Family and Community Empowerment through Bilingual Education

Patisepa Tuafuti and John McCaffery
Faculty of Education, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

In recent years, numerous educational programmes have been developed that have been aimed at raising the academic achievement and wider participation of Pasifika students in New Zealand society. One example of this, which has to date only been explored at local school level, is bilingual/immersion education. The arguments underlying this paper are that while the development of bilingual/immersion education models are crucially important for the academic success of Pasifika students, they are not, in themselves, enough. A critical empowerment approach and perspective is also required in order to address the wider issues, and power relations, that inevitably frame, and delimit, the development of first language models of education for minority students in Aotearoa/New Zealand, as elsewhere. This paper begins by providing relevant background on Pasifika languages and educational achievement in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and related educational policy towards Pasifika students. The remainder of the paper focuses on a recently completed 10-year project involving the development of Samoan bilingual education at Finlayson Park Primary School, a primary (elementary) school in South Auckland. The project was developed by the authors in partnership with local Samoan families, community and the school, and was specifically underpinned by theoretical research-based models of empowerment. Discussion of this particular school highlights just what can be achieved when a critical empowerment approach to bilingual/immersion education is undertaken, not least when such a programme has been developed within a wider national educational policy environment that neither supports nor resources it.

Keywords: Pasifika education, bilingual/immersion education, empowerment, New Zealand

Introduction

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Pacific Islanders (now known as Pasifika or Pasefika peoples) make up approximately 8% (250,000) of the total population (Statistics New Zealand, 2004, 2005). Seventy-seven per cent of the total New Zealand Pasifika population lives in Auckland, New Zealand’s largest city, making up over 15% of the total Auckland population. Sixteen per cent live in the capital city, Wellington, and the remaining 17% are spread throughout the country. There are six main Pasifika groups in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The majority of these are Samoan, 75% (120,000), followed by Cook Islands Māori, 19% (49,019), Tongan, 18% (35,389), Niuean, 12.5% (20,000), Fijian, 0.07% (8695) and Tokelauan 0.04% (5000). Approximately 50% of the Pasifika population is under 20 years of age, with 15% under the age of five years. This is a significantly younger age profile compared with other groups in Aotearoa/New Zealand, where collectively 29% are under 20 and 8% are under 5 years of age (New Zealand Yearbook, 1996 Census; data updated). By 2035, it is...
predicted that only 33% of the total New Zealand population will be of Palagi (European) heritage, with the other 66% comprising mostly Māori, Pasifika and Asian ethnicities.

Pasifika peoples are also statistically among the most disempowered and disadvantaged ethnic groups in New Zealand society. Pasifika peoples have the lowest adult literacy and school achievement levels of any group in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Pasifika children make up the bottom 40% of underachievers in education (Nash, 2000). Only half of all Pasifika people in New Zealand aged 15 years and over have some form of educational qualification. The average Pasifika income is the lowest of all identifiable groups at NZ$12,400 per annum, versus the New Zealand average of NZ$30,000. Pasifika people feature disproportionately in poor health, poverty, housing, unemployment and crime statistics. Breaking out of these historical patterns is an urgent priority before it becomes fixed as an intergenerational cycle that could establish itself as ‘the Pacific way’ in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

**Belonging in New Zealand**

Pasifika peoples began migrating in large numbers to Aotearoa/New Zealand in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Pasifika migrants were welcomed for the cheap labour they provided in New Zealand’s manufacturing industries, and the wider economy, at the time (Gray, in Rata et al., 2001: 196). However, other aspects of their languages and cultures were less readily accommodated. For example, the right to maintain a Pasifika language was not countenanced, primarily on the basis of their migrant status, and consequently New Zealand-born Pasifika peoples are now nearly three times less likely to speak a Pasifika language than Pacific-born people in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2004, 2005).

At one time or another, Aotearoa/New Zealand had had administrative responsibility for Niue, Cook Islands, Samoa and the Tokelau Islands (New Zealand Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Pacific Affairs, 2000). As a result of this history, Niueans, Cook Islands Māori and Tokelauns are still New Zealand citizens and have free access to the country. Their languages, then, are languages of a significant group of New Zealand’s citizens, but as yet lack any official recognition or support. Many Pasifika families are also now in their third generation, as grandchildren of the original migrants. In 2004, over 60% of all Pasifika people were also born in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and this percentage is projected to rise rapidly. As Mara argues (in Rata et al., 2001: 201): ‘the challenge for Pacific nations peoples since the time of first settlement, has been that of retaining our own identities, languages and cultural values in a foreign and largely monolingual, [monocultural] country’ (see also May, this issue). Accordingly, some Pasifika communities now find themselves in the position where their heritage languages and cultures face rapid loss in the second and third generation and where these languages will likely only survive with the assistance and direct intervention of the education system (Fishman, 2000; May, 2001, 2002b; McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2003; see also below)
The Current Position of Pasifika Languages in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Pasifika children’s bilingualism in Aotearoa/New Zealand has become the subject of considerable professional and community interest in recent times, as high levels of Samoan language use continue in homes and community, whereas several other Pasifika community languages have wavered, and their use has declined over time (see Bell et al., 2000; Davis et al., 2000; Lameta-Tufuga, 1994; Statistics New Zealand, 2004; Tuafuti, 1997, 2000). Data from the 1996 and 2000 national censuses in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and a local research project (Bell et al., 2000; Davis et al., 2000), show that the Samoan and Tongan languages are currently still secure in the middle generations above 35 years of age. Samoan, Tongan and other Pasifika languages, however, show early signs of serious erosion amongst the school-age population, with an increasing number unable to understand or speak their heritage languages. The first stage in this erosion is evidenced by the large numbers of Pasifika children who can still understand their heritage language(s), but choose to speak only English (Statistics New Zealand, 2004).

