

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**FACTORS FACILITATING THE ENGAGEMENT
IN LEARNING OF PĀSIFIKA STUDENTS AT
INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL LEVEL**

ALET VAN VUUREN

2016

**FACTORS FACILITATING THE ENGAGEMENT
IN LEARNING OF PĀSIFIKA STUDENTS AT
INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL LEVEL**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN EDUCATION

at

Massey University
Albany Campus
Auckland, New Zealand

ALET VAN VUUREN

2016

Copyright resides with the Author of this thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purposes of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the author.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the engagement in learning of Pāsifika students at intermediate school level. Engagement was considered as a multi-layered, multidimensional construct, which is best viewed through an ecological, culturally based lens. The importance of teacher knowledge and understanding of critical cultural components, which are at the core of Pāsifika peoples' values and belief systems, was highlighted.

A case study was used to investigate behavioural and emotional engagement across three different ecological layers: personal, school and wider community. Participant interviews, surveys, whole class observations, and data from the school's database illustrated the significance of shifting understandings of engagement from being uni-dimensional and within-person, to multidimensional and within communities of learning.

The results of the study generated a 'Feeding the Roots' Model of Pasifika Student Engagement. This model illustrates how 'static' as opposed to 'cyclic' processes in a school's ecology can act as barriers or enablers to engagement. 'Static' processes, identify barriers to engagement in learning, and are those communities where there is limited understanding of the value of incorporating critical cultural factors in teaching, learning and interacting with parents. In this context, Pāsifika students' achieved lower levels of engagement in learning, and parents remained on the periphery of the school community. In contrast, 'cyclic' processes that facilitated engagement were environments where students and parents were included in collaborative, reciprocal communities in which critical cultural factors were a central focus. These communities were representative of teaching practices that valued collectivism, community, and reciprocity and generated higher student and parent engagement.

The findings provide insights into the actions teachers can take to develop culturally appropriate and culturally responsive communities of learning. The 'Feeding the Roots' Model of Pasifika Student Engagement is an assessment and reflection tool teachers can use to determine whether their practices are creating higher levels of Pāsifika engagement at student, parent and school levels.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and guidance of significant people in my life. This journey has been living a promise I made to God when I lost someone who was very dear to me. Losing someone created the desire to contribute to young lives beyond the teaching position I held at the time. Therefore, all praise to Him, my spiritual strength, who has since kept me to His promise in the words of Isaiah 41:10.

I am indebted to my supervisors Associate Professor Mandia Mentis and Associate Professor Bobbie Hunter (and for the first two years also Dr. Jean Annan). Thank you for sharing your knowledge, expertise, wisdom, and experiences with me, and for showing patience, compassion and understanding. Every step we took together was inspirational and thought provoking, which was just what I needed to push my own thinking beyond the normal parameters. I have learnt so much and have gained so much on so many levels. Thank you for believing in what this study will contribute – above all, for believing in me.

Thank you to the Pāsifika Reference Group. Your willingness to walk alongside me throughout this journey have been reassuring and inspirational, and your cultural expertise, invaluable. A special word of appreciation to Rose Mose, for her words of cultural wisdom and encouragement.

Thank you to all the participants: Pāsifika students, their parents, principal, staff, and RTLB. Also, the Board of Trustees who gave permission for this study to be conducted at Pācific Intermediate School. I sincerely hope the future contributions of this study will do your expectations justice.

Thank you to my family, friends and work colleagues who have endured my constant jabbering about my studies. Your continued interest, support, and ongoing provision of coffee, lunch, baking, special treats, gifts, and cards provided emotional support that overshadowed every lonely, isolated, difficult moment. Undertaking and completing this doctorate had been one of the most amazing accomplishments I could ever imagine; I am entirely filled with gratitude. For me, education is the door to the soul, the key to a changed heart and a powerful factor in creating philosophies that can challenge, divide and unite while engaged in the absolute pleasure of sharing. In conclusion, I would like to share the following by Nelson Mandela:

Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, and that a child of farmworkers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Appendices	ix
List of Figures	x
List of Tables	xi
Glossary	xii
Researcher's background	xiii
 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	 Page
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Rationale for study	4
1.3 Focus of this study	6
1.4 Significance of the current study	7
1.5 Research Questions	8
1.6 Overview of thesis	8
 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 Global definitions of engagement	13
2.2.1 Shift: uni-dimensional to multi-dimensional definitions of Engagement	15
2.2.2 Introducing global definitions of engagement in the Pāsifika Context	19
2.2.3 Pāsifika disengagement factors	22
2.3 Ecological focus: The three dimensions of engagement that involve Pāsifika students	28
2.3.1 Pāsifika values and identity applied ecologically	28
2.3.1.1 Teacher, student and parent perceptions of Engagement	29
2.3.1.2 The role of teachers and Pāsifika identity	34

