

PASIFIKA STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR L1 MAINTENANCE AT HOME AND SCHOOL: LANGUAGE TO CLIMB A COCONUT TREE?

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Abstract

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, many Maori and Pasifika students in English-medium schools are either failing within the system or exiting early (Hattie, 2003), whilst those in successfully operating bilingual units are not only exceeding academic grade age norms but are also becoming successful bilingual and bi-literate students (McCaffery et al., 2003). The aim of this study, which adopted a narrative inquiry approach, was to investigate the effects of language shift and/or maintenance on four Pasifika primary school students who recently moved from their Pacific Island homes to a monolingual (English) New Zealand teaching and learning situation. The study found that the participants' strong belief in the importance of maintaining their L1 was juxtaposed against the obvious phenomenon of quite marked language shift to English within a fairly short time period (2-4 years). It is suggested that greater emphasis should be placed on recognising and incorporating students' differing cultural knowledges within the school environment, that closer home-school partnerships should be developed and that current Ministry of Education efforts to provide bilingual support personnel within mainstream classrooms should be supplemented by initiatives designed to foster L1 maintenance, bilingualism and biliteracy.

Introduction

Students of Pacific Island ethnicity are overwhelmingly represented in the mainstream and bilingual classrooms of most South Auckland primary schools. Many of these 'Pasifika' students come from homes in which either their first language or a combination of both their first language and English is spoken. The majority of these students are currently placed in mainstream classrooms where English is the medium of instruction and communication. Often their teachers are members of the majority, monolingual, middle-class culture or even if members of Pasifika cultures, have not been trained to utilize their own (and students') first languages effectively for teaching and learning.

An analysis of Pasifika language use in Auckland reveals that Pasifika languages are in the process of shift and varying degrees of maintenance (Davis, Bell & Starks, 2001). In Manukau City, the 'Polynesian capital of the world' and the region deemed to be the most multilingual area in the whole of New Zealand, the most robust of the Pacific languages are Samoan and Tongan. Although older speakers are more fluent there are fewer of them and "although Samoan and Tongan languages are currently very robust, they are in danger of declining in the same way Cook Islands Maori and the Niuean languages are doing" (Davis et al., 2001, p. 3). Responses by schools are varied with only pockets of high commitment,

evidenced by just seven primary and intermediate schools in the Manukau region currently teaching Pasifika languages.

This article reports on a study which aimed to reveal the language-related stories of four Pasifika students in a South Auckland primary school. All had moved from their Pacific Island home to a home in New Zealand and also to an English-only teaching and learning situation. In this study we aimed to investigate their perceptions of their own language shift and/or maintenance both within the home and school domains.

Research into language maintenance and shift in numerous contexts around the world has been well documented (e.g. de Klerk, 2000; Fishman, 2001; Hulsen et al., 2002; Putz, 1991). Language shift may result when languages come into contact and a community gives up its indigenous language in favour of the language of the dominant group. Reasons for community shift to another language may be economic, political, demographic or due to a lack of realisation that the minority language is actually endangered. In fact language shift is often recognised by a period of “transitional (unstable) bilingualism in which the competing languages are used side by side in a community, with one language progressively intruding into all spheres of the other language” (Pauwels, 2004, p.720). Where the minority language is valued and perceived as a symbol of ethnic identity, it can be maintained longer. In fact unless minority group communities actively work at maintaining their languages, “shift is almost inevitable in many contexts” (Holmes, 2001, p. 59).

Language maintenance occurs when members of a community employ strategies to keep the languages they have always used. Research findings indicate that first-language maintenance is vital to the academic success of minority students (Baker, 2001; Cummins, 1989; McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 1997). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, many Maori and Pasifika minority students in English-medium schools are either failing within the system or exiting early (Hattie, 2003), whilst those in successfully operating bilingual units are not only exceeding academic grade age norms but are also becoming successful bilingual and bi-literate students (McCaffery et al., 2003).