The position of the Samoan language appears at present to be stronger than other Pasifika languages for several reasons. A desire for academic success for Samoan children, alongside an ongoing concern for language maintenance and revival, remain the central issues for many Samoan parents and the wider New Zealand Samoan community (Esera, 2001; Hunkin-Tuilefuga, 2001; Tuafuti, 2000). In other words, Samoans continue to hold on to their first generation ambitions and drive for both success in English and in academic qualifications, as well as maintenance of their language and Faasamoa (Samoan cultural perspectives, values, obligations, language and practices) (see Bell et al., 2000; Davis et al., 2000; Esera, 2001; Statistics New Zealand, 2004; Tuafuti 1997, 2004). The latter concern may also relate to the fact that, in contrast to other Pasifika groups, Samoans have arrived in New Zealand later, mostly in the last 15 years.

The dual emphasis on academic achievement and Samoan language maintenance has also been specifically supported since 1995 by the Ulimasao Bilingual Association, based in Auckland. Ulimasao began in 1995 to use strategic planning and put formal measures in place that would promote the continued use of Samoan as both a medium for Samoan social and cultural life and for promoting academic learning among the preschool and school age Samoan population. As a result, there are 18 Samoan bilingual primary school projects currently in operation (McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2003).

Institutional support for other Pasifika languages, and the related strength of these languages, is not so evident, however. Indeed, we argue that unless widespread bilingual/immersion education programmes are established within the next few years, several Pasifika languages, notably Cook Islands Māori and Niuean, will cease to have another generation of speakers. Indeed, without ongoing support, even Samoan and Tongan language loss would still be likely to occur by the next generation (Bell et al., 2000; May, 2002b; McCaffery & Fuatavai, 2002; Statistics New Zealand, 2004). This is further exacerbated by a clear lack of interest of the New Zealand Ministry of
Education in supporting bilingual/immersion education (see also May, this issue). Two recent Ministry of Education reports (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2003, 2004) claimed, for example, that so many Pasifika students were now English-speaking that first language bilingual education was rapidly fading as an option for them. This view ignores, however, substantial wider research that indicates that disempowered English-speaking minority students benefit equally from quality bilingual/immersion programmes, as do L1 minority language speakers (May et al., 2004; Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002).

We believe, then, that all Pasifika languages in Aotearoa/New Zealand are entering a critical phase, where only preschool/school-based bilingual/immersion education offers any significant chance of arresting their inevitable decline over time. Such education also provides a clear opportunity for improving the educational achievements of Pasifika students more generally, as the majority of Pasifika students have, to date, only had experience of English submersion educational approaches, and have consequently fared less well than they might otherwise in programmes that specifically fostered their bilingualism and biliteracy (see Baker, 2001; Cummins, 2000; May et al., 2004; McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2003; see also Tagoilelagi-Leota et al., this issue).

### Pasifika Students’ Current Academic Achievements

Historically, the blame for Pasifika educational failure has been placed squarely on the supposed deficiencies of Pasifika families, languages, and cultural values and traditions, rather than on the structural disempowerment experienced by Pasifika peoples, including the failure of the education system to cater adequately for them. Such deficit thinking in relation to minority language speakers is, of course, also widely evident elsewhere (see Cummins, 1989; May, 2002a, 2002b; Neville-Tisdal & Milne, 2003).

However, the comparatively low academic achievement of Pasifika children, averaging under the 40th percentile, has finally begun to receive more serious attention in relation to systemic issues from both research and intervention programmes, including the development and trialling of bilingual/immersion education.³

Policy initiatives from the New Zealand Ministry of Education, however, remain far more circumscribed and circumspect with respect to Pasifika bilingual/immersion education. The recent Pasifika Education Plan (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2001) aims, for example, to raise Pasifika educational achievement via the promotion of a wide range of initiatives. However, none of these, as yet, includes bilingual/immersion education. Instead, the Pasifika Plan has promoted to date the following rather eclectic/disparate range of projects: early childhood education (ECE) participation projects, substantial investment in ESOL, Pasifika teacher scholarships for postgraduate study, an ECE/primary liaison project, community capacity building, cooperative learning, reflective practice, learning within the community, a digital ITS Pasifika project, home school partnerships, family literacy, Pasifika teacher aides in classes, Pasifika language teaching projects, Pasifika mathematics initiatives, adult literacy, literacy in the home, a literacy taskforce and a literacy project.
While clearly well intentioned, it is our view that the lack of a coordinated strategy towards addressing Pasifika educational achievement and the exclusion of bilingual/immersion education both seriously weaken the potential influence/impact of this wider initiative. Perhaps as a result, researchers report that, by and large, Pasifika academic achievement has not improved significantly over this time and that the gap between the educational achievements of first language speakers of English and bilingual Pasifika speaking students – the so-called, ‘home language gap’ (see May, this issue for further discussion) – remains intact (see Nash, 2000; Wilkinson, 1998 for further analysis).

**Official Policies of the New Zealand State**

The New Zealand Ministry of Education has thus clearly been influential in directing the policy direction away from bilingual/immersion initiatives for Pasifika communities (see McCaffery & Tuafuti, 1998; NZEI, 2002 for useful critiques here). As such, a brief critical examination of the policies and practices of the New Zealand state is necessary for an understanding of why and how this disempowering strategy is now being resisted by a growing number of Pasifika leaders and communities. Such a critical examination also seeks to find ways to bring about change so that bilingual/immersion education can come to be included and promoted in the official policy agenda, and be fully explored and examined for what it has to offer Pasifika learners in New Zealand schools. While this is not the direct focus of this paper, it is an important aspect of empowerment and resistance requiring our attention.

