Much like the use of the term Pasifika, the term 'the Pacific Way' is not intended to imply homogeneity. The diverse Pacific nations and peoples that fall under its banner are not all the same. Crocombe (1996) argued that the term was developed and has been used within the region in those instances and occasions when "... the common interests of all the islands peoples can be served by collaboration ..." (p. 1). Reflecting on the value of collectivising terms for Pacific peoples, Samu (2006) has stated:

Sometimes the main advantage of a unifying concept is the countering effect it has against oppositional forces such as neo-colonialism – or for migrant community groups such Pasifika in New Zealand, countering oppositional forces such as assimilation and social/economic/cultural marginalisation. (p. 10)

There is another dimension of identity that is of critical importance. This involves the forging of unique identities of Pasifika or Pacific Island itself. Over the past ten years, New Zealand-born and New Zealand-raised Pasifika young people have developed unique forms of expression and identification. They demonstrate a creative, assertive self determination and are growing in numbers. They strive to be bicultural or multiethnic on their own terms.

In any discussion of Pasifika diversities, this particular platform must not escape notice. It exists, it is vibrant, and it is becoming more and more distinct. It appears to blend aspects of traditional culture with the urban and the contemporary. It does not exist in any of the Pacific nations, rather, emerging within the migrant communities of Pasifika in New Zealand, Hawaii, the west coast of the USA and Australia. It, as an identity platform, is attractive because it is safe; a person can be Pasifika in ways that he or she wants to be. The conscious and deliberate construction of such a personalised Pasifika identity means it is okay not to be fluent in the mother (or father) tongue. It is okay not to be an expert in traditional art form; and, it is okay not to be knowledgeable of culturally based protocols.

A Pasifika identity-montage affirms multiple-heritage. It excuses partial cultural literacy and provides a degree of social credibility. It is inclusive (albeit

selectively) of the historical and contemporary socio-political issues of Pasifika. Such identities may not be articulated clearly by young Pasifika learners in schools. However, if they are listening to hip-hop music and wearing clothes from the Dawn Raid label and watching the annual *Style Pasifika* fashion show, and animated comedy series *BroTown* on television, then they are being exposed to, and participating in, the process of new ethnic identity formation taking place amongst many New Zealand-born Pasifika peoples.

With respect to identity, research conducted by Anae (1998) and Pasikale (1996, 1999) clearly identifies the existence of different groups or types of Pacific young people. Pasikale (1996) called these identity profiles, and described them as: Traditional; New Zealand blend; and New Zealand made.

In other words, these profiles are based on the extent to which the individual Pacific youth can relate to the cultural traditions and practices (including language) of their parents and/or grandparents. Pasikale (1999) describes the interests and issues of New Zealand-born Pacific people as being of critical importance because of the high proportion of Pasifika in Aotearoa who are New Zealand-born. The implications for schooling then, as she describes it, are:

... the images, information and stereotypes about Pacific Island people are rooted in assumptions based on the images of 'recent island migrants' ... [and consequently] ... the displacement of the majority Pacific learners, especially in the formal educational establishments. By this I mean the assumptions (mostly bad) educators make about New Zealand born Pacific Island learners, who either fail to meet expectations or worse still, float by without any expectations or demands on them because of some misguided liberal attitude (otherwise known as the 'soft option'). Either way, human potential is not recognised or developed. (Pasikale, 1999, p. 5)

Pasikale (1999) continues her argument about the importance of identity to successful learning by saying:

It is evident that how one perceives oneself provides the context for how one will proceed with learning. The literature suggests that for Pacific Island people, the sense of being (or identity) is influenced strongly by the environment. This has important significance for New Zealand born Pacific Islands people who are being socialised in a predominantly westernised environment. (p. 5)

Pasikale (1999) further argues:

... suffice to say that 'identity' is a critical issue for many Pacific Islands learners, and understanding the issues can mean the difference to our positive cultural continuity and the alienation of a generation more comfortable with other forms of sub-culture. It can also mean the difference to continued academic failure and educational success based on the realities of future Pacific Islands generations. I have come to appreciate that 'identity' is not a static

product but a process of constant navigation, based on a core of convictions that provide a foundation for self-acceptance. (p. 6)

It is important to note that the conclusions that Pasikale draws on (above) are based on a qualitative research project called *Seen But Not Heard* involving 80 Pasifika learners on what were then known as Training Opportunities Programmes (TOPs). The majority of the learners were youth who had not been successful in secondary school and had left before achieving any formal qualifications. As young people they seemed to be particularly vulnerable to issues around identity, and were positioned to reflect quite deeply on what did, and did not work, for them in schools.

More recent documentation of Pacific youth 'voices' articulating their own constructions of personal identity include work by Pacific art historian, Lisa Taouma, journalist and producer of Television New Zealand's *Tagata Pasifika*. In the promotion flier for a recently presented seminar¹ for the University of Auckland's Pacific post-graduate seminar series (August, 2006), was the following statement:

Pasifika youth in Aotearoa are increasingly visible in asserting a new brown identity where the catch cry is 'loud, brown and proud' – heard on the radio, seen on the tv. The impact that this Pasifika youth population is making particularly in popular culture is looked at in a 20 minute video piece on the perception and projection of Pacific identity in Aotearoa.

The aforementioned video piece is a compilation Lisa Taouma has made from stories aired on *Tagata Pasifika*. A number of Pasifika people, from their teens through to their thirties, confidently state the names they have given to the identities that they have constructed for themselves: for example, I am a Kiwi Samoan, I am a Pacific New Zealander, Urban Samoan, and so on.

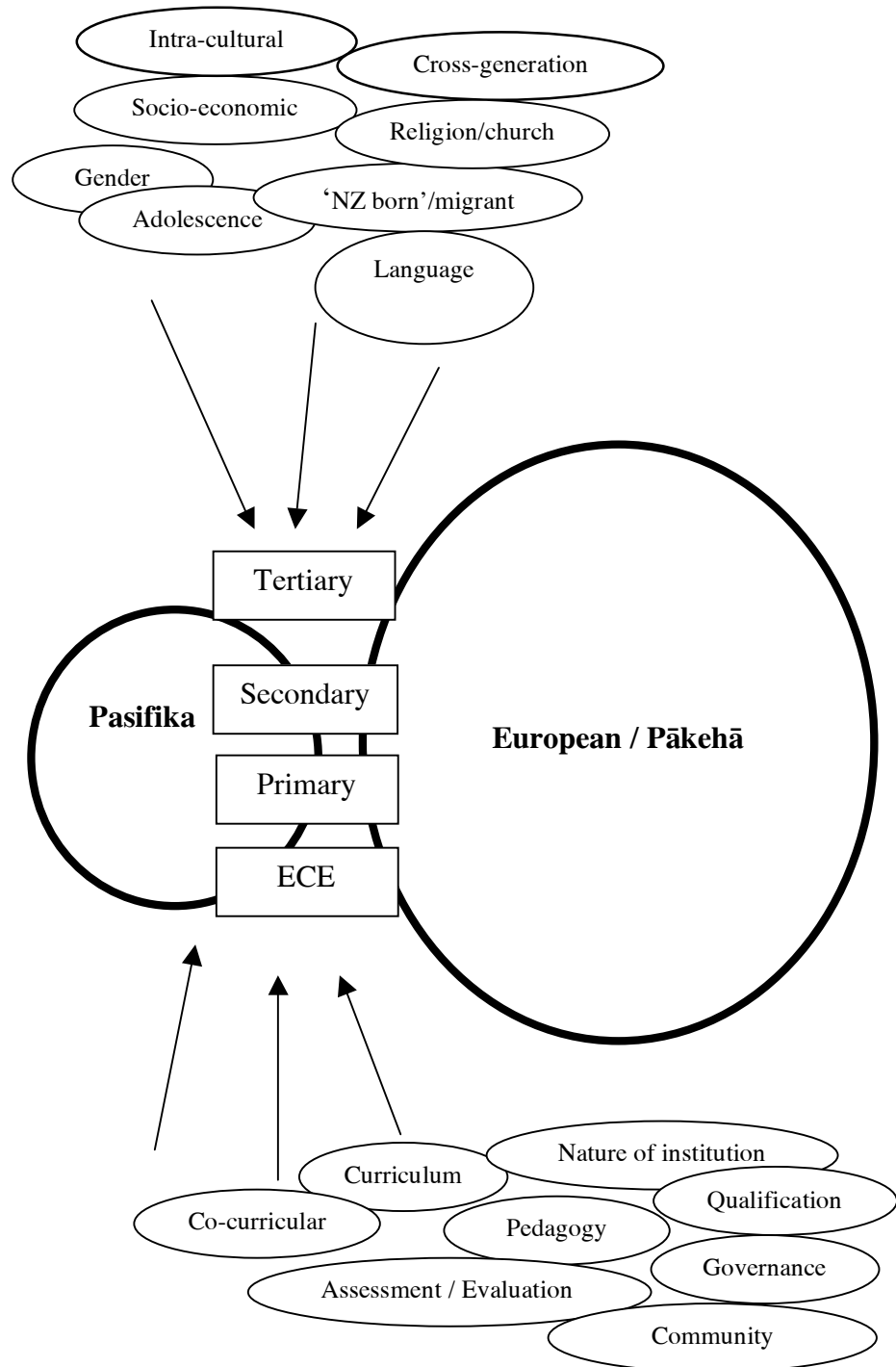
However, while identity is complex and quite fluid, there are additional factors to examine closely and to consider in terms of learner realities. Where should a teacher begin?