A number of studies have sought to ascertain the academic effectiveness of different types of educational programmes for bilingual learners. Esera's (2001) study sought to identify key components in enhancing Samoan children's academic development. He compared results from two types of bilingual programmes operating in two different Decile 1 primary schools in South Auckland. School 1 used Samoan language as the medium of instruction for half a day a week and at other times intermittently. School 2 operated a full dual-medium programme in which “Samoan was used as the language of instruction and interaction for students from Samoan speaking homes when they started school” (Esera, 2001, p. 3). Esera found that students in School 2 were “achieving significantly higher levels of oracy and literacy in both languages than their counterparts in School 1” (McCaffery et al., 2003, p. 92), and attributed the high level of success in School 2 to the continued use of Samoan language and literacy throughout the entire eight years of schooling, valuing of students' first language, high levels of teacher fluency and professional knowledge, regular collegial discussion, and a clearly articulated school-wide bilingual policy.

A similar study by Aukuso (2002) explored the long-term effects of a seven-year dual medium, Samoan and English programme by studying two groups of Samoan students in the same school in South Auckland. The first group was in an English/Samoan bilingual unit; the

second group was in an English mainstream programme. Aukuso found that Samoan students in the bilingual unit achieved higher individual reading levels by Year 6 than Samoan mainstream students and that the bilingual students were in fact acquiring literacy in both Samoan and English "with their biliteracy having a significant positive impact upon their acquisition of English" (McCaffery et al., 2003, p. 94).

According to Bourdieu (1983), all people possess cultural and linguistic capital (a first language and cultural background knowledge), with some forms of capital being more highly valued than others by society or the dominant culture (in New Zealand's case, the white middle class). People possessing 'appropriate' highly valued linguistic capital are more likely to benefit from higher economic and social status. Corson (2001) argues that schools operate as if all children have equal access to the cultural and linguistic capital that the schools value. Aspects of linguistic capital may include the literacy experiences that five-year-old students bring to school. Children who speak the same language and are familiar with the same types of literacy practices as those of the school are automatically advantaged over others (for example, opinion sharing during shared reading is a common 'Pakeha/palagi' literacy strategy as opposed to rote memorisation of text, a common Pasifika literacy strategy). Children arriving at school with a different cultural and linguistic capital to that of the school may find it difficult not only to acquire the school's valued capital but they may also lose their own.

Norton (2000) cites makes the point that schools need to be centrally concerned with what they can do to address inequalities in educational and social institutions (see also May, 2001; Miller, 2004; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). When minority students in mainstream classrooms lose their first language and culture they may experience a keen sense of displacement and loss, from both the majority and their parents' minority language and culture. Issues of empowerment, therefore, are key to the success (or not) of minority students' school performance. Cummins (1989) argues that minority students are empowered or disabled as a direct result of their interactions with educators in schools. His theoretical framework for intervention specifies a number of institutional characteristics which exert a major influence on minority students' successful performance in schools: in order to empower minority students in educational contexts, their disabling can only be challenged when teaching, learning and assessment focus on the extent to which children's language and culture are incorporated within the school programme (cultural/linguistic incorporation), the extent to which educators collaborate with parents (community participation) and the extent to which children are encouraged to use language (both L1 and L2) actively within the classroom (pedagogy and assessment). These characteristics will be referred to again in the section that follows.

This study then does not discuss in any great depth the various characteristics of language shift and loss (adequately addressed by other sources such as Fishman, 1996, 2001; Baker, 2001; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1995) but rather aims to tell the language stories of its participants and to suggest how educational programmes for bilingual learners in schools could possibly address some of the issues which they raise.

Methodology

The data for this study were collected by means of two in-depth interviews with each of four participants who were encouraged to tell their 'language stories' through a narrative inquiry research approach, incorporating culturally appropriate methodological procedures. All

interviews were conducted by Raewynn Siilata (one of the authors and the participants' ESOL teacher) in English and lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. They took place in the ESOL room at the participants' primary school. Narrative inquiry aligns itself comfortably with qualitative research methodologies where researchers "see themselves as participants in the situations they investigate" (Edge & Richards, 1998, p. 336). Furthermore, the typically humanistic and naturalistic characteristics of qualitative research are seen to be "integral to the refinement of a Pasifika research methodology" (Anae et al., 2001, p. 32):

There is a growing engagement amongst researchers in Pacific communities with qualitative research methodologies such as ethnographic research approaches. ... For example there exists the "life story" model of information gathering where the interview is conducted and organised according to how the issue has been experienced or perceived throughout the different stages of the interviewee's life. Or, there are the semi-structured or structured interview topic guides where the researcher selects relevant topics for discussion, noting probes where necessary, and basically attempting to cover ... those pre-selected areas of discussion with each interviewee.