Before exploring these issues further, however, a significant exception to the general reluctance towards recognising the significance of Pasifika languages, both within and beyond education, has been demonstrated by the Ministry of Pacific Affairs (MINPAC). Since 2000, in particular, the MINPAC strategy has supported Pasifika communities in expressing and exploring their aspirations, and has sought to support associated language maintenance and revival goals. MINPAC has also challenged the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s dismissal of bilingual education policy, and has sought, and achieved, recognition of the special status of Niuean, Cook Islands and Tokelauan communities and their languages in the New Zealand constitutional framework. Nonetheless, MINPAC does not feature significantly in the state’s hierarchy of power, and their funding, influence and priorities are thus severely restricted. They remain, however, a significant moral voice for Pasifika language rights, and continue to be committed to the long-term empowerment of Pasifika peoples as full and active members of the New Zealand community (New Zealand Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Pacific Affairs, 2000).

Elsewhere, however, the concerns of Pasifika languages and cultures are far less evident. After 150 years of struggle by the indigenous Māori for language rights, the New Zealand state now supports Māori language bilingual/immersion education (see also May, this issue). It does so because New Zealand courts have ruled that it is required to do so under the provisions of the New Zealand constitutional founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi (McMurchy-Pilkington, 2001, 2004). Hence, Māori are now seen as having
constitutional treaty language rights that other minorities do not have. What is potentially problematic here though is that this constitutional recognition is increasingly being used by state institutions, such as education, as a reason for not providing other language groups with any language rights or recognition by the state (see also May, this issue). Such ‘divide and rule’ discourse is common in colonial and postcolonial settings (Said, 1978). It can be argued, however, that Aotearoa/New Zealand clearly does have a special historical and constitutional relationship with the Pacific nations and peoples, one which is very different from its relationship with other migrant countries, and which thus could and should be recognised in a national languages policy.

In reality, it is our opinion that this political discourse is also underpinned by a fear of the possible financial costs of recognising Pasifika language rights within education (New Zealand Cabinet, 2002). Once recognised, state officials believe there would be consequent obligations to fund support for many languages other than English and Māori (New Zealand Cabinet, 2002). This position is also conveniently supported by the ongoing absence of a ‘national languages policy’ or education language policy in Aotearoa/New Zealand to guide decision-making in this area. The absence of a policy means Pasifika languages receive no official recognition or place in New Zealand society or education, except by grace and favour. The absence of an official policy has been the subject of much criticism and debate among language educators in New Zealand for at least the last 15 years (see, for example, TESOLANZ 1990–2005, the publication of the New Zealand TESOL organisation), not least because a draft national languages policy was proposed in the early 1990s (see Waite, 1992a, 1992b), but subsequently never acted upon.

This issue of language rights for minorities has also been critically examined in depth in the ongoing work of Stephen May (1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2004). May shows why it is necessary, and how it is possible, to recognise both indigenous and migrant language rights in national policies. Recently also, the New Zealand Human Rights Commission, a state organisation, issued a draft statement on language rights in Aotearoa/New Zealand that does recognise the special place of Pasifika communities and languages (Human Rights Commission, 2004, 2005).

**Pasifika Resistance and Struggle for Language Rights**

Pasifika young people in Aotearoa/New Zealand have turned to many forms of music and art to express their resistance to being forced into a Palagi (European) lifestyle and English-only future. Far from being a negative rejection of being Pasifika, they actively seek to resist pressures to be Palagi. Hip-hop/rap music is one of these powerful forms, as demonstrated by the following excerpt from a rap by a group of Samoan students: ‘We speak fluently even with words that don’t [officially exist]. You don’t understand then take a hike and call upon resist’ (cited in Tuafuti & McCaffery, 2005).

In the wider community, support for the continued bilingualism of Pasifika children and the right to grow up and be Pasifika people in Aotearoa/New Zealand is increasingly being expressed through support for bilingual/immersion education. The earliest successful application of these principles,
and expression of this Pasifika pride and empowerment, was demonstrated at Richmond Road Primary School in Ponsonby, Auckland. The local Pasifika community and the school, under its then principal, Jim Laughton, worked in a genuine, empowering partnership to create New Zealand’s first truly multicultural, multilingual school. The influence of Richmond Road on educational thinking, both locally in Auckland, and internationally, has been extensive (see Cazden, 1989; May, 1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1997; Villers, 2003). At the national and policy level, however, it has been seemingly ignored and forgotten. Only Finlayson Park Primary School, which we will proceed to discuss shortly, has since attempted a similar empowerment, community approach to the establishment of bilingual/immersion education (see also McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2003).

The palpable lack of enthusiasm for Pasifika bilingual/immersion education continues to be a prominent feature of national education policy in Aotearoa/New Zealand. And this is despite 15 years of local Pasifika community initiatives in establishing over 80 Pasifika early childhood language centres, and 20 pilot bilingual classes or units within such state funded mainstream education (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2004a). Significantly though, the independent Education Review Office (ERO) has begun on the basis of the growing positive research base on the educational effectiveness of bilingual education, to recommend tentatively that schools with high numbers of Pasifika students seriously consider introducing Pasifika language and bilingual education programmes in order to promote greater academic success for their students.5

The seeming paradox of one state education organisation (ERO) promoting bilingual education, however tentatively, while the other (Ministry of Education) continues to oppose it has been made possible through a provision in New Zealand’s National Curriculum Framework (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1993; see also May, this issue). This provides for the use of languages other than English and Māori as mediums of instruction in the curriculum. Accordingly, bilingual education programmes can be established, at least ostensibly, in any language, providing schools and language communities at the local level are willing and able to resource and develop these programmes independently of any central national support, endorsement, guidance, resourcing or policy. To date, only the Pasifika community has managed to use this provision on a widespread scale – hence, the presence of a small number of local, school-based Pasifika bilingual/immersion programmes, the majority of which are Samoan (May et al., 2004; McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2003).6

The New Zealand early childhood national curriculum, Te Whāriki (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996) contains a similar open-ended but hands off provision for bilingual/immersion approaches. The development of Pasifika early childhood education (ECE) centres has received some government policy support and specialised funding. Most of these Pasifika centres teach in the medium of Pasifika languages. However, a more recent Ministry of Education document (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2002) does not promote Pasifika language ECE as the preferred ECE provision for Pasifika children. Participation in any form of ECE is the stated strategic goal. In
contrast, the Ministry of Education does promote Māori language ECE as the preferred ECE provision for Māori children (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2004b).

