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Pasifika student perspectives on teaching methods can enhance academic success

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Raising the educational achievement of Pasifika students remains a challenge for the New Zealand education system. Previous studies suggest that teaching methods informed by the perspectives of students can lead to increased academic success. Research by Massey University's Lynda Knight-de Blois explores the views of Pacific secondary students on what they believe to be effective teaching and learning practices for them.

Student perspectives on teaching

The voices of Pacific young people and their perspectives about effective teaching have not typically been used to formally inform strategies, plans and approaches to engage Pasifika students in their learning and boost their educational success. Previous studies about effective teaching demonstrate that student perspectives are essential to enhance the engagement and achievement of Pasifika learners. This study found that Pasifika students believe the most important factors for their learning are teachers who build and maintain positive, caring and respectful relationships with their students; teachers who encourage and ensure all students understand their learning; and lessons that are varied, practical, and interactive.

Rationale for research

New Zealand educators and policy makers have been striving for two decades to close the gap between Pacific learners and their peers. While there have been small improvements, Māori and Pacific youth remain overrepresented among the 10,000 students who leave school each year with no formal qualifications (33% and 30% respectively – 2013 Census). The challenge is to explore why the education system seems to be failing so many Pasifika students.

Recommendations

The Education Review Office should require secondary schools to gather student voice in a systematic and rigorous way as an aspect of their teacher appraisal and performance management processes. Examining the benefits of teacher evaluation is likely to assist education providers and policy makers to design useful and effective teacher appraisal models, which support more teachers to establish and sustain caring and connected relationships with their Pacific students.

Key Points:

- Teaching methods informed by the perspectives of students can lead to increased academic success
- Building and maintaining positive relationships between teachers and students is essential to the achievement of Pasifika learners
- The systematic and rigorous collection of student voices should play an important part in teacher assessment and evaluation processes

*"Using student voice in a consistent and rigorous way may help teachers develop positive, empathetic relationships to better engage their students in learning."
(Lynda Knight-de Blois)*

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