New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies (2019) 54:21–38
https://doi.org/10.1007/s40841-019-00128-1

ARTICLE

Culturally Relevant (Teacher) Education: Teachers Responding through Va in the Inter-cultural Space of Pasifika Education

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Received: 21 September 2018 / Accepted: 21 February 2019 / Published online: 27 February 2019

Abstract
Education in an inter-cultural space is a feature of Aotearoa New Zealand: the education system is of European origin as are many in the teaching profession, while the student population is diverse. Within that diversity are Pasifika students, those with links to Pacific Island nations resident in Aotearoa New Zealand. This article offers insights into Pasifika education by focussing on a small-scale professional learning and development (PLD) programme based on Pasifika student and parent voice understood through Pacific concepts. A review of three strands of literature precedes a description of the PLD programme. Data from the programme is then discussed in terms of the kinds of knowledge teachers can develop through negotiating with va, a relational concept from the Pacific. This indicates that PLD which offers relevant student voice, concepts capable of challenging dominant world views, and socialisation into alternative ethics can provide a way forward in Pasifika education and, by implication, in other education spaces which have an inter-cultural profile.

Keywords Culturally relevant education · Pasifika education · Teacher education · va · Cultural humility

Introduction

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Pasifika education, the education of students with links to Pacific Islands (Airini et al. 2010), is an area of concern for the Ministry of Education. This group is not well served by the education system (Ministry of Education 2011, 7th June), a symptom of which is that the achievement of Pasifika students is below that of the majority European (or Pākeha) group and of the minority Asian group (New Zealand Qualifications Authority 2013, 2014, 2015). As a response,

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Pasifika education has been subject to various centrally sponsored initiatives. These include making Pasifika students priority learners (Education Review Office n.d.) for all schools, and various iterations of the Pasifika Education Plan (PEP) (Ministry of Education 2001, 2013). The PEP sets system-wide achievement targets but lacks an implementation plan at the classroom level. However, work on a pedagogic navigation document for teachers of Pasifika students, Tapasā (Ministry of Education 2018), has recently come to fruition and implementation is in the planning stages. Because most members of the teaching profession in Aotearoa New Zealand are of European origin (Education Counts 2018), and because the system itself is constructed on a European-origin model, teacher education relevant to Pasifika education takes place in an inter-cultural space.

Applicable to Pasifika education, teachers and teacher educators have access to global literature on the education of diverse students. This provides guidance on teaching and pedagogy which make diversity a strength in multi-cultural educational settings. In addition, there is a body of knowledge regarding Pasifika education which has been growing progressively since the early 2000s (e.g., Chu et al. 2013; Coxon et al. 2002; Leaupepe and Sauni 2014; Mara 2013; Samu 2011; Si'ilata 2014). Some research which specifically addresses Pasifika education points to teacher-student relationships as an important focus (e.g., Hawk et al. 2002; Nakhid 2003; Siope 2011). This article adds to the literature of teacher education in the context of Pasifika education. It discusses a small-scale in-service professional learning and development (PLD) programme set in an urban single-sex boys' high school in Aotearoa New Zealand, undertaken as part of a doctoral study. Contextually-sourced Pasifika students' and parents' ideas about teachers and teaching, together with incipient understandings of the relational concept of va (e.g., Airini et al. 2010; Helu-Thaman 1988; Ka'ili 2005; Reynolds 2016) provide the basis of new teacher knowledge. Data drawn from non-Pasifika teachers' accounts of their learning suggests the potential of Pacific concepts such as va to facilitate relevant, deep and transformative (Peck et al. 2009) change. This can occur where default understandings of classroom interaction of European origin are disturbed, and new understandings are enacted in context. The value to the learning of teachers who work in inter-cultural education spaces of relevant conceptual and applied learning is clear when pedagogical parameters promote teacher actions that are deliberately more inclusive of diverse students.

Context

Aotearoa New Zealand is a bicultural nation subject to the Treaty of Waitangi. This disputed document was first signed between representatives of the British Crown and various Māori chiefs on February 6th, 1840. The treaty has since shaped policy around the relationship between indigenous Māori and other groups (Orange 2012). Amongst the non-Māori groups who reside in Aotearoa New Zealand are people who have migrated from the island nations of the Pacific such as Samoa, Tonga, Niue and the Cook Islands. Aotearoa New Zealand is itself a Pacific nation, both geographically and through shared genealogies between Pacific peoples and Māori.

