

Sailiga tomai ma malamalama'aga fa'a-Pasifika – Seeking Pasifika knowledge to support student learning: Reflections on cultural values following an educational journey to Samoa

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Abstract

Transforming practices in initial teacher education and school and early childhood education contexts to support the success of Pasifika students and children can be challenging. Palagi educators, in particular, may find their practices are constrained by bureaucratic systems, processes and professional norms in ways that limit thinking about and responses to different ways of being and doing. Drawing from the experiences of a diverse group of educators during an educational journey to Samoa led by an esteemed Samoan leader, colleague and mentor, this article argues culturally based pedagogy holds the key to thinking and moving beyond some of these constraints. The article suggests that understanding Pasifika cultural values and integrating these into pedagogy is a critical first step for educators, before concluding with several practice messages. While these messages focus on Pasifika communities, students and children, they can be adapted for other ethnic groups.

Key words

Pasifika student achievement; culturally based pedagogy; cultural values

Introduction

“Tu’utu’u le upega i le loloto” or “cast the net into deeper waters” is a Samoan alagaupu (proverb). Leali’ie’e Tufulasi Taleni, the Kaiarahi Pasifika for the College of Education, Health and Human Development at the University of Canterbury (UC), has used this alagaupu to challenge non-Pacific colleagues, education leaders and teachers to further develop their knowledge and understanding of Pacific people’s identities, languages and cultures (see for example, L. T. T. Taleni, 2007; T. Taleni, Macfarlane, Macfarlane, & Fletcher, 2017).

Leali’ie’e¹, who is Samoan, aims to support others to make a positive difference for Pasifika² students’ learning – that is, those students living in Aotearoa New Zealand who identify themselves with and have connections to Pacific Island countries, nations, languages and cultures. These students may be recent arrivals or first or subsequent generations of Aotearoa New Zealand born Pacific peoples. This article reflects on aspects of a week long educational malaga (journey) to Samoa led by Leali’ie’e, a contributing author, in July 2019.

¹ The title ‘Leali’ie’e’ is unique to Leali’ie’e Tufulasi Taleni and is used in place of his full name throughout the article. It represents his parents, aiga, and village birthplace.

² We use the term ‘Pasifika’ in various contexts in this article consistent with Leali’ie’e’s advice, but acknowledge the term has been criticised on the basis it potentially homogenises diverse populations (Reynolds, 2016).

The remaining non-Pacific authors, Nicola (Pākehā), Raesha (New Zealand born Muslim Indian), Benita (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Porou) and Robyn (Pākehā), participated in the malaga in their role as UC educators,³ alongside 14 UC initial teacher education and health science students. The purpose of the malaga was to build staff and student capacity to be culturally responsive to the aspirations and needs of Pasifika students, children and their aiga (immediate and extended family), through exposure to fa'a-Samoa (the Samoan way) as a result of immersion in daily aiga and village life.

The article gives voice to the perspectives of Nicola, Raesha, Benita and Robyn.⁴ The richness of our Samoan specific experience prompted us to share it with others – which we could not do without writing about Pacific peoples. As a diverse but non-Pacific group of researchers/writers, we recognise we speak from outsider perspectives and must take care; partnering with Leali'ie'e was therefore crucial and helped ensure the article's authenticity. In particular, the article addresses how our participation in the malaga supported us to cast our nets deeper. It highlights new learning about the Samoan cultural values of tautua (service) and alofa (love)⁵ garnered first-hand as we witnessed, felt and unpacked these values together in our fale (house), before concluding with some practice messages for initial teacher education and in-service teachers. Sharing our insights here is one way we can honour and respect the learning we have been gifted through the malaga. It is also a way we can honour and respect the generosity of the Taleni aiga, our hosts during the malaga, and Leali'ie'e's sister, Katerina Taleni Tuimaseve, who died immediately prior to the malaga. We dedicate this article to both the Taleni aiga and Katerina's memory.

Shortly after beginning work on this article news of the 2019 measles outbreak in Samoa began circulating. The outbreak, declared in October, brought widespread fear and sorrow as the numbers of deaths steadily grew with tamaiti (children) the primary casualties. In response to the outbreak, a state of emergency was declared in November banning tamaiti from public events and shutting schools. A Government two-day shutdown followed in December closing the public and private sectors, while a mass door to door vaccination campaign was carried out (World Health Organisation, 2019).⁶ The national grief and disruption to daily life stood in stark contrast to our experiences several months earlier; we traveled freely between the islands of Upolu and Savai'i with hearts and homes opening to us at every stop, particularly in the village of the Taleni aiga, Vaiafai Iva, Savai'i. We extend our fa'aaloalo (respect) and alofa to those who passed and those who mourn.