Narrative inquiry involves telling the story that the participants are still living where "the people, schools and educational landscapes we study undergo day-by-day experiences that are contextualized within a longer-term historical narrative" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19). There is a three-dimensional intersecting narrative inquiry space, encompassing place or sequence of places, personal and social (inwards and outwards) dimensions and past/present/future (backwards and forwards) time domains. This narrative inquiry space served as a guide during both data collection (the interviews) and analysis processes. We were at all times aware that the participants' stories involved events across time and place while interacting with many different people, and by maintaining focus on these dimensions we were better able to make sense of their articulated lived experiences.

Analysis consisted of coding the data for salient themes, which were then categorised, patterns in and between the categories were identified and finally interpretations of these arrangements were made (see Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The categories are represented by the four sub-sections which constitute the Findings section below, and which match quite closely the features of Cummins' (1989) model discussed briefly above: (1) L1 communication, (2) student identity, (3) home/school interaction, and (4) student/school interaction. Finally, in analysing the narrative interviews, we take a critical empowerment position (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Fairclough, 1989; May, 1999; McCaffery et al., 2003; Pennycook, 2001). This position recognises that hidden, taken-for-granted assumptions and conventions need to be uncovered to expose unequal power relations, which can be transformed by resisting the exercise and effects of illegitimate power (Fairclough, 1989).

The four participants in the study were of Pasifika ethnicity (Samoan and Tongan), and were aged between eight and ten years (see Table 1). They had immigrated with their families to New Zealand during the past two to four years and their first language was spoken at home. They had varying degrees of fluency in their first language and English and were currently attending ESOL withdrawal classes to assist in English language support across the curriculum. The four participants were purposively selected as migrants who had arrived in Aotearoa/New Zealand with a strong first language and were then placed in English speaking mainstream classes. They were thus Pasifika students interacting in two worlds: the English speaking world of primary school and the L1 world of home and community.

Table 1: Brief description of participants

Name	Language	Gender	Age	Length of stay in NZ	Family Composition	Language background prior to entering NZ
Tani	Samoaan	Male	10	2 years	Mother/father, eldest of 2 children, 1 younger sister	Fluent first language speaker of Samoaan, little knowledge of English
Moni	Samoaan	Male	10	4 years	Mother/father, eldest of 3 boys	Fluent first language speaker of Samoaan, little knowledge of English
Sita	Tongan	Female	8	2 years	Mother/father, middle child with 2 sisters	Fluent first language speaker of Tongan, little knowledge of English
Leta	Tongan	Female	9	2 years	Mother/father, oldest child with 2 sisters	Fluent first language speaker of Tongan, little knowledge of English

Findings

L1 communication

All four of the students in this study had been fluent in their first language before coming to New Zealand. Samoaan or Tongan had been the language of communication within the family and community in their island homes. Since coming to New Zealand it was apparent that the language of communication in different places and with different people had been changing. In answer to the question Did you speak Samoaan in your village? Tani replied: "Yes, because everyone speaks Samoaan in Samoa. But here in New Zealand, there's lots of English."

In all four cases students were now tending to speak English to more people than they had previously, including their mothers and siblings. When asked how he thought his language had changed since coming to New Zealand, Tani replied, "I speak English a lot and Samoaan a little bit". Moni also had some comments to make regarding how his language and life had changed since coming to New Zealand:

Extract 1

Moni: I'm used to listening to people that speak in Samoaan to me 'cause that was my country.

Rae: So when you were at home in Samoa, did you speak Samoaan all the time?

Moni: Yes. I didn't know a lot of English.

Rae: So you spoke Samoaan to your Mum and Dad and brothers?

Moni: Yes.

Rae: And were there any other places that you went that you would speak Samoan?

Moni: Yes.

Rae: Where?

Moni: When I go to church, to... my nana's house or when I talk to my friends.

Rae: So everywhere? You spoke Samoan everywhere?

Moni: Yes.

Extract 2

Rae: Do you think you are speaking more English now than you were in Samoa?

Moni: Yes.

Rae: Why?

Moni: Because my life has changed now.

Rae: Oh, how has it changed?

Moni: I'm not used to Samoa, I'm used to New Zealand.

Tani and Moni explain that their language of communication with their fathers still tended to be their L1.

Extract 3

Rae: When do you speak Samoan and when do you speak English?

Tani: I speak Samoan to my mum and dad, mainly my dad because he doesn't speak English.