'Polynesian people' was an early term used to describe Pacific migrants living in Aotearoa New Zealand (Tanielu and Johnson 2013). Over time, however, various government bodies have referred to members of the Pacific diaspora by other terms. Recently, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has used the term Pasifika (Tanielu and Johnson 2013) to refer to "those peoples who have migrated from Pacific nations and territories. It also refers to the New Zealand-based (and born) population, who identify as Pasifika, via ancestry or descent" (Airini et al. 2010, p. 49). The status of Pasifika as a group in education is not unconditionally accepted. It is an umbrella term (Samu 2006) with relational, political and historical resonance (Airini et al. 2010). As a "term of convenience" (Airini et al. 2010, p. 49), one may ask whose convenience is being served by Pasifika. For example, people may see themselves as Niuean or Tongan in some contexts but identify as part of a Pasifika group in others. The notion of Pasifika may be more relevant in some schools, depending on the numbers, origin, attitudes and experiences of those attending. However, the salience of the term Pasifika in educational policy is likely to increase, and where used, Pasifika in education denotes an endeavour which take place in an inter-cultural space; Pasifika students are largely taught by Palagi (European origin) teachers (Education Counts 2018) in a system which has its cultural roots in Britain. Recently, there have been moves to re-place the term Pasifika with Pacific (Ministry of Education 2018).

Pasifika as a data category exposes relatively low achievement of Pasifika students in national assessment. In secondary education, problematic levels of achievement in the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) are a key focus (e.g., New Zealand Qualifications Authority 2013, 2014, 2015; Turner et al.2010). Policy initiatives (e.g., Ministry of Education 2013), statistical research (e.g., Wilson et al. 2016) and qualitative school-based inquires (Reynolds 2017a; Spiller 2013) have responded to this situation. The MoE document which frames policy, the PEP (Ministry of Education 2013), offers little guidance to classroom teachers about how to re-think Pasifika education. Tapasā (Ministry of Education 2018), a pedagogic navigation document provided to all teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand, is yet to make an impact.

This article offers a navigation for future PLD in Pasifika education by discussing the potential for teacher education of engaging with Pacific epistemologies of relational thinking for the benefit of Pasifika learners. This kind of thinking can provide a way of re-conceptualising Pasifika students' and parents' ideas about teaching and teachers. The potential of teachers to contribute positively to the education of their Pasifika students is enhanced by the interaction of two elements. Firstly, contextually relevant knowledge of Pacific origin capable of disturbing default understandings of classroom interaction of European origin. This can contribute to new pedagogical thinking. Secondly, opportunities to express new understandings in practice. Although located in the specific niche of Pasifika education, by implication this article offers a sustainable model for researchers and educators in other contexts which involve the education of one group by another.

Literature

Three bodies of literature provide a context for a discussion of PLD in Pasifika education. First, the literature of culturally relevant education provides an overview of education in diverse contexts. Second, the literature of Pasifika education indicates the salience of relational concerns to Pasifika students. Finally, the Pacific origin concept of va offers a relevant way of appreciating Pasifika students' and parents' relational concerns in contexts where thinking of European origin often dominates.

Culturally Relevant Education

Aotearoa New Zealand has been influenced by global developments in education such as the movement to effectively teach diverse students (Alton-Lee 2003). In the context of the US, the movement came to a "windfall moment" (Paris 2012, p. 93) in the 1990s when research had provided evidence of the value of resource pedagogies to counter prior deficit approaches. A deficit understanding of diversity "overwhelmingly locates the basis of school failure in students, their cultures, and their families" (Valencia 2010, p. xv) and justifies "compensatory strategies" (Vass 2017, p. 452) in education. By contrast, an asset or resource-based approach values what students bring to school. This can include ideas and practices from students' cultures and families when they are made central to educational success. Examples of asset-based approaches in the Pasifika context include Si'ilata (2014).

Within this general movement, Aronson and Laughter (2016) identify two interlocking strands. The first strand focuses on the actions teachers can take to work effectively with diverse students. This is culturally responsive teaching (CRT) (Gay 2000, 2002). CRT involves challenges to historically justified practices of narrow cultural origins through alternative actions which take account of the histories and experiences of students. Accurate knowledge of students, the replacement of deficit perspectives, the valuing of culture and difference as essential aspects of humanity, and the forging of contextual pedagogical connections with students can contribute to a relevant education (Aronson and Laughter 2016).