The catalyst for our learning: The achievement of Pasifika students and children

Achievement, for Pasifika students and children in Aotearoa New Zealand, occurs against the background of Te Tiriti o Waitangi / the Treaty of Waitangi, the agreement established

³ Nicola and Benita are (respectively) senior lecturer and lecturer at UC. At the time of the malaga and subsequent writing of this article, Robyn was employed as a lecturer at UC, and Raesha as a senior tutor. Both Robyn and Raesha have since left UC.

⁴ Hereafter, use of 'we' and 'our' etc in this article refers to we four women. Leali'ie'e's presence however, is felt throughout the article.

⁵ As non-Samoan people, we acknowledge our understanding of these values is filtered through our own worldviews.

⁶ The state of emergency ended in late December 2019, after which Samoa entered a state of recovery. As of early January 2020, there were 83 deaths (World Health Organisation, 2020).

between Māori and the colonising British Crown in 1840 (Orange, 2015).⁷ Te Tiriti provides the context for relationships between Māori and Pākehā (Orange, 2015), including between Tangata Whenua and Pasifika peoples as tauwi (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2020). But Te Tiriti also provides the context for the education system; the partnership promise at its core is expected to be applied in educational policy and practice with success for Māori as Māori a shared responsibility (Ministry of Education, 2013a, 2015, 2017). Despite this expectation, the current system marginalises Māori students; disparities in achievement levels and inequitable outcomes remain a concern (Berryman & Eley, 2019; Education Review Office, 2014; A. H. Macfarlane, 2015; S. L. Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2020; May, Jang-Jones, & McGregor, 2019; Skerrett, 2020).

Pasifika students and children are also marginalised within the education system and experience similar disparities and inequities (Education Review Office, 2014; May et al., 2019; Ministry of Education, 2019a, 2020), to the point that their performance has been identified as a potential crisis (T. Taleni et al., 2017). As Apulu (2017) observes, “we should be questioning why our [Pasifika] students should have to assimilate to systems and education that do not work for them” (p. 59). In state and state integrated schools in 2019, Pasifika students were primarily taught by Palagi (European) teachers (Education Counts, 2019b). While improvements in Pasifika students’ assessment compared with nationwide trends have been noted in some areas, results continue to fall short of achievement expectations (Ministry of Education, 2019a), suggesting Palagi teachers do not always have the cultural competence to support these students’ engagement and meet their needs. Similarly, in licensed early childhood education services in 2019, Pasifika children were primarily taught by Palagi teachers (Education Counts, 2019a). While it is simplistic to intimate that teaching alone will make the difference needed for Pasifika students and children to meet achievement expectations, it nevertheless remains an important factor to consider.

Successive Ministry of Education Pasifika Education Plans (see for example, Ministry of Education, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2013b) have attempted to redress concerns about the achievement of Pasifika students and children. While Reynolds (2019) claims the 2013–2017 plan lacks sufficient pedagogical guidance, *Tapasā* (Ministry of Education, 2018), a more recent resource that primarily supports Palagi teachers, may help bridge this gap by building the cultural capability of teachers. The recently released *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020–2030* (Ministry of Education, 2020) also acknowledges the need to build the cultural capability of teachers and suggests *Tapasā* should be used to guide this work. The potential of *Tapasā* to be realised however, is arguably reliant on the provision of sound professional development (Mara, 2019).

The metaphors framing our learning: ‘The horizon’ and ‘the box’

As we witnessed, felt and unpacked the cultural values of tautua and alofa during the malaga, we drew inspiration from a keynote lecture previously delivered by Professor Steven Ratuva (Ratuva, 2019). Professor Ratuva, the Director of the Macmillan Brown

⁷ Key differences in the te reo Māori text and the English text of the agreement have contributed to tensions about the meanings of these texts, subsequently leading to differing understandings about its intent (Orange, 2015; State Services Commission, 2005).