2. A Framework for Exploring and Understanding Pasifika: The Ethnic Interface Model

The Ethnic Interface Model enables a structured exploration of the possible diversities that are to be found amongst Pasifika as learners within the New Zealand education system (Coxon, Anae, Mara, Samu & Finau, 2001; Samu, 1998).

In Figure 1, the two circles represent the different 'worlds', or sets of cultural capital, meeting within the context of the four sectors of formal schooling: Early-childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary. The size of each circle is representative of the broader power relations between the two worlds. These relations are reproduced in schooling in various ways and to varying degrees. This is a relationship that must be recognised if educators are genuinely driven by the desire for equity.

Figure 1. The Ethnic Interface Model



The pyramid at the ‘interface’ of the two worlds not only represents levels of formal schooling but it is also a reminder that specific structures and processes of each level of schooling and the individual characteristics of the provider are also variables that must be taken into account in any evaluation of the academic progress of Pasifika students in these contexts.

The cultural capital of individual Pasifika students will be shaped by a number of factors that the school/learning institution has no influence over. Students’ responses to different aspects of schooling will reflect, for example, their world views. Their individual world views are influenced by their gender, cross-generational relationships, socio-economic status, whether they were born and raised in this country or are recent migrants, and even their specific religious background and level of personal activity or engagement with it. These factors will have varying degrees of significance for individual students at the interface.

Individual schools and institutions determine the organisational structures and processes within their contexts such as: the pedagogical practices teachers decide to use; the nature of the co-curricular activities they encourage and support; assessment and evaluation processes; and the school-based curricula. Many schools and early childhood centres actively seek and promote meaningful partnerships with their parents/caregivers. However, it can be argued that these more professional structures and processes are part of the core business of schools and the fundamental terms of engagement are set by the school and its teachers and/or leadership. Parents and students have very limited influence in these areas.