The second strand, culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings 1995a, b, 2014) is concerned with the thinking of teachers about diversity and intersects with critical race theory (Ladson-Billings 1999). CRP is concerned with holistic individual and community empowerment through a framework of: understanding student skill development over an extended time frame; teacher cultural competence to support students to successfully bridge between home and school environments; and the development of socio-political consciousness in teachers and students (Aronson and Laughter 2016). CRP has not been a static understanding (Khalifa et al. 2016), and developments continue. Paris (2012) for instance, advocates for culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP); education to validate student assets into the future as well as to respond to them in the present. At the core of developments in CRT and CRP is an ongoing critical approach to education which addresses issues of power and representation.

A key element of CRP, the cultural competence of teachers to support their students, has been subject to scrutiny. The concept of cultural competence can be criticised for encouraging anachronism in a fluid cultural context, and for the reification of subject-object relationships of expert and client (Yan and Wong 2005). A development from cultural competence, cultural humility (Foronda et al. 2016; Tinkler and Tinkler 2016) is a "stance" (Tinkler and Tinkler 2016, p. 193) or "way of being" (Foronda et al. 2016, p. 214) where persistent self-awareness maintained through self-reflection pays attention to power and its ongoing effects. Through its open nature, cultural humility disturbs the idea that one can ever tick the 'competence box' in respect to culture. While all teachers bring cultural capital (Bourdieu 2011) to their professional interactions, cultural competence implies a position from which a teacher might recognise and embrace the value of different capital. Cultural humility suggests a high degree of reflexivity as an ongoing means to this end, entwined with a contextual awareness of how the value of various elements of capital is established and maintained.

Aronson and Laughter (2016) suggest culturally relevant education (CRE) as a term to encompass these two strands of asset theorisation. Programmes of CRE in teacher education need to deal with CRT, which affects professional competence and practice, and CRP, which affects disposition and attitude (Aronson and Laughter 2016). Thus, teacher educators must provide challenges and experiences which can equip teachers with ways of thinking appreciatively about diversity, and opportunities to develop ways of acting positively in relation to diverse students. Self-knowledge, knowledge of the communities in which one teaches, and craft knowledge are all involved. In the context of Pasifika education, the literature of CRE is a helpful resource for those who seek to understand the assets held by Pasifika students.

Pasifika Education

Pasifika education began to emerge as a field following the Lopdell House conference of 1974, (Department for Education 1975). A subsequent report (Education Review Office 1995) identified Pasifika education, particularly that of girls, as problematic and subject to low teacher expectation. In addition, Jones' (1991) seminal study described the way divisions between Pacific and European ethnic groups can affect levels of expectation and performance in school. Further, Nakhid (2003) reports that in the early years of the field, deficit theorisation underpinned research as well as practice.

The importance of relationships in Pasifika education began to emerge as a theme in research from the turn of the century. An important publication, Hawk et al. (2002), combined three studies across primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. Although only the latter study disaggregated Māori and Pasifika concerns, Hawk et al. (2002) drew up a taxonomy of the "type of person" (p. 45) most likely to be effective teaching Pasifika students. Siope (2011) gives a similar taxonomy in which successful teachers of Pasifika students are "responsive", "readily accessible" and "reasonable" (p. 13). Evans (2011) records Pasifika boys valuing a teacher who goes "the extra mile" (p. 72) and Reynolds (2017a) shows how Pasifika students value

being accepted by 'kind' as opposed to 'harsh' teachers. Other studies also highlight relationality in Pasifika education (Alkema 2014; MacDonald and Lipene 2012; Tait et al. 2016). Samu (2006), while eschewing the idea of a single Pasifika pedagogy, advocates for "learning communities that are based on caring, inclusive and cohesive relationships" (p. 47) as the basis of success in Pasifika education. However, Nakhid (2003) shows how misunderstandings and misattributions can negatively impact on Pasifika student–teacher relationships, a finding echoed by Spiller (2012).

Together, this literature suggests that Pasifika education can helpfully be understood as a relational activity, where the quality of relationship between a Pasifika student and their teacher(s) is a crucial factor in the successful experience of education as a process. While the quality of relationships which seems expected by Pasifika students is often portrayed as dependant on the personality of the teacher, Pacific cultural models of appropriate teacher relational conduct exist (Helu-Thaman 1988, 2008). However understood, Pasifika student expectations of positive relationships in education can be viewed as an asset; meeting such expectations offers teachers an opportunity to respond to students positively and in ways which are likely to support learning.

