

PASIFEX

Supporting Pasifika Learners in New Zealand to aim for “Excellence” in the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA)

DIVISION: Senior

PROJECT TYPE: Team

PASIFEX: Supporting Pasifika Learners in New Zealand to aim for “Excellence” in the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA)

PART I – PROJECT OVERVIEW

A: AREA OF CONCERN

"You have brains in your head and feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose!" Dr Seuss.

These words suggest equal opportunities for all learners and that self-determination is the key factor in achieving success. Unfortunately these words do not hold true for Pasifika¹ learners in New Zealand (NZ) today. At present Pasifika learners achieve significantly below their NZ European and Asian peers, particularly when it comes to attaining the highest grade in the NZ education system of 'Excellence'.

In 2002 a new qualification was introduced in NZ called the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). It has 3 levels for secondary students in years 11 to 13, and students can pass with Achievement, Merit or Excellence. In 2012, 63% of Year 12 Pasifika learners gained NCEA. Whilst this is an increase from 58% in 2011, it is still well below the 78% and 80% pass rates for European and Asian learners respectively. This is significant as Level 2 is identified by the NZ Ministry of Education as a key qualification leading to future educational and vocational opportunities. Furthermore, only 2.4% of Pasifika learners gained the highest grade of 'Excellence', compared with 13.9% of NZ European learners and 18.5% of Asian students.

We, the Pasifex team, began this project as a group of five Year 12 students at McAuley High School, a decile 1² school in Otahuhu, Auckland in which 88% of our students are of Pasifika descent. Our school's results do not reflect the national picture. In 2012 93% of our Pasifika learners gained NCEA Level 2, with 3.8% gaining 'Excellence'. This excellence rate is the same as NZ European learners and higher than Asian learners for schools in the same socio-economic band. As five Pasifika learners who gained NCEA Level 1 with 'Excellence' our team set out to support and encourage other Pasifika learners to excel in NCEA.

NZ is recognised as having one of the most inequitable education systems in the world, with the gap between high and low performing students in studies such as PISA one of the widest in the OECD³. Unfortunately Pasifika students are both under-represented in the proportion of high achievers and over-represented in the lower end of performance. NZ also has one of the largest differences in achievement between students of high and low socio-economic status. This is a clear contributing factor regarding the educational success of Pasifika learners as we are disproportionately seen in poorer areas of our country. For example, 58.6% of residents in our community, Mangere-Otahuhu, are Pasifika, compared with 14.4% across wider Auckland, and 6.9% in NZ. Mangere-Otahuhu is ranked the lowest of all 21 districts in Auckland on the Auckland Council's social deprivation index, and 84% of our schools are decile 1 or 2, compared with 20% of schools across NZ.

The issue of Pasifika underachievement has been a major concern of the NZ education community since the introduction of NCEA. One reason, other than poverty, that has been suggested for the achievement gap is low expectations of Pasifika learners, in part due to deficit theorising that attributes low attainment to the abilities of the student and their circumstances rather than the quality of teaching or school systems. Many Pasifika learners are also new immigrants to NZ, with English as a second language. We note, however, that this is also the case for many Asian learners who currently perform the best of all ethnic groups in NCEA. Poor attendance and lack of engagement have also been mooted as potential reasons, with Pasifika students over-represented in such statistics. Cultural barriers to learning, such as seeing the questioning of teachers as disrespectful, may also be relevant, and this is something we see as a factor in our own school. A further potential issue is the 'clumping' together of Pasifika learners as one homogenous group for statistical analysis purposes, when our educational experiences and backgrounds, even within our small group of five, show significant diversity.

The NZ Ministry of Education has recognised the relatively low achievement of Pasifika learners in its Pasifika Education Plan (PEP) aimed at raising Pasifika learners' participation, engagement and achievement in education. Key targets from this document include 85% of Pasifika 18 year olds achieving NCEA Level 2 or

¹ 'Pasifika' is a term used in NZ when referring to Pacific peoples. It refers to peoples who have migrated from Pacific nations and territories as well as the NZ-based (and born) population, who identify as Pasifika.

² A school's decile rating indicates socio-economic status of communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities.

³ <http://www.appa.org.nz/new-research/what-is-pisa-and-what-do-the-results-say-about-new-zealand-schools>

equivalent in 2017, and increasing the number of Pasifika school leavers with University Entrance (UE) to achieve at least parity with non-Pasifika school leavers in 2017. We note that UE is the lowest possible entrance requirement to NZ universities, and many, in particular our local University of Auckland, have higher requirements based on the proportion of 'Merit' and 'Excellence' grades a student achieves. What particularly concerned our team was the relatively low levels of these targets, indeed they are at levels that students at our school have already exceeded, even with the low socio-economic status of our community.

