



**RAISING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PASIFIKA STUDENTS IN
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

Key ideas and proposed actions from fonos held in Wellington and Auckland during 2004

Introduction

The New Zealand Catholic Education Office includes in its work programme efforts to assist Catholic schools in raising the achievement levels of Pasifika students. Catholic schools have a greater proportion of Pasifika students than the wider state school sector.

In 2004 the Office sought the advice of members of the Pasifika community on useful initiatives which could be promoted by Catholic schools. The information below arose from a series of meetings instigated by NZCEO, for invited Pacific Nations parents of students in Catholic schools.

There were four meetings altogether, two fonos each in Auckland and Wellington. Some sixty or so people, mostly parents, and also some recent school leavers and some senior students, contributed their ideas. They highlighted many examples of good practice, and were hopeful that by sharing these ideas teachers and others involved in Catholic education would be enabled to work more effectively with students and their families.

This Office expresses the gratitude of the whole Catholic education community to the meeting participants, who gave their time so generously and evinced such a strong desire to help Pasifika children.

1.0 Early Childhood

- Pasifika children need good quality early childhood education. If the teachers and programmes in the aoga amata are not good enough the children would be better off in an ordinary early childhood centre.
- NZCEO could encourage the country's Bishops to encourage parishes to set up Pasifika early childhood centres where there are a significant number of Pacific people in a parish. Parishes need to know how much government money is available to assist with setting-up costs. They need to know that they can get meshblock data (demographics) from NZCEO and also a range of information to assist them to start an early childhood centre.

2.0 Communications

- Schools could identify who are the various Pacific community leaders, and, along with the catechists, seek their co-operation and communicate with them in order to get messages out to the communities, about the importance of early childhood education and about a range of other matters to do with schooling.

- Catechists could be asked to speak about education issues regularly during Church gatherings. Many of the issues identified in this paper could be raised during Church services. (NB Get the message to the priest as well - he could be encouraged to publicly state his support for what the catechist is saying.)
- The various Pacific communities could identify their best speakers or communicators and use them to lead groups communicating with the school, rather than automatically using community leaders, who may not necessarily be so comfortable in English.
- If parents feel that they can come into the school as they are, and be welcomed as they are, then the school will get their support, skills and co-operation.. Schools need to seek advice and work out what will make Pasifika parents feel at ease in the school environment – and to devote enough time to meeting with parents.

3.0 Leadership

- Schools could identify and train Pacific youth to take on roles of responsibility at school, expressly linking this to taking on roles of responsibility in the community. Mentoring of younger students by older ones could also be considered.
- The Bishop could appoint more Pasifika people as Proprietors' appointees on Boards of Trustees – there are not nearly enough at present.

4.0 Quality Learning, and Learning for Diversity in the Classroom

- Students could be asked what they think about their experience at school – enable them to discuss problems and solutions away from the school staff, and then feed back the information later. Teachers need to hear that Pasifika students feel that some teachers show prejudice against them - that these teachers don't seem to want to build up relationships with them, or to find out how the various Pacific cultures and mindsets function. Many teachers need to be more sympathetic to, and understanding of, Pasifika students, and show that they believe in them and their ability to succeed. If this is done teachers will be more effective in their work.
- Primary and secondary Catholic schools could work in clusters and groups to identify ways to improve students' success, and to feed information upwards (from primary to secondary) and downwards (from secondary to primary). An active collaborative relationship will bring benefits to both.
- Parents from the Catholic schools in an area (primary and secondary) could come together to talk about how to achieve educational success for their children. Teachers could be invited to listen to these groups, and to communicate with them.
- The message needs to be got out to teachers, parents and students that it's not a failure not to go to university. Trade Certificates, work experience, role models and mentors from industries coming into schools to speak at assemblies are ways that this could be done. Yr 12 and 13 students could gain NZQA credits that match their interests and talents.

5.0 Mentoring

- Mentors are a great way to engender success. For example, successful school graduates or parents of successful ex-students, could engage with the students to assist them with their education and life skills. They could meet separately with the parents, to coach them in how to support their children's education and general upbringing (explaining practical things like turning off the TV at 10pm, getting to bed early, getting enough sleep).
- It needs to be recognised that Pasifika parents find bringing up their children harder now, and so they would welcome help to adapt their child raising techniques to the new situation they find themselves in. Practical guidelines from principals and teachers would be welcome.
- Mentoring schemes could be developed for the middle achievers (who might, if pushed, get a Merit rather than just Achieve). Parents could be invited into the school (more than once) to tell them how they can support their children, so that they can achieve Merit.
- A former student could be employed as a mentor for Yr 9 and 10 students, where there is much slippage in student achievement. The role could include going into homes and doing IEPs with parents in the homes.
- Parents with no education or jobs could be mentored in parenting skills, and assisted to feel confident about being involved in their children's education.
- Older learners (second chance learners) could be encouraged to become mentors.

6.0 Parent Involvement

- Pasifika parents could be invited to become teacher aides and to work in homework centres.
- Parents could be encouraged to work in groups to get the most effective communicators elected or appointed onto Boards of Trustees.
- Pasifika parents could be specifically engaged to promote understanding of what the Board of Trustees is, what the school charter is, and its importance. Parents could be encouraged to ask the school what is in the charter and they can be involved in charter planning discussion to help meet their children's needs.
- Charters and school plans could be translated into the parents' languages (including an explanation about charters) – Boards have a responsibility to communicate the charter to all parents.
- Pasifika parents could be encouraged to ask principals and teachers in primary schools how they are dealing with literacy and ensuring all children can read and write well enough before they leave primary school.

7.0 Language as Power

- English is the language of power in tertiary study, careers and policy making: schools need to teach students to speak, read and write really well in English, stressing formal academic language and grammar structures.
- The language of the home is the language of power in the culture: it is probably best taught at home and its importance stressed within the home and cultural context. Children need to be successfully bi-lingual and are more likely to become so if parents have a clear understanding of the ways they can support both languages.
- It is important that children experience a wide range of language use at home, and parents need to recognise that to be successful in the palagi culture children need experience in speaking freely and debating opinions at home, about a wide range of issues. This way they will learn appropriate vocabulary, and will learn to speak out as leaders.
- Parents need to know that reading at home, and having books for young people to read at home, is vital for education success. Parents also need to understand that children need to be read to regularly from the time they are a year old, and need to have time set aside for them to read each day as they grow older. They also need to see parents modelling reading.
- Schools and community leaders both have roles in spreading these ideas to parents.