The Pacific Relational Concept of va

Although it is impossible to do justice to such an expansive concept in a short article, a brief account of va is offered as a way of understanding relational aspects of Pasifika education.

The concept of va can be found in the academic literature of Samoa (e.g., Aiono-Le Tagaloa 2003; Lilomaiava-Doktor 2009) and Tonga (e.g., Helu-Thaman 1988; Koloto 2017), as well as elsewhere (Hoem 1993). While it would be presumptuous to claim va as Pan-Pacific (Tuagalu 2008), conceptual links have been made across the region (Wendt 1999). Va is a spatial understanding of relationships which operates multi-dimensionally across spiritual, social and physical domains. Wendt says va is "the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things" (1999, p. 402). Ka'ili explains that va "emphasises space in between. This is fundamentally different from the popular western notion of space as an expanse or an open area" (2005, p. 89). Each relationship has a va which both connects and separates those involved. Every classroom has many va, between teacher and student, peer and peer, student and subject, and so on. In education as elsewhere, the key issue is the state of the various va.

In the literature of Pasifika education, there are references to va. Silipa (2004), for example, describes student–teacher relationality in terms of trust, expectation and space, commenting on "'va fa'afeangai' (mutual respect of each other's space)" (p. 198). Tuagalu (2008) discusses student–teacher relationality thus:

> This, then, is the *va* between teacher and student. Teachers use concepts and tools such as learning styles and critical thinking, and their intimate knowl-

> edge of Western forms of learning to enable the student's relationship with the subject being studied. (p. 122)

Va is a holistic concept. Entities are related through a common creation. Through a va lens, the self is "relationally dependent – […] quite different from the view of the self that is prevalent in modern western society" (Mila-Schaaf 2006, p. 11). To focus on va "leads to an examination of our interaction with others; a focus on our intentions and conscious actions that influences the nature of our relationships with others" (Mila-Schaaf 2006, p. 10). Further discussion can be found in Anae (2010a); Lilomaiava-Doktor (2009); Reynolds (2016) and elsewhere.

An understanding of va brings an obligation to nurture relationships. The Samoan reference for this is teu le va (Airini et al. 2010; Anae 2010b), and the Tongan, tauhi va (Ka'ili 2005; Poltorak 2007). To hereafter use the Samoan form, teu le va can be tentatively translated as making the va beautiful or tidy (Airini et al. 2010) and involves "balance, symmetry, beauty" (Mila-Schaaf and Hudson 2009, p. 117). To care for the va is an ethical matter and by preference connections are encouraged and conflict reduced in order to care for the relationship through "a desire for harmony and symmetry within the engagement" (p. 117). The va is a reciprocal space. As the poet Selina Tusitala Marsh concisely explains, "it's called the Va in Samoan philosophy/what *you* do, affects me" (2016, p. 37).

Weaving the Strands

There are intersections between these three strands of literature. Where va is recognised by educators as enacted in Pasifika students' lives it can be an asset in CRE. Va is a resource "to honor, explore and extend" (Paris 2012, p. 94) in the inter-cultural space of Pasifika education. For culturally humble teachers, thinking through va may provide valuable community-based knowledge. Finally, negotiating an understanding of va may stimulate teachers to develop other kinds of knowledge valued in CRT, including self-knowledge and relevant pedagogical knowledge (Gay 2002).

Original Research

Having discussed the nature of Pasifika education and examined relevant strands of literature, the narrative turns to the study at hand. This sought to address the question: 'What is Pasifika success as Pasifika' in the context of education. It used a case-study (Stake 1978) structure, bounded by place—a single institution, and time—an academic year. An asset-based, mediated dialogical (Nakhid 2003; Reynolds 2017b) relational methodology was employed in the setting of a boys' high school in Aotearoa New Zealand. The decile of a school reflects the socio-economic profile of its environment (although not all its students). The case-study school's decile, ten, suggests a comparatively wealthy setting (Ministry of Education 2017).

