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**Factors of engagement: Secondary Pasifika student learning**

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# FACTORS OF ENGAGEMENT: SECONDARY PASIFIKA STUDENT LEARNING

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## Abstract

*Education within Aotearoa has not effectively engaged Pasifika students (Ministry of Education, 2023a), and has led to Pasifika students being less likely to continue to tertiary level education (Ministry of Education, 2023b). This review focuses on the published literature about factors that improve the conditions of schooling in Aotearoa to facilitate higher levels of engagement in Pasifika students. For this paper, 20 studies that were carried out in Aotearoa secondary schools with Pasifika students were collected. These studies were then analysed to understand what factors increased their engagement in secondary school. The findings suggest that student-teacher relationships, teachers' perceptions of Pasifika students, and effective implementation of culturally responsive pedagogies have the greatest impact on Pasifika student engagement in their secondary school career.*

## Keywords

Pasifika; engagement; secondary education

## Introduction

This review focuses on the published literature about factors that improve the environment of schools in Aotearoa<sup>i</sup> to better align with Pasifika students' needs in their secondary education. Student engagement is a topic that is popular in education research at the moment, as teachers are interested in knowing how they can create higher levels of engagement in their classrooms (Trowler, 2010). However, Pasifika students' engagement in their secondary school education has been chronically lower than other ethnic groups within Aotearoa for many years, akin to the engagement of Māori students within Aotearoa (Ministry of Education, 2023a).

Over the last few decades, The Ministry of Education (2021) has published policy documents and research papers to equip their majority Palagi<sup>ii</sup> teacher workforce with tools to connect with and teach Pasifika students effectively, such as Tapasā in 2018. However, many teachers do not have the time to deeply engage with these documents due to the workforce being underfunded, overworked, and stressed (Secondary Principals' Council of Aotearoa, 2021). Reading a policy document, or a framework such as Tapasā (2018), is only the beginning of understanding Pasifika students. As most teachers within Aotearoa do not have ancestral connections to the Pacific Islands (Ministry of Education, 2021), there is potential that many teachers have not had an opportunity to connect with Pasifika cultures outside of reading policy documents. Therefore, in Aotearoa, we have a teaching workforce that does not deeply understand what it means to be a teacher of specifically Pasifika students (Averill & Rimoni, 2019).

As a researcher I wanted to focus on strategies that create inclusive learning environments for Pasifika students in their schooling, focusing on teacher-based solutions as opposed to focusing on a pervasive false narrative that the problem lies with Pasifika students. From this a question was formed: what are the main factors that increase Pasifika student engagement in secondary schooling?

## **The term Pasifika**

“Pasifika” is an umbrella term that includes people who live in Aotearoa but have ancestral ties to the islands in the Pacific Ocean, including Tonga, Sāmoa, Cook Islands, Tokelau, Tuvalu, and other smaller

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Pacific nations (Tanielu & Johnson, 2013). The umbrella term of “Pasifika” does not mean that these Pacific island nations are one homogeneous group. It does, however, link the idea that these nations hold outlooks on their worldview, similar *kaunohoga* (family) values, and ideas around education. Within the term “Pasifika student” there is a variation of experience, as some of these students will have been born in their respective ancestral homes, while others within this category may be the second or third generation in their family to have been born in Aotearoa. In Aotearoa, the term “Pasifika” is used throughout most published studies and will therefore be the term I use. A note: throughout this literature review I will be using the term “Palagi” to refer to White people who are not of Pasifika descent. A similar term is the Māori “Pākehā”.

I am a Palagi/Rotuman/Ngāti Hauā (Taumarunui)/Ngāti Maniapoto woman who was born in Aotearoa, grew up partially in Australia, and moved back to Aotearoa when I was nine. I am connected with all aspects of my ethnic heritage and so I have had the unique opportunity to experience education in Aotearoa from a multidimensional perspective. After I finished my undergraduate degree in music, I taught tertiary music classes where my Palagi students and my Pasifika students engaged in different aspects of what I was presenting, or became more interested when I taught using different pedagogical strategies. It was then that I began to realise that I had to work to bring all sides of myself together to create an environment where all of my students could invest their attention and engage in the content. My nana, who is Pasifika through her Rotuman ancestry and culture, has been an educator for almost 60 years in both Fiji and Aotearoa. She has always had a goal to connect to her Pasifika students particularly, and I grew up hearing her stories of effective and engaging Pasifika teaching.