Centre for Pacific Studies at UC, spoke to the metaphor of ‘the horizon’; alluding to traditional Pacific cosmology as endless and panoramic, the horizon encompasses heaven and earth and is empowering. It stands in stark contrast to the metaphor of ‘the box’. As Ratuva observed, Palagi built themselves boxes—both literally and figuratively—and these boxes represent hegemonic, colonial and neoliberal processes that divide, rule and commodify culture and education and so on. By their very nature, they are disempowering. ‘Deboxification’—or thinking and moving outside of the box—is however possible. In the following sections of this article, we describe some of our experiences of tautua and alofa in conjunction with our efforts to engage in deboxification of the bureaucratic systems, processes, practices and professional norms boxing us in. The *Culturally Based Pedagogy Model* (see Figure 1) that Leali’ie’e developed is also introduced; his model helped frame this work.

The gift of tautua: Living service through sorrow

Tautua is a key value in Samoan culture (Anae, 2016; Apulu, 2017; Fa’asalele, 2010; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2010; Siu-Maliko, 2016; Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017; L. T. T. Taleni, 2017; T. Taleni et al., 2017; Va’a, 2009). Like other key Samoan values, tautua guides social action; it is not just an abstract concept (Va’a, 2009). From a Samoan perspective, to serve, is to put others before self (Sauvao-Va’auli, 2017; Siauane, 2004) without seeking individual gain or payment (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2010; Va’a, 2009). Accomplished and implemented through alofa, tautua involves rendering service to the aiga and the matai (chief) (Apulu, 2017; Siu-Maliko, 2016; Va’a, 2009). Indeed, tautua is the key criteria for the succession of the next matai (L. T. T. Taleni, 2017). In acknowledging the pathway to leadership is through service, the alagaupu, “O le ala i le pule, o le tautua”, succinctly captures this point.

The malaga afforded us the rare privilege of observing tautua in practice at a time of loss and grief for the Taleni aiga. As mentioned, Katerina died immediately prior to the malaga. Yet in the midst of their sorrow, rather than cancel the malaga, the agia graciously decided Katerina’s funeral and burial should be delayed until after the malaga, such was their commitment to tautua.

During the malaga, the knowledge of Katerina’s passing—a woman we had never met—was ever present in our interactions with the Taleni aiga as we participated in communal daily life. This lent the malaga a special quality; our experience of tautua at such a time remains humbling. That the malaga went ahead was not the only expression of tautua we were to encounter. Benita, a strong advocate for the Māori values of whanaungatanga and manaakitanga within our predominantly Pākehā context at UC, takes up our story next, describing how tautua also tested us in unexpected ways.

Benita: Navigating tensions

During our early morning ferry crossing from Upolu to Savai’i following our arrival in Apia the previous evening, one of our students, Renee,⁸ unexpectedly became very unwell. Raesha, our designated team member responsible for health and safety on the malaga cared for her during the crossing. On docking at Salelologa Wharf, while negotiating the heat, crowds and unfamiliar processes of the terminal in a cultural context that was new to

⁸ Pseudonym

us all we realised Renee was worsening and needed hospitalisation. With 13 other students to transport by vehicle to the Teleni aiga compound in Vaiafai Iva some rapid decisions were called for.

Rather than travel as a group to the hospital in the village of Tuasivi, we decided to drive straight to the Teleni aiga compound. Both the aiga and other villagers were ready with a formal welcome, however proceedings were delayed, while Leali’ie’e explained the situation to members of his aiga. Without hesitation, his sister Orita Teleni volunteered to take Renee and Raesha to the hospital, where she remained with them, providing support and translation as needed. Her actions allowed Leali’ie’e to take up his role in the welcome ceremony as the village Tofilau (high chief) and the rest of our group to participate in the ceremony as planned.

At this point in our story, we were comfortable with events and grateful that Orita had stepped in. We understood we must allow her—and by extension the aiga as a whole—the mana to extend tautua in this way. When Orita suggested Renee should stay in her fale in the guest room following Renee’s discharge from hospital later that same day, rather than sleep communally in the fale with the rest of the students, we also appreciated and accepted this offer.

In the early evening we met with Leali’ie’e and Renee to discuss whether or not Renee should continue to stay in Orita’s care as had been offered, or accompany the group on a two-day road trip around the island, leaving the next day. We agreed she should remain with Orita, along with another student who wanted to keep her company. But later that evening, back in our own fale, we were beset with doubts about this decision. Our key concern was whether or not one of us should remain behind too. This, we believed, would be expected of us in our capacity as UC employees in this unanticipated situation. Moreover, we imagined Renee’s family might also expect it of us, given we were responsible for her wellbeing on the malaga.