As a Palagi teacher-researcher of British origin, I embarked on the study as a response to a challenge from Pasifika parent, and progressed the work for the benefit of my Pasifika students, their parents and communities, and as an act of learning in

the service of fellow professionals. My commitment was to edgewalk (Neal 2006) between Pasifika and Palagi worlds as far as possible, and to position myself as a learner in each. I embraced Pasifika research ethics (Airini et al. 2010) by, for instance, paying attention to a continual process of negotiation around shared ownership, reciprocal responsibilities, and mutual benefit. A relational ontology is an aspect of such ethics. An understanding of education through a constructivist lens provides a way of understanding the potential of research to focus on Pasifika education as an inter-cultural space in which Pasifika student and community knowledge can scaffold teacher understanding, and in which the role of the teacher includes recognising and valuing students' existing knowledge as a springboard to future progress.

Two main sets of data were generated in the doctorate as a whole. The first came from the school's Pasifika community. Pasifika students form about 6% of the case study school's student body. Sixteen boys who self-identified as Pasifika and were in their first year at the school (Year 9, Age 13–14) contributed to the research. This cohort formed half the Pasifika students their year group. They were recruited through contact with families. Their contribution was to participate in a series of paired interviews and group talanoa (relationally mediated interactions) (Fa'avae et al. 2016; Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba 2014; Suaalii-Sauni and Fulu-Aiolupotea 2014) with the researcher. These research interactions discursively investigated Pasifika students' concepts of success in educational contexts. The data set also included information from talanoa conducted with Pasifika parents of students at the school. Echoing the literature, a key concern for both students and parents was the nature of relationships and relational interactions between Pasifika students and their teachers. Va became relevant as a conceptual tool in an informed grounded theory (Thornberg 2012) analysis of this data set, particularly within the related themes of Pasifika success as acceptance, comfort and participation (Reynolds 2017a).

The second set of data came from teachers of Pasifika students. Twelve teachers opted to participate in a PLD programme focussed on Pasifika education within the schools' general group-based PLD provision. In accordance with the ethical agreement between the researcher and Pasifika participants, themes from the first set of data were offered to the group of teachers within a mediated dialogue (Nakhid 2003), together with anonymised individual responses to exemplify each theme. Prior to discussing extracts from the first data set, teachers were presented with the concept of va through discussions with a community representative and the researcher, and by reference to key quotations from the literature.

Complex ethics are involved in research where a researcher simultaneously holds three key positions within three sets of relationship: teacher of students, colleague of teachers, and researcher working for and with a community group. Attention to intricate insider–outsider positionality is required such as that discussed by Carling et al. (2014); Kerstetter (2012); Merriam et al. (2001); Smith (1999). Following the advice of Airini et al. (2010), ethics of positionality were resolved through teu le va, where the multiple roles I occupied were aligned by a focus on the teacher/colleague/researcher as learner. In this way, relational clarity was provided through explicit attention to the researcher's responsibility to learn and to provide learning opportunities for others. The aim of all learning from the study was to support the

achievement of Pasifika ideas of success as Pasifika in education, the core of the enquiry.

In this article, the focus is the data set derived from the involvement of teachers in PLD. The PLD programme was shaped to some extent by school-based constraints: the time available and output requirements. In order to enact the research methodology within these contraints, six 40 min PLD sessions were planned as follows: introduction and discussion of va; discussion of va and Pasifika parents' comments about teachers and teaching; discussion of va and Pasifika students' comments on teachers and teaching; discussion synthesising and clarifying previous sessions, matters of practice and the organisation of peer observation; feedback from peer observation of lessons and paperwork completion; and filming of videos as accountability to parents. In the event, some blurring of boundaries between sessions occurred, and some filming took place away from the group sessions.

There can be a tension between scale and detail in research. Small studies are limited in direct generalisability by their contextual nature. However, they can reveal what Sanga calls "the context behind the context—the spheres or domain of social relationships within communities" (as cited in Airini et al. 2010, p. 11). Deeply contextual material helps us to know in depth what needs to be dealt with on a wider scale. A tight and intense contextual focus that appreciates the complexities of experience can indicate the kinds of questions to ask more widely, and profile the kinds of dynamics which might be significant elsewhere. In this case, a glimpse is provided of the process of learning about a Pacific relational concept and the classroom application of this learning. This is of value to those wishing to understand teacher education for CRE in other spaces.