Extract 4

Rae: Do they want you to answer back in Samoan or in English?

Moni: Samoan. But I speak to my Mum in English.

Rae: What about to your dad?

Moni: I speak Samoan to him all the time.

Sita, however, intimates that the reason that she responds in English is due to her lack of proficiency in Tongan:

Extract 5

Rae: Do you still speak Tongan to your mum and dad?

Sita: No, I speak English.

Rae: Oh, do you, why?

Sita: Because I can't say the Tongan words properly ... they speak to us in Tongan and we answer back in English.

Leta also explains her differing language use with her mother and father.

Extract 6

Rae: When do you speak Tongan now? Do you ever speak Tongan?

Leta: Yeah, sometimes when I don't understand what my mum tells me in Tongan, I speak Tongan to her and sometimes she speaks English to me and then I speak English to her.

Rae: What about your dad?

Leta: Yeah, oh much because my dad doesn't know how to speak in English. ... He always speaks in Tongan to me and I understand.

Rae: So when you speak to your dad, do you mainly speak back in Tongan?

Leta: Yeah.

Rae: And your mum?

Leta: Both.

These interactions reveal that the children's language is indeed shifting to English and that it has already had quite a major effect on family communication. Communication within the family now often occurs in English, unless parents have difficulty understanding the interaction. Children then attempt to speak their L1, although not always successfully. For these fairly recent migrants to New Zealand, English is now spoken in most interactions with others (school, siblings, friends, church) apart from when it is necessary to use their first language with those who don't understand English (for example, their fathers and sometimes their mothers). The result of this changing language use has implications not only for family communication and continuity but also with regard to personal identity and academic success.

Despite the children's personal perceptions of their own language shift, they all still professed a desire to be able to pass their L1 onto their own children when they grew up. They also believed that maintenance of their first language could assist with job security, and that they would prefer to have both languages rather than English only.

Extract 7

Rae: Do you think it will help you to get a good job if you speak Samoan and English?

Tani: Yes.

Rae: Or do you think it's more important just to have English?

Tani: Oh nah, I want to have both.

Rae: Why?

Tani: Because if someone speaks English to me I can answer them back, if someone speaks Samoa to me I can answer them back too.

Rae: What language will you speak to your children when you grow up?

Tani: Maybe Samoa?

Rae: Would you like your children to be able to speak Samoan?

Tani: Yes.

Rae: Would you rather they speak Samoan or English?

Tani: I like them to learn both.

These interactions clearly reveal that these Pasifika students in mainstream settings are indeed experiencing both language shift and varying degrees of maintenance of their first languages (depending on level of support from home and parents). Maintenance appeared to depend solely on parental commitment, with little or no commitment to L1 maintenance evident at school. All four participants wanted to maintain their first language as well as acquire English, which was viewed as 'a future passport to success.' However it was apparent that all participants had experienced quite marked shift within a fairly short time period (2-4 years).

Student identity

Identity is inextricably linked to language and culture and in fact "memories framed in stories are integral to identity" (Kearney, 2003, p. 85). Identities are continually evolving, and we agree with Kearney (2003) who says that identities are in fact "fluid and mobile" (p. 108). Three of the four participants, when asked about personal identity still saw themselves

as either Samoan or Tongan, comfortable communicating in both languages, despite obvious language shift.

Extract 8

- Rae: Do you feel more comfortable speaking in English or speaking in Samoan?
 Tani: Both of them.
 Rae: Both of them, that's good. So would you spend more of your time speaking in English or more of your time speaking in Samoan?
 Tani: Speaking English.
 Rae: So for you – who do you see yourself as ... a New Zealand boy or a Samoan boy?
 Tani: A Samoan boy.
 Rae: And why, why do you see yourself as a Samoan boy?
 Tani: Because I'm from Samoa.

Tani also talks about links between language and identity. His sense of ownership of his language is strong.

Extract 9

- Rae: Do you think you would still feel you're a Samoan boy if you couldn't speak Samoan?
 Tani: Yeah.
 Rae: Do you think it's important to speak Samoan if you're a Samoan?
 Tani: Yes.
 Rae: Why?
 Tani: 'Cause that's my language.

Tani recognised that in order to maintain Samoan, he needed to speak it at home, despite the fact that this wasn't always happening in reality.