	Page
2.3.1.3 The role of culturally appropriate education policies and teaching practices	36
2.3.1.4 The role of teachers in student disengagement	40
2.3.1.5 The role of teachers in creating relationships with parents	41
2.3.2 The wider community	42
2.3.2.1 The Ministry of Education	42
2.4 Theoretical framework	49
2.4.1 Pāsifika Tree of Opportunity	49
2.5 Summary	51

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY (FA'AFALLETUI)

3.1 Introduction	54
3.2 Research Question and Sub-questions	55
3.3 Significance and focus of the current study	56
3.4 The Pāsifika Tree of Opportunity, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and a Case Study Approach	57
3.4.1 Pāsifika Tree of Opportunity metaphor	57
3.4.2 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological theory	58
3.4.3 A Case Study Approach	61
3.4.4 Intergration of Bonfenbrenner's systems theory, the Pāsifika Tree of Opportunity and the case study approach	62
3.5 Research Methodology	63
3.5.1 Case study informed by Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach and the Pāsifika Tree of Opportunity	63
3.5.2 Epistemology	65
3.6 Preliminary stages: setting up the study	66
3.7 Research method	67
3.7.1 Planning and consultation	69
3.7.2 Negotiation	69
3.7.3 Recruitment, consent for participation and ethical issues	71

	Page
3.8 Participant demographics	73
3.8.1 Participants	73
3.8.2 Students	74
3.8.3 Teachers	75
3.9 Data collection methods	76
3.9.1 Sources of data collection	76
3.10 Ethical consideration	90
3.10.1 Steps taken to discuss and analyse the ethical issues arising in this study	91
3.10.2 Informed consent	91
3.10.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality	92
3.11 Permission for use of images	93
3.12 Reflection and exit from the school	93
3.13 Data analysis	96
3.14 Data presentation	99
3.15 Validity, reliability, trustworthiness, generalisability and transferability	100
3.16 Summary	103

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE: PERCEPTIONS OF ENGAGEMENT FACTORS

4.1 Introduction	104
4.2 Proximal factors of student engagement	108
4.2.1 Teacher related factors	108
4.2.2 Factors within the classroom	109
4.2.3 Knowledge of Pāsifika student diversity	110
4.2.4 Relational factors	114
4.2.5 Student attendance	118
4.3 Distal engagement factors	118
4.3.1 The wider school environment	119

	Page
4.3.2 National Curriculum and Pāsifika Education Plan	124
4.3.3 Factors within the wider community	133
4.4 Summary	139

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS, RESEARCH QUESTION TWO: TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICES

5.1 Introduction	140
5.2 Classroom management	142
5.2.1 Teaching and learning practices	144
5.2.2 Structure, routine, expectations	154
5.2.3 Culture of classroom	159
5.2.4 Perceptions of trust and respect	170
5.2.5 Student behaviour	173
5.3 Summary	177

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION RESEARCH QUESTION THREE: MULTIDIMENSIONAL, ECOLOGICAL FACTORS OF ENGAGEMENT

6.1 Introduction	179
6.2 Revisiting ‘engagement’	180
6.3 An Ecological and Pāsifika framework of analysis	183
6.4 First ecological layer: Perceptions of engagement	183
6.4.1 Creating equal opportunities through cultural understanding	184
6.4.2 Continuum of cultural awareness	186
6.5 Teaching and learning practices	188
6.6 Institutional factors	206
6.7 Multidimensional, socio-cultural, ecological factors	214
6.8 Summary	222

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS	Page
7.1 Introduction	224
7.2 Contributions of this study	228
7.2.1 'Feeding the Roots' Model of Pāsifika Student Engagement	228
7.3 Recommendations for future research studies	234
7.4 Limitations	235
7.5 Conclusion	237
REFERENCE LIST	239

LIST OF APPENDICES

	Page
Appendix 1: Approval Letter MUHEC	254
Appendix 2: Board of Trustees and principal information sheet and consent form	255
Appendix 3: Parent information sheet and consent form	259
Appendix 4: Non-participant parent information sheet and consent form	263
Appendix 5: Parent information sheet and consent form (Samoan)	267
Appendix 6: Non-Pāsifika student information sheet and consent form	270
Appendix 7: Pāsifika student information sheet and consent form	272
Appendix 8: Teacher information sheet and consent form	274
Appendix 9: Teacher aide information sheet and consent form	278
Appendix 10: RTLB information sheet and consent form	282
Appendix 11: Whole Class Observation Checklist	286
Appendix 12: Categories of on-task and off-task behavior	292
Appendix 13: Student interview schedule	294
Appendix 14: Confidentiality Agreement	297
Appendix 15: Teacher interview schedule	298
Appendix 16: Teacher aide interview schedule	299
Appendix 17: Parent interview schedule	300
Appendix 18: Principal interview schedule	301
Appendix 19: RTLB interview schedule	302