The next section discusses the kinds of knowledge constructed by teachers within the PLD programme. Data is of two kinds: transcribed discussions from PLD sessions, and transcripts of video accounts of teachers' learning which were offered to parents within the study's mediated relational framework. Discussion is staged following a structure adapted from Aronson and Laughter (2016): knowledge contributing to CRP; knowledge leading to CRT; and attention to CRE as a relational outcome of CRP and CRT.

Knowledge Contributing to Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Conceptual Knowledge

Aronson and Laughter (2016), following Ladson-Billings (1995a, b), describe CRP as concerned with holistic community and individual empowerment; an understanding which "primarily seeks to influence attitudes and dispositions… a posture a teacher might adopt that… would determine planning, instruction, and assessment" (p. 166/7), and which involves aspects of teacher cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness. Links between CRT and CRP gain importance in Pasifika education because of an often-silenced cultural baseline of white spaces (Milne 2013). Consequently, teachers who seek to appreciate the Pacific origin concept of va display cultural humility (Foronda et al. 2016; Tinkler and Tinkler 2016) by

placing themselves in a position where habitual foundations of thinking and practice are necessarily challenged.

"Disturbance" (Peck et al. 2009, p. 20) often refers to the effects of challenge to the systemic operations of organisations. It is used here to describe the way teachers negotiate with va and adjust their cultural systems as they read classrooms. A short PLD programme is insufficient to gain a deep understanding of va, but an incipient understanding may encourage teachers to reframe Pasifika education. Evidence of disturbance can be found in the metaphorical language teachers used to construct a new understanding of relationality. During the initial va-focussed sessions one teacher described his developing appreciation through a photographic metaphor: *kind of like the negative space, then the image is formed, the shadow that forms the image*. Another used a musical metaphor where the spatial aspect of va is the silence between musical notes which declares their relationship. The metaphor of va as space from the literature was also contextually reshaped by teachers. For instance, one teacher pondered va as *what's in the space and how far it radiates out, what are the connections,* and another imagined communication in the va: *information is going backwards and forwards across the va the whole time.* Metaphoric language of this kind resonates with other explorations of va, for example Manu (2013) and Clayton (2007).

The depth of disturbance provided by va to habitual cultural logic is explicit in a video transcript:

> [Va,] it really just blew my mind, it made me feel…it was like that aha moment where it kind of just clicked that…yeah…the space between is really important, that that relationship is really important and it's not just my classroom… it was what we created together.

Such disturbance evidences an encounter between a teacher socialised in a world view where the individual is generally the focus and an understanding which is more collective. Where teachers are challenged to re-imagine their conceptual tools, community capital (Yosso 2005) can be valuable in the re-construction of the professional stance. In Pasifika education, teachers who practice cultural humility can become *students of the va* looking for the *spirit of the va* as teachers in the PLD described themselves.

Self-Knowledge

Following conceptual discussions of va, data from Pasifika students and parents regarding teachers and teaching was presented in the PLD cycle. Key elements included the significance to Pasifika students of harmonious closeness between student and teacher, and the importance of the tone of the learning environment. Both concerns are present in the literature (e.g., Hawk et al. 2002; Siope 2011). Because conceptual discussion preceded exposure to voice-based data, teachers were positioned to understand what Pasifika students and parents had said through their incipient understanding of va. The ecological and environmental

aspects of va counter individualising personality-driven ideas about the effective teacher which feature in early literature of Pasifika education.

Self-knowledge in the context of va is also relational knowledge. Here, a teacher explores her sense of professional self as affected by new knowledge:

> I think it has been really important to consider things from the student perspective a lot more. And this is something we probably do in our own personal relationships, but it seems to get a bit forgotten in this kind of transactional relationship between teacher and student. You are so used to being the dominant presence in the classroom… Well, what we are supposed to do in our relationships with our loved ones and our friends – to actually do that a bit more in the classroom…

This describes the result of being challenged to focus on how one's actions are seen and the effect they can have. The analogy of loved ones grounds the teacher's thinking about relationships in trust and acceptance. Recognising the value ascribed to relational thinking by members of the Pasifika community seems to have provoked self-knowledge of prior pedagogic assumptions and encouraged a shift away from the distance implied in a transactional relationship.

A second example of self-knowledge from another teacher also displays the way thinking through va can shift the professional self.

> So in my class I have tried to open up and use humour and make it a warm and safe learning environment where my students want to be and want to excel. And as the year has gone on in my class I've handed over some leadership roles… and through those leadership roles it's given them [Pasifika students] more confidence.