### **Defining student engagement**

Student engagement has been studied extensively worldwide since the term came to prominence in the 1980s (Christenson et al., 2012). The most common definitions of student engagement include the following indicators. According to Christenson et.al (2012), an engaged student will

- attend school until completion of their high school qualification
- perform well academically
- be enthusiastic about learning, and show resilience when it comes to learning new concepts
- be socially involved within the school community.

According to the Ministry of Education (2023a) in Aotearoa, there are three main indicators of student engagement at a national level. First, there is the retention percentage. This is where you are able to see what percentage of students stayed at school until the age of 17, indicating how many students most likely completed high school. The second indicator of student engagement is measured by the number of students who have been stood-down, suspended, or excluded from the school. Thirdly, we are able to see attendance rates. High attendance rates indicate higher rates of engagement, and vice versa. Student engagement is affected by many different factors (Zepke & Leach, 2010). Teaching styles, student disposition, positive student-teacher relationships, family support and other factors contribute to how engaged a student will be in their education (Zepke & Leach, 2010).

In this literature review, student engagement is identified by attendance, participation, and enthusiasm. This review takes in good faith that the interpretations of student engagement in the included research is accurate and that engagement was measured fairly.

### **Why is student engagement important?**

Higher levels of student engagement have been shown to improve student outcomes academically, emotionally, and socially (Zepke et al., 2010). Engagement empowers students to take control of their own learning (Christiansen et al., 2012), learn social skills, and enjoy the beginning of their academic

careers. Higher levels of student engagement leads to more students attending tertiary institutions (Zepke & Leach, 2010), and fuels higher levels of self-belief and motivation (Sanders & Boyte, 2020).

### ***Why is engagement important specifically for Pasifika students?***

The history of Pasifika immigrants in Aotearoa has been marred with systemic racism and prejudice (Tanielu & Johnson, 2013), and we are able to see the flow of effects from this in our present-day education system. On a national level, Pasifika students have higher rates of stand-downs, suspensions, and exclusions than most other ethnic groups (Ministry of Education, 2023a). Pasifika students also have lower rates of retention and “chronic” absence levels in comparison with other ethnic groups (Ministry of Education, 2023a). The effectiveness of the education of Pasifika students in Aotearoa has demonstrated to be lacking, as shown by the lower numbers of Pasifika students staying past the age of 17 (Ministry of Education, 2022). State schooling in Aotearoa is taught predominantly in the English language and this can create a barrier for some Pasifika students (Siope, 2011). Some Pasifika students are second or third-generation Aotearoa-born and therefore are more likely to have English as their first language. However, many Pasifika students have English as their second language, and some have limited fluency with English as they begin their education in English-medium schools. Historically, mainstream state schools have not worked hard enough to include these Pasifika students in their programmes, leading to Pasifika students’ disengagement (Spiller, 2012; Sanders & Boyte, 2020; Averill et al., 2021).

### ***Methods***

This research idea came out of an interest to understand my classroom experiences with my Pasifika and Palagi students, and an early draft of the review was initially written for my Master of Teaching and Learning qualification. The main phrases used in database searches were “Pasifika student engagement”, “Pasifika secondary school”, “Pasifika student voice”, “Pasifika engagement”, “Pasifika secondary education engagement”. Once relevant literature had been identified, I also looked through the references on these studies to inform my understanding of what had already been published, and what could be further utilised.

### ***Inclusion and exclusion criteria***

I began reading internationally-based research, and then narrowed my focus to studies conducted in Aotearoa, as Pasifika is a term that is mainly used only within Aotearoa (Ministry of Education, 2018). I found that many of the relevant studies have titles that are a direct quote from student voice rather than including keywords (Siope, 2011; Spiller, 2012; Reynolds, 2018a). This meant that my inclusion criteria for a piece of literature could not solely be based on the title. Therefore, in order to be included in the analysis, the study must have had “Pasifika” in the title, keywords, or abstract. Then that study must have had some reference to “engagement” in either the title, keywords, abstract, or in the body of the study. These inclusion criteria were specific yet flexible enough to form the foundation for a comprehensive piece of work. These studies had to be peer-reviewed articles, or published books in order for them to be included in the literature review.

I then decided to focus on recent literature published from 2010 onwards. Around 2010 there was a shift in the terminology of Pasifika student literature that headed towards a streamlined way of spelling “Pasifika”, and there began to be policy documents released by the Ministry of Education that did not amalgamate Māori and Pasifika together (Ministry of Education, 2018). This made it easier to identify relevant literature. From 2011 there has also been an increase in the frequency of published studies on Pasifika student education, in comparison to pre-2011. For example, in a University of Waikato library search there were 388 results pre-2011, and 1424 results post-2011. As this literature review is specifically to do with secondary education, any study that was about early childhood education (birth to four years), or primary education (five to eleven years old) was automatically excluded from the data.