I was particularly troubled and unsure about the ‘right’ course of action. This was the case despite seeing connections between tautua and alofa, and manaakitanga and aroha. It was also the case despite knowing if the events we describe had happened on a marae and I was hau kainga, I would not have hesitated to respond in the same ways, and as manuhiri would have accepted the offer without hesitation and much less angst. Notwithstanding this knowledge, I shared my considerable anxiety about possible repercussions should Renee’s health deteriorate without one of us there to support her. How would we explain such an absence to UC management, Renee’s family, and others who might be impacted in the event of such a scenario? These anxieties, framed by my understanding of what it means to be professionally responsible, were in tension with the values of tautua and alofa *and* manaakitanga and aroha. There I was, caught in the box, but without the insight in that moment to recognise this.

This was an ethical dilemma, with no easy resolution. While *The Code of Professional Responsibility* (Education Council, 2017a) indicates teachers are expected to take active steps to learn about and recognise the significance of the culture of learners and their families, what do we actually call on to make difficult decisions when we are experiencing

different ways of being and doing? What ways of being and doing do we privilege? Both *Tapasā* (Ministry of Education, 2018) and the *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030* (Ministry of Education, 2020) remind us of the importance of examining whose knowledge is valued in education settings. As stated in *Tapasā*, “the existing system often privileges majority ‘culture’ and knowledge” (p. 8). For us, challenging the privileging of majority culture and knowledge demanded thinking outside of the box—in this case familiar bureaucratic systems, processes, practices and professional norms—itself a challenging task when we are located within that same box. Suffice to say, after considerable time engaged in robust wānanga about these issues, my anxieties diminished as our collective understanding grew. This enabled us to move outside the box in order to more fully engage with what the values of tautua and alofa mean in practice, rather than in theory. We concluded that we must privilege these values by unreservedly embracing the gift of service that had been extended to us; this was an opportunity to show that we valued this gift without laying our individual cultural expectations over it.

The next day, as we prepared to leave on our trip around the island, we said goodbye to Orita, Renee and the other student. We thanked Orita once more, for her gift of service and alofa, and apologised—yet again—for our assumption that we were creating further trouble for her at a time of considerable sadness for the aiga. Her parting words to us: “These are my daughters now”, provided another moving illustration of the depth of her tautua and alofa.

The gift of alofa: Living love through cross cultural connections

Alofa, as mentioned earlier, enables tautua to be accomplished and implemented. It is also, as the saying “Tautua fa’atamali’i ma le alofa” observes, the key to serving with integrity. Alofa, then, is another key value in Samoan culture (Siu-Maliko, 2016; Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017; L. T. T. Taleni, 2017; T. Taleni et al., 2017; Va’ā, 2009). Defined by action (Siauane, 2004), alofa encompasses more than affection or compassion, through its promotion of behaviours that foster right relationships (Siu-Maliko, 2016). Va’ā (2009) speaks to the expansiveness of alofa, noting it is expressed “first towards other family members, then towards members of one’s village, district and nation, and finally towards all other peoples. It is universal in scope. It springs from the heart of a Samoan, from love for other humans” (p. 244).

Just as the malaga afforded us the privilege of witnessing tautua in action during the early stages of a period of grief for the Taleni aiga, it similarly afforded us opportunities to see the ways in which alofa contributes to tautua. But alofa was demonstrated in other ways too. Raesha describes her experience of alofa in the next section. She reminds us that the expression of alofa can strengthen our own identities and the identities of others. Moreover, Raesha’s recognition of the similarities between collective daily life within the Taleni aiga compound and collective daily life within the family compound in her own ancestral village of Adada in Gujarat, India, speaks to the importance of looking for (and recognising) our commonalities – it is these commonalities that can help us bridge gaps between cultures.

Raesha: ‘Coming home’

My welcome to Vaiafai Iva was delayed because I traveled with Renee to the hospital in Tuasivi. As Benita has already explained, Orita accompanied us, providing support and translation. Our return to the Teleni aiga compound many hours later, was my first proper opportunity to take in the environment. From the entrance to the aiga compound, I felt a sense of immediate connection with my surroundings, which culminated in an involuntary flashback, or a sudden, intense re-experiencing of my family compound in Adada. This flashback was further heightened when I noticed Leali’ie’e’s beautiful (then) 88-year-old mother, Tina⁹ Valaei Faloa’i Pritchard Teleni, the aiga matriarch, sitting quietly on the veranda outside her fale overseeing the aiga and their tamaiti interacting with one another as they engaged in various activities.

