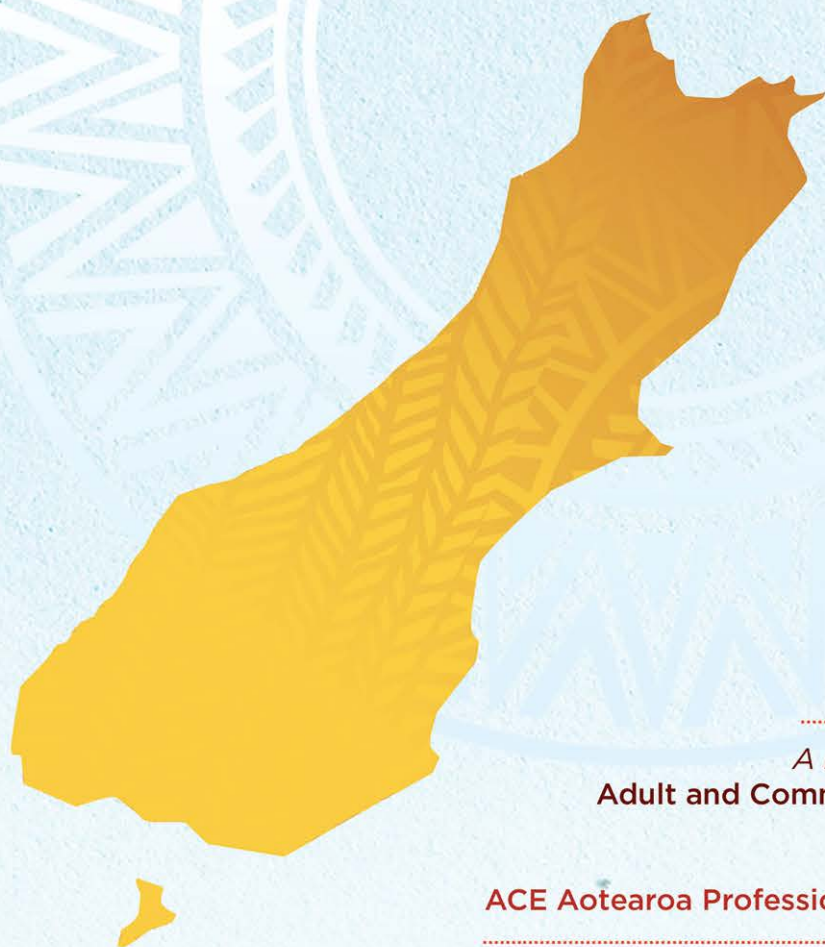




# PASIFIKA SUCCESS AS PASIFIKA

Pasifika Conceptualisations of Literacy  
for Success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand



*A research project commissioned by  
Adult and Community Education (ACE) Aotearoa*

*Sponsored and overseen by the  
ACE Aotearoa Professional Development Steering Group*



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The researcher and research team also wish to thank the following: The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), the ACE Aotearoa Professional Development Steering Group; and the PSAPiA Reference Group members for contributing to the funding and commissioning and guidance of the project respectively. The research team also acknowledges and wishes to thank ACE Director Dr Jo Lake and Project Sponsor Pale Sauni for their strong and valuable leadership.

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For all who have supported and awaited this project and intend to take up its findings for future action towards the success of Pasifika as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand, thank you.

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# Executive Summary

This research report presents the details and findings of a research project commissioned by Adult and Community Education (ACE) Aotearoa, entitled *Pasifika Success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand (PSAPiA)*. Intended to be the first of a series providing Pasifika participants in Aotearoa New Zealand with the opportunity to collectively and coherently describe success as Pasifika according to their own insights and aspirations, the focus of this current project was on seeking and articulating a collective conceptualisation of 'literacy' and 'success' and the link between the two from the perspective of Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand. The project's three-part design incorporated a review of selected relevant literature, Pasifika consultation groups, and wider consultations with Pasifika via an online survey.

The literature review provides a foundational understanding of the contested nature of 'literacy' and its evolution through various theoretical conceptualisations over time, both internationally and locally – from literacy as discrete sets of technical skills to literacy as human resource commodity for economic growth to literacy as capabilities for sociocultural and political change and various permutations in between. Conceptualisations of 'literacy' evident in official definitions in Aotearoa New Zealand reveal variations in ideology across educational levels and formal and informal contexts. While these conceptualisations have variously excluded or included literacies other than reading and writing, the study reports on a growing body of knowledge concerning indigenous literacies worldwide and efforts by these communities to re-connect with, re-value, and revitalise indigenous literacies.

The consultation groups and online survey invited the project's Pasifika participants to share their own insights and aspirations concerning literacy for success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand, by asking: (1) What is 'literacy' for Pasifika and what does it have to do with

Pasifika languages, cultures, and identities?