There is a final point of clarification regarding this framework. If viewed via a deficit perspective, one could be searching for the cause of the problem of Pasifika learner underachievement or failure in the learner’s specific Pacific cultural background, social and economic circumstances, the specific church related activities the child and his/her family are involved with, the level of English competency, and so on. Key assumptions underlying this framework are that the teachers and educators that use it:

- ... recognise the critical connection between culture and schooling ... (Hernandez Sheets, 2005, p. 3);
- Have a strong sense of social responsibility, and commitment to developing their self-awareness as cultural, social and political beings (Samu, 2004); and
- Are aware of the dynamics of power and privilege. Delpit describes this as understanding ... that power plays a critical role in our society and in our educational system. The world views of those with privileged positions are taken as the only reality, while the world views of those less powerful are dismissed as inconsequential (Delpit, 1995, p. xv).

The Ethnic Interface Model can be used by educators to examine educational issues and concerns for specific groups of students, at specific sites. Even more important, it can be used to ‘unpack’ the variables that have the most influence for particular students. The following vignette² attempts to demonstrate this.

A health education session for Year 11 students (i.e., students in their third year of secondary schooling) is about to begin at a co-

educational, central city high school. The topic is sexuality. After students are seated in the hall, and the sessions begin, a small group of Pasifika boys quickly leave the hall before any of the teachers can stop them. When one of the teachers catches up with the group outside, and demands to know what is going on, one of the boys says rather desperately, "Sir, we can't be in there, our cousins are in there too".

What was involved in this situation? The boys (gender) were Tongan, from very traditional Tongan (culture) families. Brothers and sisters have a special relationship within a traditional Tongan world view – one with strict rules of respect regarding the ways they are to speak to each other, behave around each other, and even standards of dress when in each others' presence. Being in the same room during a discussion about puberty and sexuality (adolescence) is not appropriate. And, with Tongan families, the brother-sister relationship can extend to cousins. The children of your parents' brothers and sisters are your brothers and sisters.

The boys' perspective of the problem (avoiding a cultural taboo) was not the same from the teachers' perspective (students who appeared to be wilfully avoiding a required learning experience and challenging teacher authority). If the teachers had disregarded what the boys said (because they lacked an appreciation that a different cultural way of being was at the heart of the situation), and had ordered them back into the hall, a far more confrontational situation would have ensued. If teachers at this school had been more aware of the cultural expectations that these particular boys adhered to, the special session or class could have been organised in a different way, and the required learning experience would not have been disrupted.

TEACHING THAT IS RESPONSIVE TO PASIFIKA DIVERSITIES

Quality teaching for Pasifika learners cannot be based on the assumption that there exists a specific pedagogical approach or set of strategies that best suits them. Critical questions that I would raise in order to challenge such assumptions are:

- How can there be a Pacific pedagogy in the context of New Zealand schools when Pasifika people are so diverse?
- How can there be a Pacific pedagogy in the context of the New Zealand education system when there are such different ways of being Pasifika and when some more recent forms of Pasifika identity do not require competency or fluency in a specific Pacific language³ or culture?
- How can there be a Pacific pedagogy in the context of the New Zealand school system when individual schools are unique micro-contexts of their own with their own cultures?
- How can there be a Pacific pedagogy in New Zealand schools when, in many instances, Pasifika students do not dominate the class or school composition in terms of numbers?

I do not believe that the development of a Pacific pedagogy as such, or a straightforward evidence-based prescription for quality teaching of Pasifika learners in this country, is possible. However, I am of the view that what can be developed for teachers of Pacific students in New Zealand classrooms is a framework of principles to guide their efforts to develop specific and relevant teaching and learning environments for their specific Pacific students.

One of the main contentions of this paper is that the first principle is the development of teachers' understandings. According to Coxon et al. (2001):

Educators must take a more pro-active role in becoming aware and informed of Pasifika diversities, and acknowledge the cultural bias inherent within the structures of New Zealand's education system. Having done so, such educators would creatively consider their own practices in terms of how to bridge the quite complex cultural and social gaps, or mismatches that exist. (p. 5)

Teachers and their Pasifika students interact at the interface of two culturally embedded, yet quite different, worlds; the formal education system (specifically, of the classroom and the school) and the world of the individual learner. The most immediate determinant of student success or failure in school depends on the interactions of teachers and learners at that interface between two culturally embedded worlds – worlds that reflect the unequal, imbalanced power relations of wider society.

