**‘Engaging Pasifika Learners’ HBETA Meeting on 25th June 2015 held at St. John’s College.**

1st Presentation of ideas by Mrs Lyndie Balfour, HOD English at St. John’s College.

As background, three events have had significant influence on my beliefs. In 2013 I received a NZ Teachers’ Council Sabbatical which gave me a term’s leave to the focus on improving the reading of Pasifika boys at SJC. Secondly, last year Jane Beatson and I attended a three day course in the holiday at Wellington called ‘Carrying the Tapa’ (Pasifika focus on all subjects, pre-school, primary and secondary). Lastly, this term I attended an in-service course on ‘Engaging Learners from Years 9 and 10’ and once again many of ideas from the previously mentioned endeavours were reinforced. Below are some of the idea that I believe are the most important things that we as teachers need to be addressing with our Pasifika students.

**Introduction.** Engaging Pasifika students and improving academic results is complex. This involves: individual Pasifika students, the classroom, tutoring outside class time, extra-curricular activities, school-wide policies, the families, wider community and spiritual lives. When learning about Pasifika students’ education the phrase that ‘it takes a village to bring up a child’ kept being repeated. Today I will give an overview, Jane Beatson will look at AVAILLL, Rebecca Lagas will talk about collecting and using data and lastly Tracy Russell will talk about homework centres at Flaxmere and at school.

* The most important aspect is **student-teacher relationships**. Greeting students by name as they arrive and pronouncing names correctly; finding out about their family, cultural origin, language spoken at home plus their connections; spirituality; sports; academic aspirations; interests etc. **Goal setting** is important and teachers should discuss and track these with students 1-to-1. All the high performing Pasifika students who spoke at the Wellington course stressed teachers tracking their performance, caring for them and their achievement, having high expectations and personal support in the school. Respect, humour, fairness, patience, and a giving nature all matter.
* **Mark their work and give regular, personal feedback**, specifying what is done well and what is needed for improvement or to secure a higher level. Ensuring that Pasifika students thoroughly **understand the language used in the assessment criteria** is vital. Language diaries help students track words they need to understand.
* Show interest and value for their **cultural differences within the classroom**: include Pasifika images on the walls, use Pasifika texts, include their Pasifika identity in creative writing, formal writing, speeches, when producing their visual texts/posters/film-making etc.
* Select teaching programmes which work. E.g ***AVAILLL Studies***

A pilot ***AVAILLL*** study was completed in 2007 in Christchurch by the developer from the US, (Alice Killackey) and reported on by Faye Parkhill and Jilaine Johnson. Four schools in the Christchurch area were invited to participate in this project. Teachers in the experimental group were chosen by standard random method, with the developer, researchers and school administrators there as observers. A total of 240 children from decile 2 – 5 schools took part in the study. 40% of the children in the study were from non-European ethnic backgrounds. **The results of this study indicated that the AVAILLL programme had a significant impact, particularly for Maori and Pasifika and low progress students.** **In this sample of schools, the non-New Zealand European group’s mean reading gain increased by 0.66 years and the below age readers’ mean gain was 0.77 years after a six-week programme.** This compares with the control classes non-New Zealand European groups, whose mean gain over the same period was 0.17 years. Control below age readers’ gain was 0.22 years. These results were statistically significant.

The qualitative data from **questionnaire** revealed some interesting trends. There was a 98.8% positive reaction from the students in the programme. Emerging themes from student evaluations included the following: high enjoyment, ways in which it helped their reading, its role in supporting other academic areas, **the development of (renewed interest) in reading and reading subtitles in their leisure time**.

Equally important was the improvement, after the programme was completed, continued in both reading comprehension, vocab recognition and writing.

* **Collecting data is vital**. By analysing data teachers know more: students’ cultural identity and family circumstances; students’ achievements, strengths, special needs, weaknesses; what they are enrolled in etc. These need to be tracked and support provided before assessments etc.
* **Polynesian Clubs** are important as they support students’ cultural identity and feelings of self-worth. A **teacher with a responsibility for Pasifika students** is important here. It is important that this group is visible in schools: performing in assemblies, receiving awards at assemblies, showing videos of their performance at the Polynesian Festival etc.
* **Selecting Pasifika students** **as cultural representatives**. E.g. this year both the SJC O’Shea Shield junior and senior **orators** were Pasifika students (being placed 1st and 2nd in their events). The content of their speeches were culturally significant. Both performed in our assemblies and received their awards later in assembly.
* **Select Pasifika students as prefects, house leaders** etc. This is important as they are the role models for other Pasifika students. Using these leaders is also useful when other students are underperforming-almost like student counsellors.
* **A teacher in charge of tracking the academic achievement outside specific subjects**. Tracy Russell is our Level 1 Academic Dean and she has made a huge impact on the results of our Pasifika students. E.g. 100% L 1 Literacy in 2014.
* **Teachers who offer 1-to-1 tutoring out of class time is vital**. Students from Mc Auley High School, a high performing Auckland school, spoke of this aspect being most influential in their achievement. If students are not completing Internals, homework and such, teachers work with them at lunch or after school. This made a huge difference, both in the short and long term, and in the level of achievement.
* **Providing Homework Centres in school**. We run homework classes after school Monday to Thursday, with computers available for these students. These homework classes must be staffed by teachers.
* **Encourage Homework Centres in the community**. Tracy Russell runs the Tongan Homework Centre in Flaxmere on Mondays and she will discuss this later.
* **Senior Management need to take an active interest in the families, their strengths and needs**. At the schools where results are high, the SMT are actively involved. E.g Ann Dyer the principal from McAuley High is at the gate every day, checking uniform, lateness etc. This school has over 90% P.I, is Decile 1, yet their NCEA results are similar to Decile 8-10 schools. By following up on uniform issues, she often discovers financial hardship which needs supporting.
* **Absenteeism and lateness** followed up quickly and personally. These two impact greatly on academic achievement so involving the families makes a difference.
* **Including the families in school by having Pasifika Evenings.** These involved the parents and improve results. Inclusion of food and prayers are important here. An evening could include having parents attend the practice night before the Polynesian festival. Discussion groups, working through questionnaires, will help give the school feedback and feedforward on issues important to parents and their students.
* **Teaching parents about N.C.E.A. helps student performance.** Schools which ran evenings that explained how NCEA functions, how to read results, reports etc. have found that Pasifika students’ results improved.

It takes a village to raise a child so we need to be looking at all aspects of the student and recognise what we can do to help them achieve to the best of their potential.