Tina Valaei’s presence and way of being reminded me profoundly of my grandmother who passed away when I was in my early twenties. Like Tina Valaei, she would sit overseeing interactions and activities within the family compound in Adada in exactly the same way. As a range of emotions came over me, I felt an immediate affinity with her. This potent sense of affinity cannot easily be explained (much less understood rationally). Perhaps, as Mason (2018) imagines it, affinities are simply “those connections that feel ‘kindred’ in some way, or make things kindred, whether or not they involve a family or kinship link as conventionally defined” (p. 1). As Mason goes on to explain, affinities can be understood “as connective charges and energies” (p. 2). Certainly, I felt I had known her my whole life.

Leali’ie’e took me to meet Tina Valaei. Like them, I had experienced the recent loss of a family member. My brother Junaid Ismail (Shaheed, Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji’un)¹⁰ tragically passed during the Christchurch mosque attacks on the 15th of March 2019 several months before Katerina’s passing (may they both rest in peace). On many occasions, Leali’ie’e would acknowledge my understanding of his grief given our shared experience of losing a sibling; we connected deeply in a loving, supportive manner without necessarily needing to articulate how we felt. As Leali’ie’e introduced me to Tina Valaei, she took and held my hands in her own while listening to him explain the circumstances of Junaid’s death in Samoan, before translating for us both as we spoke quietly together. Tina Valaei then named me her daughter. My tears welled up. Despite never having met, and despite our different languages, we felt ‘kindred’. In that moment, it was like meeting my grandmother again, at home in Adada. My alofa for Tina Valaei and hers for me was instant. During the remainder of the malaga, I connected with her almost every day. It was a particular privilege to support and guide her to her seat, when our group joined the Teleni aiga for a Sunday service at their local church.

It was not only the environment and Tina Valaei I connected with. I also felt connectedness with other members of the Teleni aiga as someone who was from a non-Palagi culture; those of us brought up as part of a minority group have an unspoken way of understanding the shared experience of being ‘other’. Cultural similarities, including the collective way of

⁹ ‘Tina’ is a title given to an honorable matriarch or respected elderly woman in Samoa.

¹⁰ While ‘Shaheed’, in Arabic, can be interpreted in different ways, we have chosen to interpret it here as one who dies for his faith. “Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji’un” is typically translated as “We belong to Allah and to Him we shall return.” In Islam, this dua or prayer is often recited on learning of someone’s death (Abdulla, n.d.-b).

being with aiga and faith-based values had a part to play in how we understood our connectedness too. As a result, rapport and relationships could be built quickly, including with the tamaiti. Their ready recognition of our likenesses engendered an immediate easy familiarity with me. For example, when a Pākehā colleague and I were in one of the smaller fale changing our clothes, several tamaiti came in and began helping me unasked, by taking out clothing from my suitcase, much as would happen back in Adada. Where life is lived communally, attitudes towards privacy are different than where this is not the case; the tamaiti responded to me as they might members of their aiga. They were, however, more reserved with my colleague, recognizing presumably, her dissimilarity to them as Pākehā.

Collectively, these and other experiences of connection and alofa coalesced on our final evening with the Taleni aiga and other villagers at the Fiafia Night prior to our departure from Vaiafai Iva the next day. In Samoa, a Fiafia Night is a night of entertainment that includes traditional singing and dancing. As the energy of the singing and dancing dissipated I felt moved to share a deeply private part of myself – an Arabic dua (prayer). In that unexpected and very emotionally charged moment, it seemed appropriate to publicly express my faith in this way, both as a response to my inclusion in the religious practices of the Taleni aiga and in recognition of our grief – theirs for Katerina and mine for Junaid. This special dua, for this life and the hereafter, asks God for the best in this life and the next: “Rabbana atina fid dunya hasanatan wa fil Aakhirati hasanatan waqina ‘adhaban-nar” (Abdulla, n.d.-a).

My understanding of professionalism has led to a separation of my faith identity from my professional identity, making my recitation of the dua all the more surprising. It is certainly not something I would ordinarily feel comfortable doing. Aotearoa New Zealand is a secular society. While teaching in secondary schools does not have to be explicitly secular, the Education Act 1964 (Section 77) requires teaching in state primary schools to be secular (Ministry of Education, 2019b). In combination, this has served to discourage me from sharing my faith identity in education settings, despite knowing that for many cultures, religious beliefs and practices are central elements of cultural experience (Hannigan, 2020).