The struggle by New Zealand’s Pasifika communities for official support and policy recognition for Pasifika languages, along with the recognition and resourcing of bilingual/immersion education, has consequently been carried mostly by the Pasifika communities themselves, and by related organisations such as Ulimasao (see above). This community struggle for Pasifika empowerment is a story of a David and Goliath confrontation between Pasifika language minority communities, recently empowered by bilingual/immersion education knowledge and successes, and a language majority education and political system, equally determined, it seems, to resist them. However, in recent times a number of academic researchers have quite independently come to the same conclusions on the need for official recognition and policy support for Pasifika bilingual/immersion education (Franken & McComish, 2003; Hunkin-Tuiletufuga, 2001; May et al., 2004).

Why Empowerment?

We began our work in bilingual/immersion education in the early 1980s as teachers, in schools working with Māori parents and communities who were seeking quality bilingual/immersion provisions for their children coming into primary schools from Te Kōhanga Reo. In general, our experience was that the then Department of Education (later the Ministry of Education) principals, school boards and teachers were all reluctant to share power with the Māori community and enter meaningful empowering partnerships with them (see May, 1994a, 1995, 1997). As active participants supporting this struggle, we learned a great deal about hegemony, power, empowerment, disempowerment, collaboration and partnership. After nearly 10 years of largely fruitless struggle, the Māori community withdrew from the state system and started its own Māori medium primary immersion schools, initially outside the state system, known as Kura Kaupapa Māori. Later Māori negotiated a return to state funding and support on their own terms and conditions (May, 2004; McMurchy-Pilkington, 2001, 2004; Smith, 1992, 1997; see also May, this issue).

At the same time, many Pasifika parents and communities and teachers, in schools where the Māori struggle was occurring, were beginning to express their support for these initiatives. They also began to express publicly, long standing private dissatisfaction about the adequacy of what schools and preschools were offering (or not offering) their children. Community meetings were organised and two concrete outcomes emerged: the first Pasifika bilingual education units and classes were established within state primary schools from 1987 onwards; Pasifika language medium early childhood education (ECE) language nests, modelled on Kōhanga Reo, were established in 1995 outside the state system, and mostly under the umbrella support of the Pasifika churches.

As teachers, advisors and later teacher educators, researchers and advocates of quality Pasifika bilingual/immersion education, we adopted an explicit bottom-up student, family and community collaborative empowerment
approach. We largely ignored issues of national policy and strategy and went on working with our communities at the local level. We used as our guide a combination of Jim Cummins’ collaborative empowerment model (1986, 1989, 2000), Paulo Freire’s philosophy and practice from his 1972 *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and later writings, Colin Lankshear’s work (1988, 1997) and that of the black American writer, Lisa Delpit (1988, 1995). We examined further the international bilingual/immersion research findings on other language minority peoples (see, for example, Corson, 2001; Cummins, 1986, 1989, 2000), and set out to explore the relevance and usefulness of these empowerment research findings for Aotearoa/New Zealand schools. Also significant to us were the critical theorists (Giroux, 1997, 2004; Habermas, 1972, 1987; Young, 1990), and especially Foucault’s ideas about power and hegemony (1972, 1980).

On this basis, we came to define empowerment as the collaborative creation of power. It is not a fixed quantity but is generated through positive empowering interactions with others (Cummins, 2000: 44; see also Foucault, 1980). Accordingly, our goal has been to implement four main empowerment strategies in our work developing Pasifika bilingual/immersion education at local school level:

- actively involve community, parents, and students in the development of Pasifika bilingual education;
- challenge and disrupt existing dominant power, hegemonic discourses and silences;
- represent Pasifika peoples through collaborative Pasifika discourses that are culturally and linguistically inclusive;
- develop active transformative processes (Cummins, 2000; Freire, 1972) to operate at all levels – micro (child and family), meso (community/church/school) and macro (policy and political).

In our opinion, to be empowered as a Pasifika student means to have both ‘life chances’ and ‘life choices’ (see May, 1994a). Life chances relate to the ability to compete academically and succeed in the dominant society through reaching grade age norms in English and in other curriculum areas. Life choices involve being able to remain (if one chooses to be) a fully functioning member of one’s own Pasifika culture and community, able to pass on to children the aspects of Pasifika heritage languages and cultures one chooses to, and to allow the intergenerational cycles of community links to be maintained and developed. In other words, success constitutes being bilingual, bicultural and being able to move freely and easily in both Pasifika and Palagi (European) language and cultural settings via the adoption of multiple identities (May, 1999a).

In this sense, empowerment is also more than just academic success on someone else’s terms. Biliteracy then becomes a valuable tool for both personal empowerment and cultural and linguistic success (Baker, 2000: 339). Biliteracy has also come to be used increasingly by Pasifika peoples as an ‘act of resistance’, particularly with respect to critiquing existing discourses of Pasifika education that deliberately exclude bilingual/immersion education
as an option and which, as such, maintain the status quo with respect to Pasifika educational (under)achievement.

Paradoxically, the more the New Zealand state refuses to discuss or act on Pasifika bilingual/immersion education, the more they are feeding the growth of long-term Pasifika community critical inquiry and empowerment. We now examine this process of critical, community-based development in more detail.

**Power Relationships and Researchers**

We initially began this research journey with a determination to confront and address directly the issues of empowerment and disempowerment that we believe lie at the heart of Pasifika educational underachievement in New Zealand and which, via the development of Pasifika bilingual education, we have since sought determinedly and passionately to address. The traditional hierarchical relationship between researcher and researched has never applied in this work. We have instead used a model of teaching and learning as a group of colleagues engaged in reflective empowerment activity (Cummins, 1989), and critical action research (Kinelleoe, 2003). There is accordingly a strong collegial partnership between all participants in the project.