We are particularly concerned that 'Achievement' is considered an acceptable goal in the PEP. Achievement requires at best 'multi-structural' thinking⁴, in which students focus on relevant aspects independently rather than as a cohesive whole. In order to gain 'Excellence' in NCEA students must demonstrate 'extended abstract' thinking that requires making connections beyond the scope of the problem or question, as well as generalising or transferring learning into new situations. We think this is a key goal in giving educational and vocational opportunities to NZ's Pasifika community. For these reasons our challenge this year is to look at how Pasifika learners in NZ can be inspired and supported to achieve 'Excellence' in NCEA.

B: CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

- ✦ It may be a challenge that while there has been general improvement in Pasifika achievement, Pasifika learners still achieve below NZ European and Asian learners in NCEA. This may be a challenge as poor NCEA achievement can negatively impact on future learning and work opportunities.
- ✦ It may be a challenge that current initiatives to improve Pasifika education tend to focus on 'Achievement' or 'passing'. This may be a challenge as 'Excellence' grades are required to get into the majority of courses at universities in NZ and require the 'extended abstract' thinking that 21st Century learners are encouraged to develop.
- ✦ It may be a challenge that current lower achievement rates mean teachers could have low expectations of Pasifika learners. This could be a challenge because they may not teach to Excellence level in their classrooms, or may not do this for their Pasifika learners.
- ✦ It may be a challenge that in order to meet national 'Achievement' level targets Pasifika learners could be encouraged to enter lower level / remedial courses. This could be a challenge because these courses generally do not assess using the standards that allow students to gain 'Excellence'.
- ✦ It may be a challenge that Pasifika learners may not speak English as their first language. This may be a challenge because understanding 'Excellence' requirements can require interpreting unfamiliar contexts.
- ✦ It may be a challenge that Pasifika learners are over represented in lower socio economic communities. This could be a challenge as there is a clear link between poverty and poorer performance in NCEA.
- ✦ It may be a challenge that Pasifika learners may see questioning teachers as a sign of disrespect. This could be a challenge as it may not be conducive to developing 'Excellence' level higher order thinking.
- ✦ It may be a challenge that there is considerable diversity amongst Pasifika learners, in terms of background, prior learning and current achievement. This may be a challenge because aggregated statistics may not paint the true picture of what Pasifika learners can achieve.

C: UNDERLYING PROBLEM

Pasifika students in New Zealand currently perform significantly below students of other ethnicities in the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). How might we, the Pasifex team, support Pasifika learners in New Zealand to aim for 'Excellence' so that they may reach their full potential in their academic studies in 2013 and beyond?

D: ALTERNATIVE SOLUTION IDEAS

- ✦ We will develop and run an Aiming for Excellence program for Year 11 students at McAuley High School to assist them in aiming to achieve 'Excellence' in their first year of NCEA.
- ✦ We will set up a wikispace to share the resources we develop with the wider Pasifika community so that information on achieving 'Excellence' is available to Pasifika learners throughout NZ.
- ✦ We will develop professional learning resources for teachers so they are informed from a student perspective about ways to support Pasifika students to aim for and achieve 'Excellence'.
- ✦ We will network with other Pasifika education projects / groups to understand their views on Pasifika education and 'Excellence' achievement, and stay informed about new research and findings in this area.

⁴ As defined in the SOLO or "Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes" taxonomy, Biggs and Collins (1982).

- ✦ We will develop material for Pasifika parents that outlines ways they can support their child to achieve 'Excellence' in NCEA.
- ✦ We will share our findings with the NZ Ministry of Education to make them aware of our vision to raise overall 'Excellence' achievement in NCEA for Pasifika students in NZ.

E: PLAN OF ACTION

We plan to work in three main areas this year: with Pasifika students, their parents and with teachers of Pasifika learners. Research shows that in order to achieve success we need to target this 'triangle' of people involved in student learning⁵. Whilst we will be trialling many of our ideas initially at our own school our aim is to make sure any resources we develop are available to all Pasifika learners in NZ so we can potentially influence the wider Pasifika community. Ultimately we want to have a positive impact on Pasifika students aiming for and achieving 'Excellence' in NCEA throughout NZ.