According to American educator Cummins (2003), the most immediate determinant of student success or failure in school depends on the interactions of educators and students, or teachers and learners. Cummins (2003) suggests that these interactions can be examined in two ways: "... firstly by focusing on the teaching and learning relationship from a narrow perspective (ie examining the strategies and techniques that teachers are using), or alternatively focusing on what he calls 'identity negotiation'" (p. 51).

Identity negotiation is about the messages that are communicated to students about what they are capable of becoming in the teacher's eyes. The central idea of this perspective is that "... the ways that identities are negotiated between educators and students is at least as fundamental in determining student achievement as any of the myriad techniques for teaching" (Cummins, 2003, p. 51).

In considering Pasifika learners in New Zealand schools, I accept Cummins' (2003) argument for the need to "... reconstruct our curricula and teaching methods in light of a richer image of the child" and relate that to the New Zealand context. Teachers need in-depth understandings of the specific diversities of their specific Pasifika learners in order to construct contexts where "culture, language, intellect and imagination are a part of the discourse of their 'image of the [Pasifika] child'" (p. 51, adapted). Amongst Pasifika learners are unique, contextualised Pasifika ways of knowing and relating to the world. What is needed is tailor-made, contextualised teaching.

In New Zealand, there is a growing research-informed knowledge base about what is required for the quality teaching of diverse learners. The Ministry of Education's Best Evidence Synthesis (BES), *Quality Teaching for Diverse Students*

in *Schooling* (2003), persuasively argues that effective teaching is contextualised, and that this must also include the socio-cultural context of learners. Effective teaching involves the creation of learning communities that are based on caring, inclusive and cohesive relationships. The onus would appear to be on teachers actively developing richer images of their Pasifika students, and creating learning communities that are meaningful to Pasifika students.

I acknowledge that this paper has not provided much in the way of specific research evidence to connect teachers' efforts to know and understand their specific Pacific students, and their pedagogical responses, let alone how such connections resulted in positive changes to Pasifika academic achievement (i.e., quality, effective teaching). Māori educational research provides invaluable support for this through landmark studies and subsequent professional development programmes such as Te Kotahitanga Project (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai & Richardson, 2003). One must be cautious, however, and avoid assuming that this research will be relevant and apply to Pasifika learners in New Zealand. However, intensive work is being conducted in 2006 and beyond within Ministry of Education research projects that are focusing on Pasifika learners, their perspectives or voices (such as *The Experiences of Pasifika Students in the Classroom* project contracted to New Zealand Council for Educational Research) and exploring what constitutes effective teaching in specific curriculum areas for Māori and Pasifika learners (*Quality Teaching and Learning Development Project*). As we continue to theorise and reflect on teaching that is responsive to Pasifika learners we can be assured that the evidence-based research that is needed to inform this process will be available to enrich, stimulate and challenge our efforts as teachers and educators to support Pasifika learners more effectively.

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¹ Entitled 'From Dusky to Dawn: Dusky Maidens to Dawn Raids'.

² Hernandez Sheets (2005, p. xxii) describes the purpose of constructing and including vignettes in her book for pre-service teachers, *Diversity Pedagogy: Examining the Role of Culture in the Teaching-Learning Process* as being to "... demonstrate theoretical positions ... to invite dialogue and focus on specific [pedagogical] elements based on current literature on how teachers and students learn". The rationale for inclusion and use of vignette in this paper is the same.

³ Please note that I am not downplaying the importance and value of Pacific heritage languages. The reality, however, is that some Pasifika learners have quite strong culturally based identities which provide them with a sense of place and belonging in their social worlds (of school, family and peer community) – these important anchoring ways of being, at that particular point in their lives, do not involve fluency in heritage language.