The authors, as researchers, also seek, however, to move beyond uncritical action research in order to address questions of ‘inquiry into whose constructions of reality prevail and whose ought to prevail … and, following Foucault, whose systems of knowledge and power [dominate]’ (Kinelleoe, 2003). As a research partnership, we represent and present several views of that reality. We accept that this is problematic and is, itself, an important issue to address in the research as an object of the study (Pennycook, 2001: 42). We seek to provide space and opportunity for others to explore and express ‘their own lived realities’ as members of the Samoan community in Auckland (with whom we worked in this project; see below) – a community that has faced direct, personal and institutional racism and the exercise of unequal power on a daily basis all their lives (Jones, 1991; Macpherson et al., 2001). Consequently, as researchers and community members, we are committed to a cooperative power sharing approach.

On this basis then, we argue that there is a clearly established research link between empowered students and communities and quality additive bilingual/immersion education. In order to advance our argument we draw on a major recently completed case study of a Samoan empowerment-based bilingual education programme at Finlayson Park Primary School in Auckland (see also McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2003). Our claims are supported by data from a number of other Pasifika programmes and communities that we are also involved in supporting, developing and researching.

**Finlayson Park as a Case Study in Empowerment Processes**

‘O le Taiala’ (the world of the navigator) is the name of the Samoan bilingual unit at Finlayson Park School in Manurewa, Manukau City, just south of Auckland, which has been developed over the last 10 years as part of this particular research partnership. O le Taiala provides bilingual/immersion in
Samoan for students from Years 1 to 8 (5–12 years of age) and, in 2003, had five classes and approximately 140 students. In New Zealand terms, Finlayson Park Primary School itself is regarded as a large multi-ethnic primary (elementary) school with over 900 students and 35 classrooms. The ethnic composition of the school is 63% Māori, 27% Pasifika (26% Samoan), 5% Palagi (European) and 5% other immigrants and ethnic groups. Due to the community perception that the school is highly successful, the intake is still growing and an enrolment policy to restrict the intake has had to be put in place.

The school is classified as Decile 1a, the lowest socioeconomic category on the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s funding and support indicators. In spite of this, the school has many special features not found in most New Zealand schools, especially those serving low socioeconomic communities. It has a large hall funded by the community, its own purpose-built health centre, a parents and community meeting room, a computer suite, a well-stocked library, a school-owned and operated Early Childhood Centre/Creche, for children of staff and parents working in the school and its own school bus. It also arranged for assistance to employ its own school counsellor and social worker. The school has longstanding special programmes for students in: Special Needs, Special Abilities, ESOL, Bilingual Education, Behaviour Management, Choir, Music, Māori and Pasifika Cultural groups, and a strong and highly successful team sports programme. The school’s mission statement states that the school strives to provide a safe and caring educational environment, which is both culturally sensitive and educationally challenging.

Like all other New Zealand state schools, Finlayson Park is funded centrally by the Ministry of Education but administered locally by an elected Board of Trustees, which is required to ensure that the school follows National Administration and National Curriculum guidelines. Within these general guidelines there is substantial scope for local initiatives, including the teaching and use of community languages as mediums of instruction. This allows the Board of Trustees to be responsive to local community aspirations and to be accountable to the community for its decisions. Thus the five elected Board of Trustees’ members of Finlayson Park makes a local commitment after each election to co-opt four additional members to ensure that there is a representative of the Māori and Samoan bilingual units within the school (see below) and each of the main ethnic groups in the school community. In comparison then with many multiethnic schools in New Zealand, Finlayson Park is a national leader in these respects.

There are 92 full-time and part-time staff in total, including 45 teachers and other support professionals, at Finlayson Park School. Staff and children are organised into seven teaching teams or syndicates. Among them is Te Huringa (the Māori Immersion unit), which has seven classes. There is also a dual medium bilingual Māori–English unit with four teachers. The Samoan bilingual unit, O le Taiala, has five classes. Staff in O le Taiala are appointed for their teaching expertise and knowledge in both Samoan and English. Almost 40% of the school’s classroom teaching staff are therefore directly involved in the delivery of some form of bilingual/immersion education. Policies of the school strongly support bilingualism and value all children’s
home languages and cultures. All staff are required to attend professional
development sessions/programmes on bilingualism and bilingual education
and to model respect for the languages and cultures of parents and children.
There is a strong commitment to promoting tolerance, understanding and
respect among members of all cultures in the school.

The school’s Principal, Shirley Maihi, is widely admired, respected and
acknowledged for her determination to drive these developments since
coming to Finlayson as Principal in 1987. Her role in developing a shared
vision, and gaining the collective commitment of all groups in the school
community cannot be underestimated. Without her presence it is unlikely any
of the innovations we are discussing would have eventuated.

O le Taiala is an essential part of the school and not separate from it. How
much of the academic success of O le Taiala children (discussed extensively in
McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2003) is due to this positive empowering, all encom-
passing school climate and practices, and how much to the specific bilingual/
immersion pedagogies and practices adopted in O le Taiala is unknown.
Certainly, a combination of both effective bilingual/immersion pedagogy
within the unit and a wider additive bilingual school environment is likely to
have contributed directly to the academic success of these students. The latter
is also likely to be a contributing reason for the relatively high levels of English
literacy achieved by Samoan students in mainstream English-only classes at
Finlayson Park (Aukuso, 2002), given that the wider school environment
clearly meets many of Cummins’ (1986, 1989) criteria for student and
community empowerment. This is in sharp contrast to similar Samoan-
speaking students in other low decile schools, who are clearly not achieving
comparable high levels of literacy or overall academic achievement (see Elley,
1992; Esera, 2001; McCaffery & Fuatavai, 2002; New Zealand Ministry of
Education, 1999). Relatively low levels of language and academic achievement
are also being found in many of the other so-called Samoan bilingual units
operating in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Esera, 2001), perhaps for reasons
comparable to those discussed by May et al. (2004), see also May & Hill,
this issue) in relation to Māori-medium education – e.g. low levels of
immersion and a lack of clarity and understanding of effective bilingual/
immersion pedagogy and practice.