Appendix 20:	Parent survey	303
Appendix 21:	Student survey	305
Appendix 22:	Teacher survey	308
Appendix 23:	Teacher Aide survey	312
Appendix 24:	Permission from Dartwood Museum in Queensland (images)	315
Appendix 25:	Student Absences	316
Appendix 26:	Food at school	318
Appendix 27:	Summary of survey results	320
Appendix 28:	Observation results: summary of classroom management and teaching practices	329

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Progress against targets (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 2)	45
Figure 2: Compass for Success (Pāsifika Education Plan, 2009, p. 5)	48
Figure 3: Tree of Opportunity. Adapted from: “Tree of Opportunity: re-thinking Pacific education”, (2002), (p. 3), Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific Institute of Education.	50
Figure 3.a: Tree of Opportunity. Adapted from: “Tree of Opportunity: re- thinking Pacific education”, (2002), (p. 3), Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific Institute of Education	58
Figure 4: Bronfenbrenner’s ecological approach	60
Figure 5: Research method	68
Figure 6: Total number of participants	74
Figure 7: Adapted Observation / Reflection Cycle (Robinson, 2002)	81
Figure 8: Integrated approach and areas of focus	95
Figure 9: Steps in analysis of research data	98
Figure 10: Student perceptions about what they liked least and most about school	120
Figure 11: Writing results from school’s database: comparison across gender and school year level	126

Figure 12:	Reading results from school's database: comparison across gender and school year	127
Figure 13:	Mathematics results from school's database: comparison across gender and school year	128
Figure 14:	End of the year results from school's database: comparison across other ethnicities	129
Figure 15:	Feeding the Roots Model of Pāsifika Student Engagement: Barriers	218
Figure 16:	Feeding the Roots Model of Pāsifika Student Engagement: Enablers	221
Figure 17:	'Feeding the Roots' Model of Pāsifika Student Engagement	227

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:	Student respondent demographics	74
Table 2:	Teacher respondent demographics	75
Table 3:	Frequency distribution of whole class observations	77
Table 4:	Respondent participation rates for interviews: comparative results	84
Table 5:	Return rates: surveys	89
Table 6:	Example of coding and patterns emerging	97
Table 7:	Mapping the alignment between research question and data gathering tools (RQ 1)	105
Table 8:	Teacher information and summary of observation results	107
Table 9:	Interview results: randomly selected focus group on student-parent discussions	116
Table 10:	School database: categories of support to Pāsifika students	125
Table 11:	Mapping the alignment between research question two and data gathering tools (RQ 2)	141
Table 12:	Observation results: Summary of Classroom Management and Teaching Practices	143
Table 13:	Interview results: randomly selected focus group on student perceptions of teacher expectations	159
Table 14:	Survey results: student responses to supportive school	160

GLOSSARY

According to Coxon, Anane, Mara, Wendt-Samu and Finau (2002) and Pratt (1984), the following are accurate translations of words or phrases used in this research study:

Fono	meeting or meet
fa’afaletu	drawing together a range of perspectives
Meaalofa	Gift
Pāsifika	<p>“Pācific peoples are both local and global, genealogically, spiritually and culturally connected to the lands, the skies and seas of the Pācific region” (Tofamamao Working Party, 2007).</p> <p>Pāsifika communities are represented by “Samoan, Cook Island, Tongan, Niuean, Fijian and Tokelauan” (Liuvaie, 2008, p. 6). For the purposes of this study, the different Pāsifika communities are represented as: Samoan, Fijian, Tongan, Cook Island-Māori, Niuean.</p>
Teacher-directed	Teacher directed instruction to the whole class
Student-directed	Students engage in set task activities

RESEARCHER'S BACKGROUND

My interest in the engagement of Pāsifika students at intermediate age has developed over a number of years from both personal and professional experiences.

I have built up a wealth of multi-cultural knowledge and experience across many life experiences. This has its roots in my experiences of cultural acceptance when as a young child living in rural South Africa I was gifted the name “Moya”, meaning “child of the wind” from the Sesotho workers on the farm where I lived. My professional career enabled me to have similar multi-cultural experiences, including teaching in South Africa and Taiwan, and becoming a teacher representative to help support government policy developments after the 1994 elections in South Africa.

As a New Zealand trained and registered Educational Psychologist, I have done extensive work with Pāsifika students in schools, while working alongside their families and teachers. Reasons for student engagement challenges at classroom level have always intrigued me. Reading the literature and discussing with teachers and Pāsifika colleagues, further ignited my passion for working with Pāsifika. Over the years these wide-ranging cultural experiences have created an extensive professional network based on relationships of mutual trust and respect. The research topic was located within this context.