

10 October 2019

Comment to the Pacific Education Fono, South Auckland

Unfortunately we were unable to attend the Pacific Education Fono in South Auckland on 8 October. However, we would like to provide a brief comment to the Ministry of Education as part of its Pacific Education Fono.

About Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand

Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand is a national organisation that promotes high-quality early childhood education (ECE) through initial teacher education, professional development, leadership programmes, advocacy and membership services.

Te Rito Maioha is a membership organisation. We represent early childhood education services and the teachers who provide education and care to thousands of infants, toddlers and young children. Our members are drawn from a diverse range of community-based and privately-owned education and care services, home-based services and kindergartens.

Te Rito Maioha is also one of New Zealand's top providers of initial teacher education for ECE teachers and is recognised as a leader in bicultural teacher education. We deliver a suite of qualifications and teacher education and professional development programmes that are of interest to both domestic and international students.

Te Rito Maioha is committed to high-quality early childhood care and education for every New Zealand child. That has been our purpose for 55 years since our formation in 1963, originally as the New Zealand Association of Childcare Centres and later as Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa | NZ Childcare Association.

Our comments

1. Culturally responsive teachers

Pasifika children have a right to a culturally responsive education, to have their cultural identities affirmed authentically by teachers and to experience a flexible and responsive curriculum that empowers them to access and engage with the cultural practices of their homes and communities (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Therefore, it is important that Pasifika Education Plan (PEP) places more emphasis on supplying teachers who have some understanding of Pasifika cultures and ways of children's knowing and being. We believe that more needs to be done to attract Pasifika people to become qualified ECE teachers. However, IELTS requirements for entry into Initial Teacher Education currently create a barrier to entry for some.

In promoting participation of Pasifika children, the PEP needs to support the employment of qualified, committed and reflective teachers. These teachers must be willing to engage in ongoing

professional learning and put their important work under the microscope, to examine levels of cultural responsiveness in their identification of, and partnering families in, educating children (Hedges & Cooper, 2014).

2. *Pasifika languages*

We believe that all Pasifika children should have the opportunity to learn their own language. Te Whāriki supports this by valuing confidence in a child's first language. Tapasā also supports this through its identities languages and culture competency. However, the New Zealand Curriculum does not recognise Pasifika languages as "official languages" and states that instruction needs to be in English or te reo Māori. In addition the current PEP As a result of Pasifika languages not being officially acknowledged, there are currently very limited resources for Pasifika early learning centres.

3. *Need to promote the importance of parents' participation*

From my personal experience, I have observed that many Pasifika parents shy away from schools and centres for various reasons. It is also noted that many early childhood services are in a very competitive and market-driven part of the sector and a 'consumer' or client-focused perspective (O'Gorman, 2008) and this complicates different cultural understandings of education. There is a cultural divide. Furthermore, differences between teachers' and families' views about what are valued curriculum experiences may also get in the way of reciprocal relationships forming (Hadley, 2012). In addition, parents may have important, demanding and time-consuming commitments and service obligations such as work, family and cultural responsibilities that affect their ability to collaborate.

Therefore, PEP must re-emphasise the long-standing importance of teachers working in partnerships with families to strengthen children's educational experiences. Authentic collaboration is necessary for teachers to engage respectfully with families in order to share and mutually appreciate each other's knowledge and expertise.

4. *Lack of awareness and use of the Pasifika Education Plan*

As part of the evaluation, ERO had asked schools if they were aware of the PEP and how they were using it to promote student achievement and Pacific parent involvement in their children's learning.

ERO found that of schools with Pacific students, very few were aware of and using the plan to inform their approach to improving Pacific student achievement.

It is evident that the PEP is not well distributed or publicised and that it is a high-level document that has very little impact on the decision making in schools. Many schools, and early childhood centres, and teachers are not aware that the PEP even exists and if they are, they do not see it as being a document that has any significance to their own schools or teaching practice.

The revised PEP should address the lack of school emphasis on Pasifika learners and the poor understanding, uptake and implementation strategies for the Pasifika Education Plan within schools. If Pasifika Education is considered a priority, then this should be shown in the way that the PEP is resourced, implemented and monitored within the NZ School system and in the way it is promulgated and publicised.

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