By 2005, there were more than 20 Samoan bilingual units in New Zealand
schools. To the best of our knowledge, however, only four units have chosen to
develop full dual-medium biliteracy as their major strategy towards greater
academic achievement for their students. Of those, only O le Taiala, at
Finlayson Park School, is also based on family and community based
empowerment philosophies and practices. All units have been established
and operated without any guidance or additional funding from the New
Zealand Ministry of Education.

The Education Review Office’s report on Finlayson Park School (Education
Review Office, 2002) also speaks very highly of the school’s achievements and,
in particular, those of O le Taiala and its students. Specific positive features
noted by the school and external researchers (Aukuso, 2002, Esera, 2001;
McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2003) as outcomes of the bilingual programme relate to
the students, their parents and the school staff.
For example, student attendance on a daily basis in the bilingual unit is considerably higher compared to Samoan children in other Decile 1 schools. Moreover, transience (moving from school to school) has decreased dramatically: 90% of O le Taiala students have been at Finlayson Park since Year 1, whereas only 20% of the mainstream (English-only) students have. Families who leave the school zone often travel long distances to return their children to O le Taiala for their education. The children’s positive attitudes towards school, schoolwork and education are noteworthy. The unit’s students have made significant achievements in external competitions, such as the local district speech competitions and the Australian Mathematics competition.

There are other informal indicators that the children’s academic work across the curriculum has significantly improved. This remains to be investigated in the next phase of the research project. The O le Taiala children achieve highly in sports and other cultural competitions and events, and stand out from others in this respect. They carry a great deal of responsibility both in the unit and in the wider school; many of them play senior leadership roles as counsellors, peer mediators, role models and tutors for others. Beyond the school context, these students are able to maintain active and valued membership of their family and community organisations. Churches, in particular, report that bilingual children continue to attend church and youth groups, and to adopt leadership roles there too. They are able to operate biculturally and interact confidently with other children and adults from a range of cultures and backgrounds. This then is what students from Finlayson Park at age 10 years on graduation from primary school are well on the way to being able to do. In addition, their literacy achievements in both languages are at or above their grade age norms (see McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2003 for further discussion). Their Samoan bilingual programme has thus provided them with the languages, literacies, knowledge, skills, dispositions and confidence to be able to move freely in both worlds.

Meanwhile, community support for O le Taiala, including from local churches and other Samoan organisations, is very strong. Samoan parents are now able to discuss and observe the Samoan bilingual programme option when enrolling new children and have a genuine choice: most are choosing to enrol their children in O le Taiala. Parent participation in and around the school has increased dramatically. There is strong parental support for educational trips and visits, fundraising and community events. Parents indicate that they feel a real sense of ownership and control over their children’s education. The requests to O le Taiala from other schools and organisations for displays of bilingual work and cultural performances continue to grow. This has helped build the students’ self-esteem and confidence as their bilingualism in the wider New Zealand society is usually presented to them as a problem. Finlayson Park, therefore, is enjoying the high levels of active and close scrutiny – and positive reporting – usually only found in New Zealand schools in high socioeconomic areas. Along with instructional factors (i.e. good bilingual pedagogy), this effective engagement and empowerment of parents in and through the O le Taiala programme was believed by two independent researchers to have been of equal significance in
raising the academic achievements of the students in the programme (Aukuso, 2002; Esera, 2001)

Relationships between children and their families, parents and teachers, teachers and senior management are also highly valued and positive. Senior staff now find that Samoan parents have the confidence to approach the school and ask questions and seek answers. The school attracts quality teachers who want to share and participate in these bilingual values and philosophy: they have a commitment both to the Samoan community’s language, and to excellence in English literacy. The O le Taiala teachers’ sick leave record is extremely low in comparison with many other schools. Relationships within the unit are very good: the principal attributes this to empowered teachers and high levels of job satisfaction.

O le Taiala then, has been set up, resourced, operated and funded entirely through the hard work and determination of the Finlayson Park School community and the research team with which we have been involved. We would claim that in 2005, O le Taiala is both the best developed and the most successful Pasifika bilingual programme currently operating in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Parental and Community Empowerment. How and Why?

Cummins (1986), in developing his model of community empowerment in relation to bilingual education, argues that parents must be central and full partners with schools in the education of children, not extras, leftovers or fill-ins.

The essential principles of Cummins’ model, together with other parent partnerships models (Bastiani & Wolfendale, 2000; McAllister Swap, 1993; Vopat, 1994; Wolfendale, 1989; see also below), have been used by Finlayson Park School and the authors to overcome the mismatch between school culture and expectations, and the Pasifika community’s culture and expectations, in order to empower not only students, but also Pasifika parents and the wider community (Figure 1).

Pasifika parents want the best education for their children and this is one of the main reasons why they migrate to Aotearoa/New Zealand. Their way of showing high expectations of their children is for them to take any type of employment they can get. They believe that their priorities are to earn money to provide the education for their children, including celebrations of their children’s successes. They often have absolute faith in the schools and see no reason to question the wisdom of the Palagi (European New Zealanders). ‘After all the Palagi world is wealthy and the Pacific region is poor because the Palagi way is best’.

However, when failure occurs, as it often does, the wider society and teachers blame the Pasifika parents and their language and culture. Parents in turn blame their children. Some Pasifika parents punish their children when children fail in school, even for minor lapses. The parents believe that failure is the fault of the child, or themselves, and it brings shame on the family and community (Jones, 1991; Tuafuti, 2000). Many parents want to help their children. Many have some ideas but are not sure of the best way they can help their children succeed (Tuafuti, 2000). Many Pasifika parents also believe that
part of their culture is to show respect. Respect to Pasifika parents includes being silent partners and avoiding questioning or challenging people with high status, including principals and teachers (Tuafuti, 2004). This silence should not be misinterpreted as agreement, however, as it is in Western society. It is simply respect. Parents believe that teachers are the experts, therefore they should know everything about education.