Firstly we will develop workshops for Year 11 students at our school that aim to build on the knowledge we gained in achieving 'Excellence'. We are targeting students in their first year of NCEA as we know success at this level is key to excelling in future years. We are aiming to run 2 workshops each school term, up to a maximum of 8 workshops. Our plan is to run these before school so they do not impact on students' learning time. We hope to encourage 25% of our Year 11 cohort (~41 students) to attend. The workshops will be open to all students regardless of their current level of attainment, to model high expectations of all learners. We will get feedback from students in the workshops in order to see how successful they are in supporting students to aim for Excellence. We will also track student results to see what percentage of them gain 'Excellence' in NCEA.

We will also develop resources to support the parents of Pasifika students aiming for 'Excellence' so they are aware of what they can do to help their children achieve the highest possible grade. We see our parents as critical to our own educational success and want to share how they help us with the wider Pasifika community. We also plan to use the expertise of our parents to translate this information into other Pasifika languages to make it more accessible to the Pasifika parent community. We will make the resources we create available through our school newsletter, as well through the wikispace we intend to develop.

Thirdly, we will develop professional learning resources for teachers to explore how they support Pasifika learners to achieve 'Excellence'. We want these to share our perspectives as Pasifika learners, as well as those of other Pasifika learners whose thoughts we will gather through the workshop process. Our goal is to target any deficit theorising or low expectations and share examples of best practice that we have been fortunate to have experienced. Our plan is to share these resources initially with our own teachers and then with teachers from other schools. Ideally these will be available by the end of Term 2 so we can share them in Term 3 and they will be able to impact on the current cohort of students.

It is important for us to reach beyond the McAuley High School community and explore opportunities for liaising with the wider Pasifika education community, perhaps through the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (MPIA) and / or the Ministry of Education (MOE). We also plan to share our ideas through a wikispace developed for this purpose. The plan is that our student, parent and teacher resources will be added as they are developed throughout the year and we will seek opportunities to advertise the wikispace to other Pasifika learners, including through an email to all schools.

In order to carry out this plan we will meet as a team before school on a Tuesday morning each week to plan and evaluate our actions. We believe our project has the opportunity to impact on the area of concern as it works directly with a range of members of the Pasifika community and aims to address the key issues of belief in ability to succeed, development of higher order thinking, low expectations of Pasifika learners and resourcing that is developed by, and specifically for, Pasifika learners.

PROPOSED TIMELINE	
Term 1 Jan – Apr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and run 2 student workshops • Set up wikispace • Develop parent resources
Term 2 May – Jul	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and run 2 student workshops • Develop teacher workshop
Term 3 Jul - Sep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and run 2 student workshops • Run teacher workshop(s)
Term 4 Oct - Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and run 2 student workshops • Share project with Minister of Education
Summer Holidays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review project, plan for 2014 • Share project / resources with all NZ schools

⁵ MacBeath, J. (2000) http://www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/four/assess_parents_e.php

PART II – IMPLEMENTATION OF PLAN

A: ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES TO DATE

- ✦ We have organised and run five workshops for our Year 11 students:
 - Workshop 1 - Understanding NCEA / Planning for excellence
 - Workshop 2 - Key Tips / Habits of excellence students.
 - Workshop 3 - Excellence thinking in NCEA: Comprehensive Thinking, Insightful Thinking, Critical Thinking and Integrated Thinking. These four aspects were identified by our team from our analysis of all 617 external Achievement Standards⁶ for NCEA Level 1.
 - Workshop 4 - Excellence in the externals: Online resources and memory techniques.
 - Workshop 5 – Excellence in revision and study: Tips about studying for and sitting external exams.
- ✦ Workshop 3 was filmed by the national TV current affairs show *Seven Sharp* and screened as part of a programme on the academic success of McAuley High School.
- ✦ We presented the final key note to over 200 Pasifika students at the inaugural Pasifika Youth Conference on the 2nd of May 2012, including a survey we developed "Am I aiming for Excellence". We also developed and presented a video on Pasifika students aiming for excellence. Our presentation was described as a 'highlight' of the conference in *Leo Pasifika* – the magazine for the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs and featured on *Tagata Pasifika*, a national TV show about the Pacific Island community.
- ✦ We have developed a wikispace pasifex.wikispaces.com. This currently includes a section with all our student workshop resources, as well as pages for students, parents and teachers with key tips about aiming for excellence, and a helpful links section that shares useful online resources.
- ✦ Currently this wikispace is receiving an average of 8 unique views per day, with peaks around times we have presented to schools / teachers / conferences of around 120 unique views.
- ✦ We have developed teacher resources and shared these with teachers at our own school as well as at another school in our community, Aorere College. Resources include a survey "Am I teaching for excellence?", a summary of the teaching practices we think best support Pasifika learners to aim for excellence, an overview of our four aspects of excellence thinking, including posters for classrooms featuring Pasifika designs, material on encouraging students to take risks and make mistakes and an overview of how fixed or growth mind-sets can influence learners.
- ✦ We presented the key ideas of our project to 15 staff from the Ministry of Education that work in schools with high proportions of Pasifika learners.
- ✦ We have written a letter to the Minister of Education, the Hon Hekia Parata asking her to consider setting Excellence level targets and Hinemoa presented this letter to her in person and discussed our project.
- ✦ We shared our project with the wider Auckland education community as part of a chatroom at the Festival of Education held in Auckland in March 2014.
- ✦ We have been invited to work with the Ministry of Education to create a resource for schools about supporting Pasifika students to aim for excellence.
- ✦ *Tagata Pasifika* – a national TV show that showcases the Pasifika community in NZ will be filming us in May 2014 for broadcast later that month.
- ✦ We are currently working on planning for sustainability by making our workshops available online through the Udemy website.