This claim suggests challenges to a previous pedagogy where personal involvement was limited. Trying to *open up* marks a change in understanding. In addition, in re-thinking his relationship to students, this teacher exercises agency by re-distributing leadership with positive consequences. The value ascribed to warmth and safety can be linked to the aim of harmony in teu le va, suggesting a reshape of classroom values and ethics in which cultural and spiritual safety have assumed greater significance than before.

Data from other video transcripts further displays teachers articulating revised knowledge of various aspects of the professional self. One teacher, for example, reflectively focused on interpersonal activity: *One of the great values of doing something like this [PLD] was to reflect on how we interact with the students.* Another teacher detailed a challenge to the legitimacy of previous power dynamics, the result of *a change in my mind-set from 'it's my classroom' to 'it's our classroom'.* A third discussed the relationship between temperament and a re-reading of the classroom: *I found myself being a lot more patient in situations where I would have otherwise maybe shown those frustrations, but instead I have been working on being persistent in showing the student that I care about them doing well and I care about what they have got to say.*

In various ways, these examples illustrate the potential of combining va as a conceptual disturbance with information about teachers and teaching from the school's Pasifika community. A relational lens on pedagogy can lead to the deliberate prioritisation of care as love, enhanced opportunities for reciprocity through more equitable power-sharing, attention to the effect as well as the intent of one's actions as a teacher, and an increased sense of the importance of taking agency over the quality of the learning environment. Together, this suggests that the pedagogical stance of teachers involved in Pasifika education can be challenged and reshaped by appropriately structured culturally-informed PLD. Where teachers exhibit cultural humility and are offered powerful conceptual knowledge they can learn to teu le va deliberately.

Knowledge Contributing to Culturally Responsive Teaching

Learning About Practice

A key aspect of Gay's (2002) conceptualisation of CRT is the forging of contextual pedagogical connections with students by teachers. Knowledge which undercuts deficit accounts by valuing culture and difference can support this. In the discussion of CRP above, the way teachers' thinking can be affected by a combination of conceptual disturbance and contextualised student voice was presented. In this section, attention is paid to the actions teachers involved in the PLD programme report taking in class. These actions embody revised pedagogy in practice and revised views of the professional self (Grimmett and MacKinnon 1992).

Teachers report adjusting their practice to take account of the spatial and environmental implications of va in the face of relatively quiet Pasifika students. For instance, one explained:

> I moved away from this whole class discussion and making people talk in front of others… realising that having a one-on-one conversation with someone does count as a form of [formative] assessment – just because they don't put up their hand and speak in front of everyone doesn't mean that they haven't got it.

Another teacher made a similar behavioural change:

> I decided to…focus on one-on-one discussion with all of my students… I looked at making the learning steps really clear so that all students knew exactly where they were…[and] to do more cooperative learning to let students work with their friends as much as possible.

These comments suggest teachers reframing actions by paying attention to the space in which education occurs. Teachers describe moving the basis of their interactions towards an understanding the classroom as a site of multiple relationally-defined spaces. A consequence of this change is positive deliberate physical closeness between teacher and student, helpful as a way to teu le va in educational encounters.

In the second example, the teacher also reports changing practice to acknowledge the classroom as a space of inter-student relationships which have the potential to support learning. This reshapes power in the classroom, an aspect which resonates in the following teacher's account of changed practice:

> Rather than the students all coming in lining up outside, getting your books out, standing, then listening to me give a big spiel at the start of class, I [now] welcome them all individually, ask how they are, they sit down, they sort of get their stuff out and I go around and set them all up individually. I found that that obviously takes more time but it is so much more beneficial in terms of getting the engagement levels really sort of boosted in the classroom.

These changes in practice do not imply the abandonment of the idea of 'the class', but point to a deconstruction of a historically constructed dynamic where the role of the teacher is to deal with classes as homogenised groups by controlling dialogue, geographical position, timing and so on.

Other examples of teachers describing changing of practice likely to lead to CRT include:

> [using] structures for learning that allowed for the inclusion of their voice and celebrated it …

and

> offering questioning strategies that weren't confrontational but were varied as well

and further,

> creating a space in the classroom where their home background and all the richness that they bring into the classroom, where they know it is valued.