I focused on literature that revolved around three main themes. Pasifika student engagement studies within secondary schools that were from the perspectives of Pasifika students that utilised student voice, teachers' and senior leaderships' impact on Pasifika engagement, and specific pedagogical ideas that were found to be beneficial or engaging for Pasifika students.

### **Pasifika student voice on engagement**

This section is particularly focusing on studies that have collected Pasifika student voice. Some of these studies have analysed and categorised the students' opinions, and other studies have quoted specific students and analysed their points. Throughout the literature reviewed, students talked about two main themes that centred around relationships: student-teacher relationships and family relationships. In this section of the literature review, there is a focus on how these relationships impact student engagement.

#### ***Student-teacher relationships***

Positive student-teacher relationships are a core part of fostering high student engagement (Zepke & Leach, 2010). Pasifika students want to feel connected to and understood by their teachers (Siope, 2011). When students feel disconnected from their teachers, they also correlate that with a disconnection from their education (Zepke & Leach, 2010). Siope's 2011 study discussed the idea that students are able to discern and understand how their teachers feel about them. Pasifika students are especially attuned to the idea that their teachers, and other students, may have an implicit bias against them (Siope, 2011). This may lead Pasifika students to feel that they are not allowed to exist in schools within their own cultures, as who they are (Siope, 2011). Therefore, they may not engage in education the way that would best suit them, but simply learn the "rules of engagement" (Siope, 2011, p. 11) of the hegemonic education system of Aotearoa.

A study conducted by Knight-de Blois and Poskitt (2016) asked Pasifika students to contribute their voices to the discussion of their own engagement with education. The study showed that, like most adolescents, Pasifika students want varied learning experiences within one class period (not just reading and writing), but the difference is they do not feel as if they can connect with teachers, or teachers are not trying to get to know them (Knight-de Blois & Poskitt, 2016). Many Pasifika students work to stay unnoticed within the classroom (Siope, 2011). Because of this drive to be unseen, it is the role of the teacher to facilitate connection by appropriately reaching across the cultural divide. Pasifika students want teachers to be interested in their lives (Siope, 2011)—their cultures, yes, but also their own individual hopes and dreams. Positive student-teacher relationships for Pasifika specifically are a large part of why Pasifika students choose to engage with their education (Reynolds, 2018b).

#### **Family relationships**

Many (not all) Pasifika students experience different parts of their lives within silos. Three integral spaces in which Pasifika students exist are home, school, and church (Siope, 2011). Growing up in a mixed Pasifika family, this was my experience. School was for schoolwork, church was for church, and home was for spending time with family. While analysing the literature it became apparent that this is a very common experience among many Pasifika students; for example, in Siope's 2011 study, students talked about making sure their home lives and school lives do not interact, with the exception of twice-yearly reports home. However, in order to improve Pasifika students' experience in the education system, schools must actively engage with Pasifika parents (Hunter et al., 2016). Authentic and quality teacher-parent relationships are vital to increasing Pasifika student engagement in secondary school. In order to facilitate this, teachers must be culturally competent and also available to involve Pasifika parents (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2014; Hunter et al., 2016).

These connections between school and home are usually instigated by senior leadership, or individual teachers (Fairburn-Dunlop, 2014; Hunter et al., 2016). Pasifika parents that are actively involved in the education of their children are more likely to know what their child's academic marks are, how their

child is doing socially, and what their child is excelling at and/or struggling with during the school day (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2014). However, in order for Pasifika parents to be involved, they need to feel like they can form connections with their children's teachers. Respect is a major value in Pasifika communities, and many Pasifika parents respect and trust that teachers are the authority on teaching (Spiller, 2012). This thought process leads to some Pasifika parents not challenging teachers about grades or learning, as they believe that if there is a problem, then the problem lies with their own children (Spiller, 2012). This in turn can lead schools to believe that Pasifika parents are indifferent to their children's education when more likely it is the exact opposite. There is a clear need for spaces in which senior leadership, teachers, and Pasifika parents can meet together and discuss what is happening during school time (Hunter et al., 2016). Extracurricular groups or clubs that focus around Pasifika cultural traditions, such as dancing, seem to be an effective way to make authentic connections with Pasifika parents (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2014).