Recent research on the Samoan culture of silence show that parents' reasons for being silent in education consultation meetings also have more to do with being silenced. Commonly expressed factors that caused silences and silencing in these contexts are low self-esteem and feeling intimidated, English language barriers, lack of understanding of educational issues, and refusal and resistance caused by parents' feelings that they have being used by other, more powerful people to enhance the latter's own credibility and status (see Tuafuti, 2004). Coercive relations of power between the dominant culture and minorities thus encourage Pasifika peoples to keep their silence. As they observe: 'What's the use of speaking out when most of our ideas are not followed through... fall on deaf ears' ('O le mea tuai lava e tasi! Ua oo mai i le 2004 o fai lava nei fono ae leai lava se suiga'). 'It is the same old thing! It is 2004 and we still have these consultation meetings, but there is no change' ('E le mafai ona ou tautala ona ou te le malamalama poo a mataupu o talanoa iai'). 'I don’t want to speak if I don’t understand the issues'. 'I am afraid to make mistakes in English – nei aamu mai tagata i lau nanu – people might make fun of me!'

When seen afresh from a resistance perspective, there are many acts of resistance and defiance by Pasifika people, including students, being practised in New Zealand education currently. Pasifika peoples are not passive blank

Figure 1 A framework for intervention of collaborative empowerment. Adapted from Cummins (2000: 45)
slates who do not understand the modern world of institutional racism and unequal power. At present, they generally choose not to challenge it directly and publicly. They do, however, practise many acts that can be recognised as in-group, in-house Pasifika ways of resisting (and, at times, poking fun at) Palagi power and domination.

One emerging forum for public resistance though is via the professional organisation, Ulimasao, the joint teacher, parent and community Pasifika Bilingual Education Association, established in 1995. Its purposes are to:

- promote the interests rights and involvement of learners and their parents from Pacific nations;
- provide a shared forum for Pasifika parents, community and teachers to work together;
- reaffirm and encourage the language maintenance of all Pasifika learners;
- promote bilingual education, bilingualism biliteracy and academic achievement;
- assist Pasifika educators to do more professional study and research on bilingual education and language maintenance issues.

To achieve these goals, the Ulimasao Association is goal and action-oriented. Empowerment and partnership are the most significant terms in the Ulimasao Association’s vocabulary. Ulimasao members are encouraged to see teachers and parents as equal partners in their children’s education. The work of the Ulimasao has, of necessity, been philosophical, ideological, theoretical, as well as children and community needs based. Professional development on bilingual education/bilingualism and parent empowerment programmes have also been organised and supported by Ulimasao since its inception in 1995.

Such programmes have been crucial in supporting Finlayson Park School and other newly developed bilingual units in their quest to raise the academic achievements of Pasifika children, and to strengthen their beliefs and values. Workshops, seminars, large and small conferences for parents, staff and community members, have covered topics such as: understanding the New Zealand education system and the school, its programme, policies, organisation and operation; partnership with teachers; empowerment philosophies and beliefs; voicing your concerns and learning that it is alright to ask, question and challenge the school; Pasifika literacy in the home; reading and writing in the home; making first language resources; implementing the Pasifika language curriculum; excellence in English; promoting academic development; and bilingual education (research, approaches, methodology, case studies, learning and teaching strategies and many more aspects; see McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2003 for further discussion). As Colin Baker (2000: 335) observes, new approaches to literacy, and critical literacy in particular, seeks to make oppressed communities socially and politically conscious about their subservient role and lowly status in society and what they can do about that situation (see also Freire, 1972; Freire & Macedo, 1987, 1995; Lankshear, 1988, 1997; Lankshef & McLaren, 1993).
Partnership Models

McAllister Swap (1993) discusses three models that schools consistently employ in their relationships with parents and the wider community that end up disempowering the latter. First, there is the ‘Protective model’, based on a clear goal to reduce conflict between parents and educators, primarily through the separation of parents and educators’ functions. The parent teacher association model of involvement is a classic example of this. Pasifika parents are invited to discussions on school fundraising, and used as workers for fundraising, but kept out of decision-making on their children’s education, including decisions about how the money raised could be spent. Thus the discourse of the protective model devalues Pasifika parents’ language, culture and aspirations – their silences (and silencing) are encouraged and used against them.

A second model, the ‘School-To-Home Transmission Model’, is another one-sided discourse created with prescribed objectives by the school. The model acknowledges the parents’ involvement as long as they support the school, but it is the school personnel who define goals and programmes, and this discourse is then transmitted to the home. The results of such discourse is that parents’ silence and silencing are encouraged as they respect and believe that the school and teachers are experts who will help their children achieve their goals and expectations. However, when their expectations and aspirations are not being met, parents tend to blame their children. Silence and silencing are exacerbated due to cultural issues of respect and pride which result in parents neither wanting to ask or challenge the teachers, nor wanting to make a fuss regarding their children’s failure.

The third discourse is one of ‘Curriculum Enrichment’, which focuses on curriculum and instruction as the school’s principal goals. Such a model wants to use parents’ expertise only for curriculum enrichment purposes. Discourse is thus restricted to curriculum development and instructional dialogue. It does not extend to issues such as improving professional development, management, attitudes, language and culture of the school. Neither does it build the capabilities of parents nor reduce disparities between school and community. Hence, most parents will remain silent after cultural festivals, fundraising and curriculum resource sessions.