B: ORGANISATION

This year we decided to allocate responsibilities in the following five areas:

Researcher: Hinemoa with Vivien. Collating and sharing education statistics for the group, reading a range of resources about Pasifika education including initiatives that have already been trialled.

Workshop designer: Tereena with Leueta. This involved the design of workshop booklets and activities. These were developed as a group through brainstorming. We then went away and refined this information, before

⁶ Achievement Standards (AS) are descriptions from the NZ curriculum of what a student needs to know, or what they must be able to achieve, in order to meet the standard. Each AS is allocated a set number of credits that contribute to attaining the 80 credits needed for each level of NCEA. External AS are those with exams set nationally and sat by all students entered at the end of each school year.

bringing it back to the group for final approval.

Web designer: Caylah with Hinemoa. Creating our wikispace, updating this regularly by uploading our resources and information as they were created, and keeping track of how our resources were being used and / or accessed.

Archivist: Vivien with Tereena. Collecting all project related records including minutes / meeting overviews, photos, data, workshop materials, surveys, reflections. Organising info and creating our project portfolio.

Problem Solving Leader and Writer: Leueta with Caylah. This role kept notes as our project went along in order to have information to describe our problem solving process. From this we developed our area of concern and underlying problem and made sure all team members were aware of our overall plan.

C: RESOURCE IDENTIFICATION AND UTILISATION

For us this project has been all about our Pasifika community, working with and for them as we aimed to support senior secondary students in their academic endeavours. During this project we have worked with, consulted and really appreciated the support of the following people, organisations and resources:

Pasifika education community

- ✧ The students of McAuley High School: Particularly the formal feedback in workshops 2 and 5, and the fantastic informal feedback throughout the process via discussion both within and outside of workshops.
- ✧ Students in the wider Pasifika community, especially those attending the inaugural Pasifika youth conference who were very supportive as we presented our first ever conference plenary.
- ✧ The staff of McAuley High School and Aorere College were essential in the development of our teacher materials. Their feedback following our workshops helped us to refine and further develop our ideas.
- ✧ Thanks to Yara Richmond and Kristina Sofele from the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs and Pennie Otto from the Ministry of Education who helped us develop our contribution to the Youth Conference.
- ✧ The staff from the Ministry of Education who gave us great feedback following our workshop with their advisors who work in schools in our area, in particular George Gavet and Charlotte Rawcliffe.
- ✧ We are also very grateful to our parents who have listened, offered advice & delivered us to school for all the extra meetings (including early morning starts!). In particular Mrs Finau and Mrs Mulipola who translated our information for parents – a very challenging job given the technical vocabulary of NCEA.

Media help

- ✧ Tagata Pasifika: Our presentation at the Pacific Youth Conference was filmed by Tagata Pasifika. It was an opportunity for us to share our project not only with the students present but also throughout NZ.
- ✧ Leo Pasifika: The magazine from the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs who included us in their article about the Pasifika Youth Conference as well as advertising our project through their online newsletter.
- ✧ Seven Sharp: This national TV show filmed one of our workshops with the Year 11's that focused on the different types of Excellence Thinking used in NCEA.
- ✧ NZC Online: The developers of this website transferred our video from the Pacific Youth Conference into a format that can be shared online, making it more accessible to Pasifika learners nationwide.
- ✧ Manukau Courier – our local newspaper published an article about our project that led to a tenfold increase in numbers visiting our wikispace in the following week.