Extract 10

- Rae: Do you think your parents should tell you to speak Samoan at home?
 Tani: Yeah.
 Rae: Why?
 Tani: So that if I can speak Samoan at home and if I come to school I can speak English.
 Rae: Why do you think you should keep Samoan?
 Tani: 'Cause I like Samoan.

Moni also had a strong sense of his Samoan identity, but seemed unsure about a New Zealand identity.

Extract 11

- Rae: Do you see yourself as a Samoan boy or a New Zealand boy?
 Moni: A Samoan boy.
 Rae: Why's that?
 Moni: Because I respect my country.
 Rae: So?
 Moni: I'm proud to be Samoan.
 Rae: Do you want to be a New Zealand boy as well?
 Moni: Umm, kind of.

From these interactions, it can be seen that the children still value their first language and desire to speak it and pass it on to their own children when they grow up. They recognise, however, that their language use is changing and that interaction is occurring more often in English, in a range of places and with a variety of people. They also realise that the linguistic demands of home are different to those of school. The students' perception of English as the language of the 'culture of power' (Delpit, 1988) is supported by Fishman (1996) who argues that ethnolinguistic consciousness is not necessarily positive. Although the students all wanted to continue to speak their L1 when they grew up, they tended to view the acquisition of English as more advantageous.

This view is supported by Phillipson (1992) who argues that choice of a particular language as the medium of instruction should not "imply condemnation of other languages to low positions in a hierarchical linguistic ordering or the exclusion of particular groups from access to power and resources" (p. 105). The students themselves believe, as Delpit (1988) suggests, that in order to succeed in the culture of power, they need to successfully acquire the linguistic form and communicative strategies of English. In fact Tani intimates that he thinks Samoan will be helpful only in Samoa.

Extract 12

Rae: Do you think that you have to be able to speak good English to do well when grow up?

Tani: Yes.

Rae: Why?

Tani: Um because if I don't know English then I won't be able to do things properly.

Rae: Do you think you will need to be able to speak good Samoan to do well when you grow up?

Tani: Oh when I'm in Samoa.

Rae: Only in Samoa?

Tani: Yeah.

Mills (2004) describes Punjabi mothers in the UK and their desire for their children to learn English while at the same time signaling "an ambivalent attitude toward it and regret at its almost predatory nature, the way it had eroded the language in the home. Ironically, as part of their mothering duties the women had promoted English, recognizing it as the route to educational success. Their children's ability in English had become at odds with their desire to maintain their mother tongue" (p184). The participants in this study also described a conflict between their parents' desire that they not only become proficient at English but also maintain their mother tongue. When asked about how their parents felt about maintenance of their first language, it was obvious that parents were keen for their children to continue to communicate successfully in the language of the family.

Extract 13

Rae: Who encourages you to speak Samoan? Anybody?

Tani: My mum.

Rae: Your mum?

Tani: She told me that um if you speak English um, sometimes she'll give me a smack.

Rae: How do you feel about that?

Tani: Bad.

But then later Tani intimates that his Mum is also keen for him to acquire English.

Extract 14

Rae: Do you think you are swinging more to speaking English now than Samoan?

Tani: Yeah.

Rae: You are? How does that feel?

Tani: I don't mind.

Rae: What about your family?

Tani: They don't mind too.

Rae: Oh ... your mum said not to speak English?

Tani: Yeah, if I speak English too much.

Rae: She's not happy?

Tani: Oh nah, she is, but she told us to try to speak Samoan, so that we can learn both languages.

Home/school interaction

The children see their lives at home as being distinctly different from their school lives. School was seen as being quite separate from home, however their parents appeared to be more involved with their schooling in New Zealand than they had been in the islands, which the children viewed quite positively.

Extract 15

Rae: Do your parents have more to do with your school here than in Tonga?

Leta: Yes, they tell me, 'What did you learn, did you learn anything?' I say, 'Yes.' I like my parents to ask about school so they know I learn stuff. And they help me with my homework.

Rae: Who does?

Leta: My dad works. My mum helps. She sits down with me and anything I'm stuck with she helps me, but sometimes she helps my other sister. When I don't understand what the homework's talking about, she talks in Tongan.

Rae: Does that help?

Leta: Yes I found it easy, it helps when she talks Tongan.

Community participation results in the empowerment of both students and their families. The Ministry of Education recognises the importance of home-school partnerships in order to foster academic success and empowerment of minority group students. Their professional development programme (Ministry of Education, 2003) which operates in schools with high numbers of Pasifika students, for example, has the aim of promoting greater continuity between home and school literacy and numeracy practices.