In contrast, McAllister Swap’s (1996) fourth model is a ‘New Shared Vision’ model, which is about establishing meaningful and effective partnerships between school and communities that create a two-way solution. The model is about collaboration, empowerment, intervention and envisioning of the whole school environment to accomplish a common mission with the community. The discourse of this model allows the community to voice their expectations and aspirations and to share their expertise with the school so that their children achieve their goals. The parents’ aspirations and vision becomes a shared vision with the educators and/or school. By applying this model, parents will then feel valued and empowered that their voices are heard and respected. The two central assumptions of the New Shared Vision partnership model are:
Accomplishing the joint mission requires a re-visioning of the school environment and a need to discover new policies and practices, structures, roles, relationships and attitudes in order to realise the vision.

Accomplishing the joint mission demands collaboration among parents, community representatives and educators. Because the task is very challenging and requires many resources, none of these groups acting alone can accomplish it.

Finlayson Park clearly uses this last model in its wider approach, and in relation to the specific development of O le Taiala – its Samoan bilingual unit.

Integration of the Empowerment, Partnership and Bilingual Education Models and Theories Within our Work with Pasifika Schools and Communities

The inclusion of Pasifika languages, cultures and parents and communities in all aspects of the establishment and running of bilingual programmes does have many positive effects, including: raising self-esteem, self-identity, self-responsibility, self-discipline and self-confidence. It also fosters cognitive and academic proficiency in L1 and then in L2. This is because key ideas about the world, curriculum and learning can usually be explored and understood best in a person’s first language. Using the first language is simply the quickest and most efficient way to learn conceptual and academic knowledge. Well organised, theoretical and community based bilingual education is now recognised as the most powerful empowerment approach in minority education (Baker, 2001; Cummins, 1996).

Taken together with Cummins’ empowerment principles, the use of the L1 in all areas of the work of Pasifika bilingual education is a powerful approach and catalyst for change. It is our view that Pasifika L1s must be used extensively in programmes to ensure that the school, children, parents and communities’ shared vision, hopes and dreams are being heard and acted on. The integration of Pasifika language and culture in academic processes and procedures will provide many personal development opportunities and journeys from which Pasifika bilingual unit teachers, children and parents will benefit. Pasifika parents at Finlayson Park, for example, are now able to use their Pasifika languages in their dealings with the school, if they so choose. They are also more proactive, and willingly question the teachers if they do not understand notices or teachers’ comments regarding their children’s school reports. Parents and teachers work well together in both formal and informal settings and situations. Vopat (1994: 9) notes that ‘working together sounds great, but is really only feasible when those who are expected to be together know and feel comfortable with each other’.

The discourse and outcomes of the ‘new vision model’ coincide with Cummins’ (1986, 1989, 1996, 2000) collaborative empowerment model and with the Pasifika pedagogical approach of soalaupule. Soalaupule is the Samoan name for an inclusive discussion and decision-making process that is used extensively by Pasifika peoples. The approach is part of most Pacific cultures and thus is practised regularly within the chief (matai) system,
extended families and church meetings. This is the most powerful Pasifika approach for sharing power and knowledge. People who have regularly experienced it feel valued that their knowledge and influence contribute to the whole process of decision-making. Research results on influential factors that affect our Pasifika children’s learning have confirmed our own convictions that the holistic integration of empowerment, partnership and bilingual education theories and models, allied with the Pasifika communities’ visions and beliefs, will raise the academic achievements of Pasifika children, reduce disparities and maintain Pasifika languages, cultures, identities, beliefs and values (see also McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2003).

Conclusion

We set out in this paper to explore some of the reasons for Pasifika students’, parents’ and communities’ disempowerment in the New Zealand education system, and what could be done about it. The causes are complex, historical and still largely unresearched. We have shown, however, that even when we do not fully understand the causes, solutions that work may indeed be accessible and achievable. Every now and again in history, a combination of factors comes together in a way that creates something new and exciting. Community-based, Pasifika bilingual/immersion education, with a central goal of achieving biliteracy, and based on principles of collaborative empowerment and partnership, is one such approach. Moreover, even though it has yet to be endorsed by state organisations such as the New Zealand Ministry of Education, it provides a key to, and an example of, the potential for wider Pasifika empowerment in Aotearoa/New Zealand, both within education, and well beyond it.

O le tele o sulu e maua ai figota

Through collaborative work, the most difficult challenges can be overcome.

Correspondence

Any correspondence should be directed to Patisepa Tuafuti, School of Pacific Education, Faculty of Education, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand (ptuafuti@clear.net.nz).

Notes

1. Pasifika is a recent term used to describe the status of New Zealand-based Pacific peoples, their values, activities and perspectives. It recognises the clear links with other Pacific people still living in their Pacific territories, but also specifically recognises the New Zealand-born status of many Pasifika peoples.
2. The two authors are both members of Ulimasao.
4. As Susan Gray observes of this:
New Zealand has a monolingual culture. Despite its official language status, only recently has the Māori language begun re-establishing itself. The National Languages Policy ... languishes for lack of political will. The linguistic resources that new migrants bring are often ignored ... (in Rata et al., 2001: 196–200)

5. ERO has the statutory responsibility to independently review and monitor the performance of schools and early childhood centres in Aotearoa/New Zealand (see also May & Hill, this issue).

6. These programmes have also drawn support from the following official reports and recommendations: The New Zealand Literacy Experts Group (1999), The 2004 United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, the policy statements of the primary teachers’ professional organisation, the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI, 2000, 2002) and the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s own recent commissioned research on bilingual/immersion education (May et al., 2004) and ESOL (Franken & McComish, 2003; see also Franken et al., 2005). One wonders how many reports and recommendations there will need to be, and how many schools will need to begin bilingual programmes, before the New Zealand Ministry of Education will be required to act, and give official recognition and resourcing to such programmes.

7. We have already identified and publicised the whole school policy and operating factors that are essential ingredients for promoting successful bilingual/immersion education in New Zealand. These are set out in McCaffery and Fuatavai (2002); see also May (1994b) for an earlier discussion in relation to Richmond Road School.

References