As Benita made clear, challenging the privileging of majority culture and knowledge demanded that we think and move outside of the box. While I did not consciously think about the ways in which I am boxed in by secular norms or about the effects of this at the time, in later reflection with my colleagues, I realised that feeling loved and cared for by the aiga enabled me to step outside of the box. The act of reciting the dua brought my faith identity to the fore, allowing me to be more authentically myself in that moment. It proved a powerful reminder of the contribution love and care can make when connecting with Pasifika students and children in school and early childhood education contexts. Through love and care, we make space for their different faith identities and values—something they and their parents have told us is important in a good teacher (Ministry of Education, 2018)—while simultaneously supporting them to be their most authentic selves. As one of the criterion that measures progress towards achieving the vision of the *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030* (Ministry of Education, 2020) states: “Pacific learners’ cultures, faiths and beliefs are valued in education” (p. 13).

Back in our fale and beyond

“Fofola le fala se’i ta talanoa” translates as “spread the mat so that we can talk.” Each evening during the malaga, we returned exhausted but exhilarated to our fale, to spread the mat and talk. We reflected late into the night about the day we and our students had spent together, whether that was at the Taleni aiga compound, out and about in the village, or travelling around beautiful Savai’i. Talanoa, in Samoa, refers to the traditional cultural process and practice of conversation (L. T. T. Taleni, 2017), or a critical exchange of thinking and ideas that can lead to knowledge creation through the co-construction of stories (Vaiioleti, 2006). Our exchange of thinking and ideas unfolded with a dual focus; we storied our own experiences, observations, wonderings, and developing understandings of fa’af Samoa, while also storying our perceptions of the learning that may or may not have been taking place for the students. This process was not only valuable for our professional learning, but also for our collegial relationships. Davey and Ham (2011) suggest that professional learning for teacher educators that is based on collaborative and collegial relationships and is responsive to “localised context and culture” is particularly effective (p. 244). We certainly found this to be the case for us.

Deboxification: Thinking and moving outside of the box

During our late-night talanoa, we began to deconstruct the boxes that were constraining our thinking in an effort to open our minds to other ways of being and doing. Returning to Ratuva’s (2019) observation shared earlier, Palagi built themselves literal and figurative boxes; these signify hegemonic, colonial and neoliberal processes that govern and treat culture and education etc as commodities. As we have attempted to illustrate, the notion of the box drew our attention to the bureaucratic systems, processes, practices and professional norms that boxed our thinking in. The process of deboxification—thinking and moving outside of the box—helped us to take in a wider view and ponder the endless, panoramic horizon – the place where what we know meets with what we don’t know. Leali’ie’e’s *Culturally Based Pedagogy Model* (Figure 1) supported us in this work, by helping us to conceptualise the learning that was taking place for us and our students on the malaga.

Leali’ie’e explained to us that he developed the *Culturally Based Pedagogy Model* (Figure 1) five years ago, to contextualise his thinking about participants’ experiences of the numerous malaga held prior to ours – besides several of his colleagues, participants on each malaga were typically leaders or teachers of Pasifika students, or, as was the case on our malaga, students who would either graduate as teachers of these students or as health professionals. As Leali’ie’e pointed out, the model provides a framework that leaders and teachers can utilise to guide their thinking as they develop the cultural capability to engage Pasifika students and children in their learning. It includes four tulaga (levels) of progression. While these tulaga are based on participants’ experiences on the malaga, they could be achieved through other cultural opportunities.

The first tulaga of the model, *Cultural Exposure and Experience*, reflects the cultural exposure and experience participants on the malaga encounter through observation on their arrival in Samoa. The second tulaga, *Immersion and Engagement*, marks the shift participants make, from observation to the active formation of relationships with the Taleni aiga and other villagers, participation in a range of cultural practices and activities, and a

developing awareness of the ways in which cultural values are embedded within them. According to Leali'ie'e, immersion and engagement is critical; it is where the real learning takes place, as participants start to feel a sense of belonging. Our own immersion in daily aiga and village life was humbling; we were privileged to experience, for example, early morning and evening rituals, meal preparation, child rearing practices, communal prayer, a church service, traditional singing and dancing and more. We began to understand specific cultural values in a lived sense, not only as part of a model we had read about and perhaps puzzled over. We were particularly struck by the collective nature of the aiga and village as a whole; tautua, alofa and respect appeared integral to communal interdependence and were demonstrated by the youngest members of the village through to the very old.

