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***‘O mātou ‘o le fatu ‘o le fa‘amoemoe –
fesili mai!***

We are the heart of the matter - ask us!

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Lynda Knight-de Blois

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Abstract

This study explored the perspectives of junior secondary school students of Pacific heritage and asked them what enhanced their learning. A qualitative, interpretive framework was used for this multi-site case study and grounded theory was used to analyse data. Three groups of Year 9 and 10 students from three North Island city schools, representing a range of Pacific nations, socio-economic areas and genders, participated in focus group interviews and questionnaires. Pacific concepts, values and research methodologies were explored and integrated into both the research process and discussion of the findings. An innovative approach was trialled which involved “insider” research assistants facilitating the focus group interviews: four Samoan teenagers worked with the researcher to draw out the opinions and ideas of the participants about what helped them to learn. Data analysis led to the identification of ten pedagogical attributes and strategies. The voices of the participants in this study echo the findings of earlier New Zealand research, which demonstrate that the key factor for successful Pacific learning is the strength of the relationship between teachers and learners.

Acknowledgements

Ia ō gatasi le futia ma le 'umele
Let there be unity, for in unity there is strength

The literal translation of this ancient Samoan proverb is *Bring together the sennit ring and the stand*. These words, from a fishing context, refer to the stand on which the fishing rod sits and the ring which fixes the rod to the stand. This proverb was found for me by Fanaafi Winona Hewitt who has been the cultural advisor for this thesis research. The words are applicable to this work on many levels; they are about people working together. They signify strength of relationships that are needed for Pacific students to engage, learn and succeed: the sennit ring as the teacher, the stand the learner and the rod the learning which thrives if the ring and the stand are bound firmly together. The proverb also reflects the team work that underpins this study and the collective orientation of the Pacific cultures; in contrast to the individualistic orientation of most western cultures.

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