Student/school interaction

The children had mixed responses regarding the possibility of using their L1 for teaching and learning. They also either didn't know if the school valued their first language, or felt that it didn't. Tani appeared not to want to be different from others in the class, although when probed further, he felt that learning in Samoan would be helpful.

Extract 16

- Rae: Do you think that your language, Samoan language and culture, do you think that it's important at [name of school]?
- Tani: Oh, I don't know.
- Rae: Do you think the teachers here or the school value or think Samoan is important?
- Tani: I don't know.
- Rae: Do you think that Samoan is as important as English?
- Tani: Yeah.
- Rae: Do you want to be able to use Samoan in your class?
- Tani: Nah, 'cause I like to speak Samoan not at school but at home.
- Rae: Why?
- Tani: 'Cause I get shy when I speak Samoan. Everybody looks at me and then they won't understand me.
- Rae: Would you like to be in a class where they teach you in Samoan?
- Tani: Yeah.
- Rae: What do you think it would be helpful for? What things would you like to learn in Samoan rather than English?
- Tani: To um...climb a coconut tree and...
- Rae: What about things like maths and science and social studies?
- Tani: We do social studies at Samoa.
- Rae: So would you like to do something like that in Samoan rather than in English?
- Tani: I don't know.

Tani was obviously not comfortable to use Samoan in his mainstream classroom with either his teacher or his classmates (even though there are other Samoan students in the class). He would, however, like to be in a class where Samoan is used as the medium of instruction. It was interesting that Tani's only response to what could be learnt in Samoan was related to "climbing a coconut tree". He appeared to have no understanding of the possibility of using Samoan as the language of instruction for teaching and learning. In fact, when asked about his Samoan school experience, his perception of the language of instruction was very interesting.

Extract 17

- Rae: Do you think it would be good to learn maths in Samoan?
- Tani: Nah.
- Rae: Did you do that in Samoa?
- Tani: Yeah, I learn it in nothing. I didn't learn it in English or Samoan.

Moni, however, was a lot clearer about what he would prefer in a classroom and his perception of the extent of the school's valuing of Samoan.

Extract 18

- Rae: Do you prefer being taught in English or Samoan?
- Moni: In Samoan.

Extract 19

- Rae: Do you think that our school values Samoan and the Samoan culture?
- Moni: Hmmm, no.
- Rae: What about in the classroom, would you like to be able to learn things in Samoan?
- Moni: Yes.
- Rae: Why?

Moni: It would help me.

Although convinced that it would help him academically to be able to learn in Samoan, he revealed that he would not be comfortable to speak in Samoan unless his teacher was Samoan. He also seemed unsure about what he could use Samoan for, possibly revealing his perception of Samoan as the language of the home only rather than as a language for the classroom.

Extract 20

Rae: So would you feel comfortable to use Samoan in your class?

Moni: No.

Rae: What about if you had a Samoan teacher?

Moni: Yes.

Rae: So what areas would you like to use Samoan in?

Moni: The playground and the field and sometimes the footpath (Moni: 117-122).

Sita and Leta also indicated that they would like to be able to use Tongan for teaching and learning in the classroom, and that it would help their comprehension of classroom talk.

Extract 21

Rae: What about school? Would you like to be in a class that has both Tongan and English?

Sita: Yes.

Rae: Why?

Sita: So um ... um ... because sometimes I make mistakes and I can talk in Tongan.

Rae: And that would help you?

Sita: Yes.

Rae: Do you think that the teachers in our school, do you think that they think that Tongan is important?

Sita: No.

Extract 22

Rae: Would you like to be in a class where you can learn in Tongan as well as English?

Leta: Yeah.

Rae: Would it help?

Leta: Yeah, because sometimes in class I can't understand.

Rae: So if you had a teacher that could speak Tongan and English, do you think it would help your learning?

Leta: Yeah.

It is clear that all the participants felt that their L1 would be helpful for comprehension of classroom content and subsequent academic success, and at the same time, their comments perhaps express some disquiet about the value the school places on the importance of their first language.