The process of *Building Cultural Competence and Confidence*, begun as part of the second tulaga, continues in the third tulaga; participant learning expands, as ongoing dialogue with the Taleni aiga and other villagers about cultural practices, activities and values further clarifies understandings and thus competence and confidence. Late in the day, Leali'ie'e would often gather us on the fola or the floor of the beautiful Taleni aiga fale to further reflect on and talk about our learning together with the students.

The fola of a fale is the space where talanoa is traditionally enacted – the mat is spread, ready for the conversation or critical exchange of thinking and ideas (L. T. T. Taleni, 2017). As mentioned, in our case, late-night talanoa also took place in our fale, although we sat on our beds rather than on the floor. Vaiotei (2006) suggests a cultural synthesis of the thinking and ideas—the co-construction of stories—alongside the theorizing talanoa makes possible generates relevant knowledge and options for responding to Pasifika issues. As we exchanged our thinking and ideas, co-constructed stories and theorized we built our cultural understandings together as trusted colleagues; this rich opportunity led to new understandings and insights about ways forward. It was through this process that we were able to critically examine the cultural clash of expectations that resulted in the dilemma Benita described about how best to manage the care of our sick student, Renee. In recognising the need to privilege Samoan ways of being and doing and to respect the values of fa'a-Samoa, we came to see that leaving Renee in the loving, competent care of Orita was the right and respectful course of action. Similarly, we were able to unpack Raesha's choice to share a dua, thus considering important questions about faith we have not always paid attention to in our professional settings.

Finally, the last tulaga of the model is *Integration and Implementation of Actions*. The cultural knowledge gained at each of the previous tulaga can be integrated and implemented into education settings. The process of including this cultural knowledge in teaching and learning supports the engagement and success of Pasifika students and children because it is familiar to them. They can be confident their prior knowledge and experiences are connected to the content they are learning. In particular, the cultural values that are at the core of the model can be reflected in pedagogical approaches to this content – a pedagogy of service, a pedagogy of love, a pedagogy of respect and so on. As Leali'ie'e said to us, "This is truly the pedagogy of the heart. [It] develops from students' own cultural capital and funds of knowledge and has the power to drive Pasifika students' learning from possibility into reality."

Co-constructing and sharing our personal stories—during the malaga, with our students and colleagues on our return to Aotearoa New Zealand, and in this article—proved enriching and served to move us towards the integration and implementation of a culturally based pedagogy. We acknowledge that we are at the beginning of this journey; our nets may have been cast deeper, but there is more work to do. In this spirit, we offer several practice messages for initial teacher education and in-service teachers. While these practice messages arose from our Samoa specific experience, they focus on Pasifika communities, students and children more broadly. We acknowledge they may not necessarily be applied to all Pasifika communities, students and children, and, if applied, that the application should be done carefully, recognising that ‘Pacific’ is a homogenising label, which can minimise the uniqueness of each island country or nation’s culture.

Practice messages

1. Learn about key cultural values and what these mean to diverse Pasifika communities. In initial teacher education, explicitly model these values and overtly identify what is being modelled. In schools and early childhood education contexts, embed these values in pedagogy.
2. Be respectful, humble and develop the cultural humility to show service to Pasifika students and children through acting in ways that assist their learning, while also recognising and accepting the ways they and their aiga might show service to us.
3. Meet Pasifika students and children with love and care, supporting them to be their most authentic selves.
4. Create space for talking about aspects of Pacific cultures that might differ from our own or that we may find challenging or difficult to understand.
5. Take time to reflectively engage in ethical dilemmas that arise as a result of cultural differences, working collaboratively with others to make informed decisions.
6. Use *Tapasā* (Ministry of Education, 2018) and the planning template for places of learning in the *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030* (Ministry of Education, 2020) to support both ongoing development of cultural competence and the engagement and success of Pasifika students and children.

While the practice messages here focus on Pasifika communities, students and children, we see potential for their adaption to other ethnic groups.