### **Teachers' perceptions of Pasifika students and impact on engagement**

As alluded to in the previous section on Pasifika student voice, the choices that educators make can have a large impact on Pasifika students' engagement in their own education. Teachers have the unique and privileged position of being able to speak into Pasifika students' lives and help to shape their perceptions of themselves (Siope, 2011; Spiller, 2012). If teachers inadvertently hold negative perceptions of the Pasifika culture as a whole, this can spill over into how they view and teach their Pasifika students (Spiller, 2012).

Positive student-teacher relationships are important in order for all students to feel engaged in their education (Zepke & Leach, 2010). Pasifika students are the same. However, there is a separation barrier that both Pasifika students and Palagi teachers need to break through in order to create the most engaging teaching environment possible. Certain perceptions of Pasifika people have burrowed and engrained themselves within the culture of Aotearoa through systemic barriers, whether they are acknowledged or not (Siope, 2011; Spiller, 2012). This has created a lasting impact on how people outside of Pasifika cultures see Pasifika people, but it has also shaped and moulded how Pasifika people and students believe they are perceived by outsiders (Siope, 2011).

Spiller's (2012) study provides a strong example of how a limited understanding of a culture can alter the perceptions and conclusions that teachers come to when educating their students. Spiller presents the idea that Palagi teachers' preconceived ideas of Pasifika church culture, family culture, and culture around education changes the way that teachers interact with their Pasifika students. This in turn greatly impacts the education that these students receive from their teachers. During the study, Spiller identified that these presuppositions about Pasifika students can lead to teachers avoiding calling on Pasifika students during class, teachers blaming Pasifika cultural values for hindering students' education, and lastly, omitting information from Pasifika students about the curriculum levels they were working at and assuming students were not able to work at higher levels.

Within this study, none of the ideas that teachers held were displayed in particularly overt ways (Spiller, 2012). These teachers were not necessarily conscious of the conclusions they were coming to, and therefore they were not trying to actively sabotage their Pasifika students' learning. However, this study shows that although teachers can have good intentions, a lack of cultural understanding within the education setting can impact student engagement, and therefore student outcomes. In order to engage in learning, Pasifika students need to know that their teachers respect them and believe that they are just as capable as students of other cultures (Siope, 2011). In Pasifika cultures, respect is among the highest values (Rimoni & Averill, 2019). When teachers do not hold high expectations for students, it is seen as disrespectful and dishonouring (Siope, 2011; Rimoni & Averill, 2019).

### **Curriculum and delivery**

Pasifika students want to be able to connect to the curriculum (Knight-de Blois & Poskitt, 2016). However, in an education system that has been created by Palagi, and with low Pasifika teacher representation (Ministry of Education, 2021) there are not many opportunities for Pasifika to connect

to the content on their own cultural level. Throughout the literature, there are two main themes around curriculum content and delivery that stand out as supporting Pasifika engagement. Firstly, that the curriculum content is relatable, and secondly that the delivery of content is varied and interesting (Siope, 2011; Spiller, 2012; Knight-de Blois & Poskitt, 2016). Relatable curriculum content for Pasifika students includes connecting the culture to the work they are doing. This can be in a couple of different ways: learning about the histories of Pasifika peoples (Knight-de Blois & Poskitt, 2016), and talking about current events affecting Pasifika people e.g., Tuvalu being impacted by the climate crisis (Salem, 2020).

Creating an engaging delivery of curriculum content for Pasifika students is good for all students. The Pasifika students represented in the literature engaged well with varied delivery of content, like facilitating an open environment where students are able to freely communicate ideas with each other (Spiller, 2012), letting students talk loudly and enthusiastically within the classroom as long as they are on task (Spiller, 2012), and facilitating different connections to content by offering the content in different methods e.g., reading about a concept, then having a visual representation of the same concept available (Knight-de Blois & Poskitt, 2016). Making sure that varied delivery of content exists for the whole class, and not just Pasifika students, also lessens the potential for extra help to be misconstrued in a negative light by Pasifika students.

### **Senior leadership interventions**

Senior leadership within schools (principals, deputy principals, student coordinators etc.) must be acutely aware of how school policies are impacting their Pasifika students, especially if those leaders are not connected culturally or ethnically to the Pacific cultures within the school (Talení et al., 2017). Not only should they be fostering Pasifika student engagement by encouraging teachers to engage in professional development around Pasifika values, but they must also be actively working to combat policies, worldviews, and perceptions that would undermine and belittle Pasifika students (Talení et al., 2017; Averill et al., 2021). Senior leadership in schools would ideally dedicate professional learning time to understanding Pasifika students and Pasifika cultures so the cultural gap in knowledge between Palagi teachers and Pasifika students can be bridged (Rimoni & Averill, 2019).