Other resources

- ✧ NZQA website: <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/>. This has been essential in providing NCEA statistics, and access to electronic versions of all the L1 Achievement Standards.
- ✧ www.studyit.org.nz: We encouraged the use of the NCEA materials on this site to support learners to have a good understanding of the excellence requirements of individual Achievement Standards.
- ✧ <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications>: This website was our main point of call for research that has been done on supporting Pasifika learners.
- ✧ www.examtime.com: This free online resource for studying and revising has proved very useful. We had great feedback from students and teachers after sharing how it could be used to support learning.

D. ACCOMPLISHMENTS

This project has given us the opportunity to make a difference both within our school community, as well as beyond McAuley High School to the wider Pasifika community of NZ. We have really enjoyed the opportunity to work with students, parents, teachers and others involved in education as we have tried to spread the word about Pasifika learners achieving 'Excellence'.

Developing "Aiming for Excellence" workshops has been a key accomplishment even though we definitely underestimated the work involved! Deciding on content, format, and delivery style were all part of a steep learning curve. Our target of 25% of Year 11s attending was met in the first three workshops, however this did drop in the final two. The 8am start time was difficult for some students so we also ran lunchtime catch up sessions. We hope our plan to develop an online version may work to reduce this barrier in the future. Our student survey showed 92% of students found our workshops useful in supporting them to aim for excellence, with Workshop 3 averaging 5 out of 5 for helpfulness. Overall 6 (15%) of participants gained 'Excellence', with a further 21 (51%) within 10 credits which they are currently working on attaining. We also created our wikispace in April 2013 as we really wanted to ensure all Pasifika learners can access material on Pasifika 'Excellence'. To date we have had over 2500 visits, and an average of 8 views per day.

Our presentations to staff at both Aorere College and our own school were both challenging and enlightening. We were very nervous about how our message might be received as we wanted to acknowledge the excellent work teachers do and also give a student perspective on how Pasifika students could be further encouraged to aim for excellence. All of the 28 staff who attended our school workshop said they found 3 or more of our resources useful. It is also great to see our Excellence posters up in every classroom in our school as teachers use them to exemplify what Excellence thinking looks like.

One of our highlights was presenting to over 200 Pasifika students at the Pasifika Youth Conference. The organisers were quite surprised when we contacted them about presenting rather than just participating. We got some great feedback from Ant Backhouse who was the key note speaker: "I thought your presentation was E for excellence! Clear, concise, great video content and the tips were right on the money".

Our other highlight was being invited to share our thoughts with the regional Ministry of Education office who work with schools with high proportions of Pasifika students. One email we received said "Your visit was absolutely incredible! Our staff raved about the power and impact of the testimonies of the girls, their confidence, the content of the presentation and so much more... I could go on and on!" These advisors have since made plans to ensure setting 'Excellence' level targets is discussed in the schools in which they work.

E. REFLECTION ON OUTCOMES

Implementing our action plan this year has been enjoyable, rewarding and exhausting! We all had a clear goal that focused on making a difference for other Pasifika learners and this was critical in maintaining momentum and persevering during challenging times.

In order to do this we tried to keep our focus on the people we wanted to target: Pasifika students, their parents and their teachers. Our impact on students at our school has been in them not seeing 'passing' as an acceptable goal, and their willingness to come to our workshops to support their goal of achieving excellence. We also had the opportunity to network and engage with Pasifika learners beyond our school through the Pasifika Youth Conference and encourage them to take the steps towards achieving excellence.

Our parent community has also been supported and acknowledged through our information sheet and with the appropriate translations our hope is it will be used by other Pasifika students to facilitate a conversation with their parents about how they can provide practical support in setting and achieving 'excellence' goals.

Feedback from the teachers of both Aorere and McAuley shows we were effective in getting them thinking about Pasifika excellence. They were particularly interested in the Examtime website we shared as it was both a student and teacher friendly website for studying. Many were also interested in the "Make more mistakes" resource about perfectionism, sparking lively discussion amongst them. Our excellence thinking posters were also a highlight as teachers believed we had explained excellence thinking in a concise way.

In hindsight there are two main areas we would do differently. Firstly, better time management as there were moments of extreme stress in regards to meeting deadlines that could have been avoided. In regards to the teacher presentation, we have responded to feedback that it seemed to critique teachers (not our intention!) and we now refer to 'best teaching practices' rather than what the 'best teachers do'.

One of the biggest impacts we feel we have had is in Pasifika self-belief that aiming for Excellence is a worthwhile and achievable goal. Media coverage of Pasifika peoples in NZ can be very negative and based on stereotypes of the consequences of poverty and underachievement. This project has given us the opportunity to show just how 5 committed Pasifika students can excel. We really care about our community and supporting them to achieve excellence and the amazing things we have had the opportunity to do this year have made this an enlightening and thoroughly 'Excellent' experience.