Conclusion

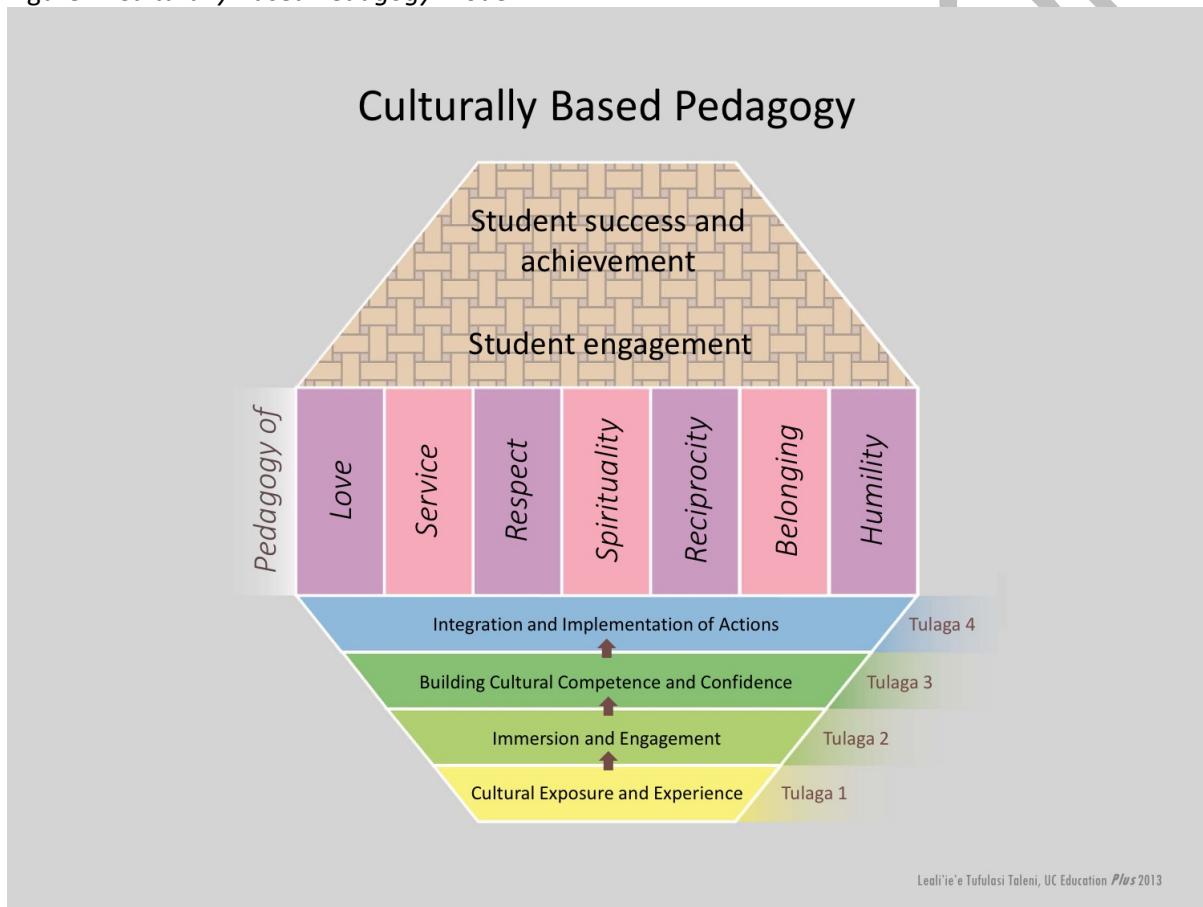
Transforming practices to become more culturally responsive to Pasifika people’s ways of being and doing is difficult from within boxes. Drawing from our experiences on the malaga, we have suggested culturally based pedagogy holds the key to thinking and moving outside of the box. Consistent with *Tapasā* (Ministry of Education, 2018) and the *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030* (Ministry of Education, 2020), we argued that understanding and appreciating Pacific cultural values and integrating these into pedagogy is a critical first step if we are to fully support and facilitate the participation and achievement of Pasifika students and children as Pasifika learners. Moreover, it is a step consistent with the expectation detailed within *Our Code Our Standards* (Education Council, 2017b) to design learning that is responsive to identities, languages and cultures.

In closing, we again acknowledge the passing of Katerina Taleni Tuimaseve and Junaid Ismail. We remember too all those who passed and those who mourn as a result of the devastating measles epidemic in Samoa along with the shaheeds, the injured and others impacted by the Christchurch mosque attacks.

Nā koutou i tangi,
Nā tātau katoa

When you cry,
Your tears are shed by us all

Figure 1. *Culturally Based Pedagogy Model*



Note. From 'E saili i tautai se agava'a - A true leader masters the art of navigation': The impact of effective leadership in raising engagement and achievement of Pasifika learners in New Zealand schools (p. 93), by L. T. T. Taleni, 2017, UC Research Repository. Copyright 2017 L. T. T. Taleni. Reprinted with permission.

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