### **Lack of representation**

As touched on earlier, within the 72,115 strong teaching workforce of Aotearoa, Pasifika teachers make up 3005 of them, or around 4 per cent (Ministry of Education, 2021). This has a few implications for both Pasifika students and Pasifika teachers. Without representation within a school or someone that connects to Pasifika cultures, policy documents are just documents with a lack of human connection (Rimoni & Averill, 2019). The best way to learn languages and cultures is by connecting with people who deeply understand and can connect with those languages and cultures (Averill & Rimoni, 2019). Tapasā (2018) is an excellent resource that has been created by Pasifika educators, but without Pasifika teachers present to connect and interpret the documents, there will be a loss of learning potential. This lack of opportunity for teachers to create deep understanding therefore accentuates the cultural divide between Pasifika students and Palagi teachers. More Pasifika teachers need to be recruited to enhance both the working environments for Pasifika teachers, the learning environments for Pasifika students, and the understanding of Pasifika worldviews by non-Pasifika teachers (Averill & Rimoni, 2019).

### **Pedagogical strategies**

Culturally responsive pedagogies for Pasifika have been well-researched in Aotearoa. Some of the main themes of these studies are using culturally responsive practices, talanoa, va, and meeting Pasifika as individual students (Prescott & Johansson Fua, 2016; Easthope-Harper, 2018; Tupou & Loveridge, 2019). If culturally responsive practice is so beneficial, then incorporating culturally responsive pedagogies into our teaching practices and making room for them in our curriculum should be a priority.

### ***Culturally responsive practices***

On an international scale, studies have shown that culturally responsive practices are effective at boosting educational engagement for students from minority groups (Easthope-Harper, 2018). Culturally responsive teaching practices focus on incorporating the cultural capital that students enter their classes with (Porter-Samuels, 2013; Easthope-Harper, 2018). Cultural capital can include a student's language, values, identity, beliefs, and cultural idiosyncrasies (Easthope-Harper, 2018). For example, in Pasifika cultures, collaboration and reciprocity are highly valued (Vaiote, 2006; Knight-de Blois & Poskitt, 2016). So to be culturally responsive to Pasifika students would be to facilitate this within classrooms.

In their 2019 study of Pasifika students' engagement with computer science, Tupou and Loveridge found that regardless of whether Pasifika students were asked to work in groups, or told to work individually, they would collaborate and help each other with the task given to them (Tupou & Loveridge, 2019). This finding supports the idea that collaboration and reciprocity are highly valued by Pasifika students, but it also confirms that this is the method of learning that Pasifika students are needing within their classrooms. Creating physical spaces for students to collaborate with each other within the classroom would create more opportunities for this type of learning within the classroom. This would aid teachers in their ability to teach in a culturally responsive way, as they would have to join in the conversations with the groups, as opposed to teaching from the front of the classroom (Reynolds, 2018b). This physical collaboration would also increase the use of more relational pedagogies from teachers, which have been shown to improve Pasifika student engagement (Sanders & Boyte, 2020).

### ***Talanoa and va***

Incorporating Pasifika ways of thinking and being into our teaching practices is another way of engaging all students, including Pasifika students (Prescott & Johansson Fua, 2016). The two main words used throughout Pasifika education literature are "talanoa" and "va". These two words encompass too much meaning to be fully portrayed in a couple of sentences, and there is much to be gained by looking deeper into these concepts than what is being presented here. It should also be noted that these terms are not universal throughout the Pacific island region and may be presented or practised differently throughout the different Pacific islands.

Talanoa is a methodology that investigates through conversation. It first focuses on forming a deeper than surface-level relationship, and then uses this relationship as a mediator to foster trust and understanding (Fa'avae et al., 2016). Talanoa is collaborative and is a Pasifika framework to investigate and talk through ideas. Talanoa acknowledges the knowledge, culture, and background of the whole person coming to the conversation (Prescott & Johansson Fua, 2016). Va from "teu le va" embodies the idea of looking after the space around relationships and maintaining the balance and harmony within those relationships (Reynolds, 2016). A deep understanding of these two crucial concepts will enhance relational and culturally responsive pedagogical practices in teachers, which has shown the potential to increase student engagement of not only Pasifika students but all students of all backgrounds (Prescott & Johansson Fua, 2016; Reynolds, 2016). Building knowledge about both talanoa and va can help teachers to understand their students on a deeper level culturally, which would hopefully lead to a deeper understanding and knowledge of each individual student in their classes.