Conclusion

Nuthall (1999) states that students "negotiate and participate in classroom activities according to their prior knowledge, self esteem, ability to sustain relationships and obtain information through social interaction, status and ability to trade. In short, the social,

cultural and cognitive are inextricably implicated in student learning" (p. 189). The findings of our study highlight the need for children's differing cultural knowledges to be recognised and incorporated at school, while at the same time contesting the "differential cultural capital attributed to them as a result of wider hegemonic power relations" (May, 1999, p. 32). Subjugated knowledges should be revalued and utilised in the classroom.

Although it seems unlikely that mainstream schools, management, teachers and classrooms will be able to incorporate learning of Pasifika languages without Ministry support, schools and teachers can certainly go some way towards incorporating culturally responsive contexts for learning. Ladson-Billings (1994; 1995) advocates the adoption of culturally relevant pedagogies which develop students academically, nurtures cultural competence and develops critical consciousness, and the New London Group's Multiliteracies Project (Kalantzis & Cope, 1999) suggest ways in which this can be accomplished. Further consolidation could eventuate through official school support of L1 maintenance; for example, through newsletters, signage, and classroom enrichment programmes that overtly incorporate aspects of students' first languages as well as culturally meaningful teaching and learning practices.

Furthermore, through home-school partnership initiatives, Pasifika families are being encouraged to maintain the rich L1 of the home and to participate actively in their children's school learning. Participants' perceptions of the separation between home and school were clearly defined in this study. However, students also intimated that they enjoyed the fact that their parents were more involved with their learning in New Zealand than they had been in the islands. It seems clear that schools need to further develop closer home-school partnerships. These are being achieved through management policies, which actively promote community ownership of the school as well as teacher promotion of power-sharing, interactive relationships with students and their whanau. Active listening by teachers is at the heart of positive relationships with students and their whanau (Bishop, 2003). These characteristics typify Cummins' (1989) intercultural orientation in which community participation is collaborative rather than exclusionary and minority parent participation in children's academic progress is actively encouraged. Schools that become part of their communities and incorporate community patterns of teaching, learning and language, will ultimately provide more effective instruction for their Pasifika students (Phillips et al., 2001).

Participants' perceptions that the school did not value or actively encourage maintenance of their first language and culture lend support to the literature referred to previously, which argues for greater incorporation of student linguistic and cultural capital. Bishop (2003) in his 'Te Toi Huarewa' study of effective teaching and learning strategies in Maori-medium educational settings pinpointed a number of strategies that were used by Year 1-5 teachers who had been identified as being effective. Although specific to Maori-medium settings, these strategies are also supported by other Ministry of Education research documents (Alton-Lee, 2003; Biddulph, Biddulph, & Biddulph, 2003; Franken & McComish, 2003) and can be equally applied to Pasifika students. Some of Bishop's (2003) effective strategies that relate to this study include recognising the prior learning and experiences of children as the starting point for learning, relating material used to the child's world view and creating culturally appropriate and culturally responsive contexts for learning.

Effective teaching of Pasifika students could incorporate ways of teaching, learning and language use which children bring with them to school. These include: texts with Pasifika images; topics and language using recitation in classroom activities which build on Pasifika children's expertise from church and family literacy practices as an instructional strategy; and capitalising on tuakana/teina (older/younger, more able/less able) relationships in peer tutoring to personalise instruction (Alton-Lee, 2003). Many schools working with Pasifika students are already incorporating these strategies in their programmes.

Though the findings of this study are limited, they provide a snapshot of Pasifika mainstream students' perceptions of the effects of their first language shift and maintenance. The participants' strong belief in the importance of first language maintenance is juxtaposed against the obvious phenomenon of rapid language shift, which is so clearly affecting them on a personal level, in their homes, at school and in community relationships. Recent efforts by the Ministry of Education to provide bilingual support personnel in mainstream classrooms is to be commended. It is, however, an initiative that aims to facilitate bilingual learners' acquisition of English rather than supporting and developing first language maintenance, bilingualism or biliteracy. Current best practice literature clearly outlines the crucial importance of the above, not only to maintain language, but also to provide a framework for personal and academic empowerment of minority students in majority-culture educational settings. Brutt-Griffler (2002) takes the discussion even further by saying that "it would seem to be more important to place special emphasis on the need for and efficacy of bilingual education for all, without couching it in terms of minorities, collective rights and mother tongues" (p. 230). It is hoped that those in positions of power will seek to hear the 'soon silenced' languages of Pasifika peoples, so that children like Tani will begin to believe that their first languages are useful, for more than merely 'climbing a coconut tree'.

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