While some might argue that changes of this nature are merely good teaching (Ladson-Billings 1995a, b), it is important to realise that a teacher's practice is not developed in a vacuum, and that challenges and support are required by teachers to oppose prevalent cultural logics which shape what they feel is expected of them. High-quality conceptually-focused PLD is a necessary precursor of deliberate and significant change in Pasifika education.

Learning About the Environmental Constraints

Comments made by teachers point to an awareness of the challenges of teu le va as a way forward in Pasifika education. Teachers reflected on deficit theorising about Pasifika students within institutionally encouraged practice:

> I had a particular class that had a high percentage of Pasifika students and I was really struggling with this class to sort of … to get them all engaged in the classroom. I was led to believe…I was sort of taught that I needed to be very authoritarian with them, very strict with them, show them who is boss… [My

> new knowledge] meant I needed to be a little bit more relaxed I guess in my teaching or a little bit more open to not being boss lady all the time…

Here, the teacher's reframed practice directly opposes what she sees as common wisdom. Another teacher discussed a similar dilemma from a more abstract perspective:

> [I pursued] a de-formalisation of the student–teacher relationship, which was a bit of a challenge at times. The formal nature of it can be protective, but I found there was more honesty from the students, so I guess that's the payback for that de-formalisation, they are more willing to buy into solutions around any issues that might arise, but also more willing to engage in what was put in front of them.

In the PLD cycle, this teacher's goal was to encourage educational risk-taking in all his students. Applying his learning about va and the ethic of teu le va to a constructivist understanding of education offered him a way to re-think classroom approaches. The idea of formality as a central aspect of the teacher's role suggests the prevalence of transactional relationships in New Zealand education. The traditional teacher's role may not be helpful in Pasifika education if wide relational distance is the result. Making changes which embody culturally responsive teaching in an environment where relational closeness is not part of the general cultural logic is not easy. As one teacher put it:

> I have… this awareness of the holistic nature of the va, and it's been a real challenge for me to think about how I incorporate something like that within a system that feels quite compartmentalised.

Together, these accounts of change in practice illustrate the value of a va lens to Pasifika education. By understanding Pasifika student voice through cultural logic, teachers can reshape how they think about their practice. This encourages teachers to be deliberate in adopting values which centre on care, responsiveness, relational closeness and acceptance. A rethink of the professional self can lead to discomfort in the face of other logics and values. Such a situation arises if the va between dominant ideas about education and Pasifika views is not well-configured.

Concluding Discussion

Notwithstanding the diversity under the Pasifika umbrella (Samu 2006), an incipient understanding of va seems to be a useful tool in developing enhanced self-knowledge and related changes in Palagi teachers. Rather than being a single Pasifika pedagogy open to the charge of aggregating a diverse population, a pedagogy of space based on "caring, inclusive and cohesive relationships" (Samu 2006, p. 47) can accommodate diversity. The comments of teachers in this study suggest that Pacific origin concepts are helpful alternatives to historically sanctioned but generally silenced educational power relationships.

Despite the contextualised nature of the study, it has been argued that structuring PLD to provide relevant student voice, concepts capable of challenging dominant world views, and socialisation into alternative ethics may provide a way forward for education in inter-cultural spaces. The potential of this approach to teacher education within a sustainable in-school model indicates that other practitioners may find fruitful ground for developing and delivering similar programmes of cultural challenge, cultural knowledge and contextual learning to teachers who are in pursuit of equity and cultural sustainability in their own inter-cultural educational spaces.

This article has discussed the value to Pasifika education of conceptual knowledge of Pacific origin when it is used to understand the voice of Pasifika students and parents, even when that understanding is held by teachers in a rudimentary form at the start of a journey of learning. New understandings can promote changes in pedagogy to embody aspects of CRP and CRT. The resultant CRE can benefit Pasifika students, their parents and communities. A caveat is that teachers in this study displayed prior cultural humility by opting into a culturally-focussed Pasifika education PLD programme. It is unclear if compulsory PLD of a similar nature would be accepted as a valid challenge by those whose cultural stance is essentially assimilationist or who inhabit a deficit paradigm. This question places importance on future research into cultivating cultural humility in all practicing teachers.

Acknowledgements Gratitude is due to the students, parents and teachers who contributed to the study from which this account is drawn, to the academics from Victoria University of Wellington and the National University of Samoa who supported the work, and to the anonymous reviewers who provided guidance. Finally, thanks to my family. ʻOfa atu.

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