### ***Seeing students as individuals***

If we, as teachers, are not seeing students as individuals with their own stories both inside and outside of their cultures, then there will be little improvement in Pasifika engagement. There is no singular blanket way to engage Pasifika students, as each Pasifika culture is individual, even though there are similarities (Rimoni & Averill, 2019). There is a danger in teachers making too many assumptions about a student's identity based on where they come from, and so it is also important that the student should



be seen and known first, rather than immediately assuming their cultural backgrounds (Porter-Samuels, 2013). Pasifika students that were born in Aotearoa will have a vastly different experience from Pasifika students who have been born in their ancestral home or somewhere else. There will be large variations between Pasifika students who are the first generation born in Aotearoa, and Pasifika students who are the third generation born in Aotearoa. No two Pasifika students have the same experiences. These frameworks for success must be held with an open hand and should have the opportunity to shift and change when needed

## **Conclusion**

Pasifika students are not being adequately engaged in education settings when compared to most other ethnic groups in Aotearoa (Ministry of Education, 2023a). This hinders their achievement in these settings (Zepke & Leach, 2010). The education system in Aotearoa was set up by Palagi, in a monocultural society (Reynolds, 2018a), and because of this, it does not cater well to many groups of minority students. Studies around student voice indicated that relationships were crucial to improving Pasifika student engagement, with the most common factor of impact being positive teacher-student relationships. This ties in with the literature surrounding the importance of positive teacher-student relationships through culturally responsive teaching for Pasifika students, and how they could be further developed by senior leadership in schools through professional learning or release time for further education into Pasifika cultures.

Through analysis of the available literature, it has unfortunately become apparent that many Pasifika students believe that teachers will give up on them due to the cultural narrative of Pasifika being “slow” or “uninterested in education”. Many Pasifika students believe that teachers see all Pasifika as “the same”, but in a negative sense. Not that their culture is something to be celebrated, but conversely as their culture is something to be glossed over and ignored (Sanders & Boyte, 2020).

These studies make it clear that Pasifika students want teachers to connect with them. They want to be seen as both an individual and as part of a whole (Rimoni & Averill, 2019). Studies published prior to 2018 recommend a policy document should be published to bolster teachers in their knowledge of teaching Pasifika students specifically. Policy documentation, such as Tapasā (2018), is a great stepping stone for teachers to begin their understanding of Pasifika cultures. However, more work must be done. What is good for Pasifika students is good for all students. Teachers will most likely come to a classroom with some form of understanding of Pasifika students, whether positive or negative. It is important that we are able to shape that understanding as much as possible through authentic engagement with Pasifika cultures. How can we as teachers form relationships with Pasifika students if we do not understand who they are or where they come from?

As teachers, we have the unique opportunity to bridge these cultural gaps and connect with Pasifika students. In a lot of ways as teachers of Pasifika students we are having to work to undo what has been done; to mend what has been broken. Teachers, Palagi and Pasifika alike, have to be constantly working to call out the stereotypes and prejudices that Pasifika students may have taken to heart. We are working to show Pasifika students that they get to choose how they define themselves, by enabling them to discover who they are in all environments. We must create space for Pasifika students to be successful as Pasifika.

## **Recommendations for future research**

Further research needs to be done on the impact that professional learning for Palagi teachers can have on increasing Pasifika student engagement. Meaningful professional learning would involve talking with people from Pasifika communities and engaging in cultural practices. It is also interesting to note that Pasifika teachers are studying their initial teacher training in Palagi institutions, where there is a noticeable lack of Pasifika tutors, lecturers, and professors (Naepi, 2019). It would be important to study the effect that this may have on their worldviews and culture, to see if we can find effective ways to

further decolonise the tertiary learning spaces and therefore continue to decolonise secondary schooling for all students.

Further research on the impact of connecting Pasifika students' home lives to their school lives is also needed. It would be interesting to see the results of a study where a teaching team within one school is dedicated to making connections and pastoral care with Pasifika students and their parents to find out what impact targeted care would have on Pasifika student engagement.

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<sup>ii</sup> The Māori language name for New Zealand

<sup>ii</sup> A Pasifika term generally used to describe a White person of European heritage