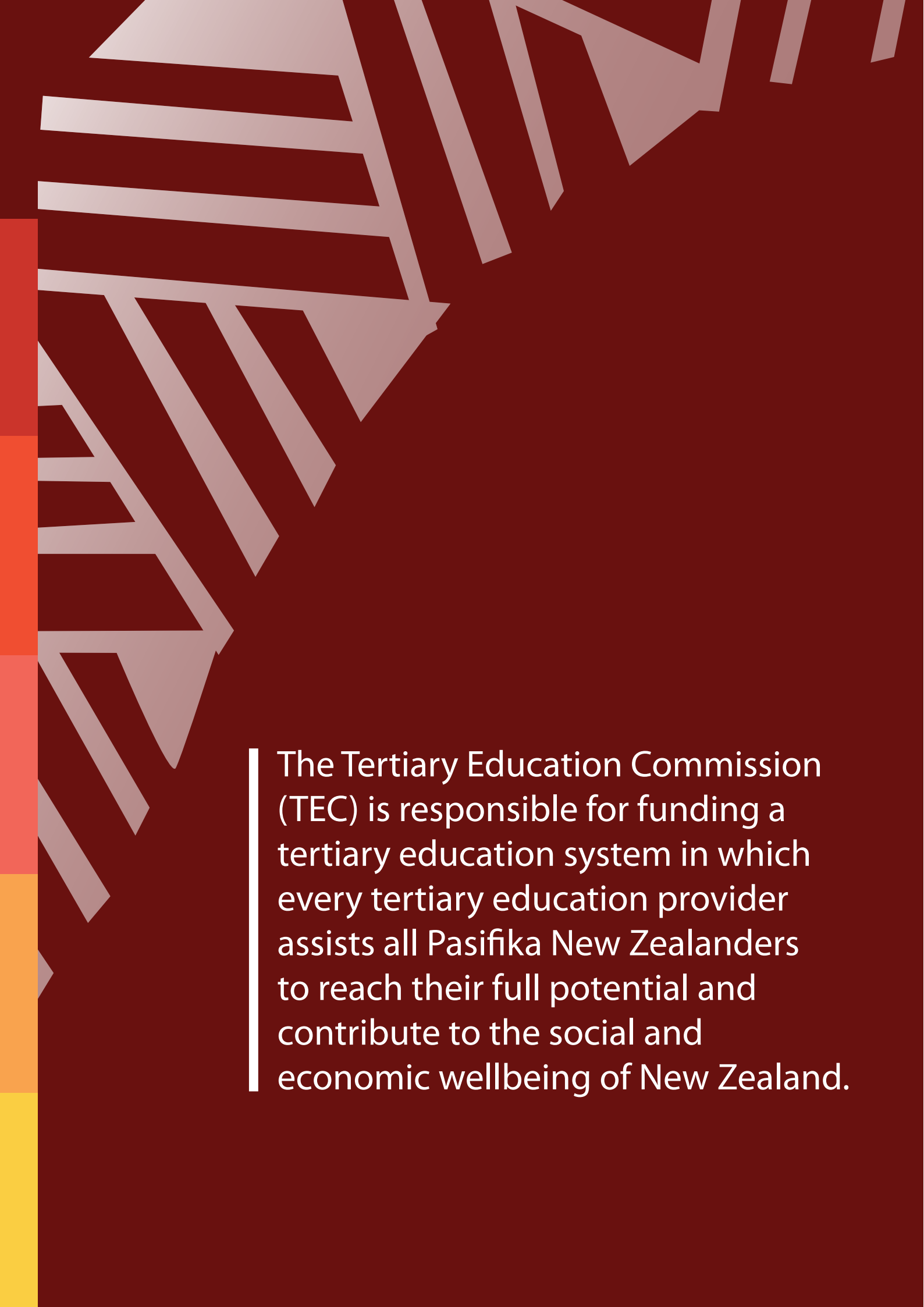
(2) What are the aspirations of Pasifika regarding the attributes of a 'literate' Pasifika person in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2028?

(3) How does 'literacy as Pasifika' contribute to 'success as Pasifika' in Aotearoa New Zealand?

The insights shared by the participants indicate that the Pasifika conceptualisations of 'literacy' and 'success' are considerably broader and more holistic than the common and official definitions prevalent internationally and locally. In the Pasifika conceptualisation, conventional literacy (the ability to read and write – usually in a dominant language) is held to be important but not sufficient for Pasifika to develop the kind of holistic, multi-modal, culturally-rich, relationally-oriented 'literacy' they desire. Furthermore, the current narrow conceptualisation of literacy as 'reading and writing' within a skills-based tradition is simply not sufficient to enable Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand to experience the kind of holistic, transformative, cultural values-based and family-oriented 'success as Pasifika' to which they aspire.

The project's findings seek to enrich traditionally economically-driven perspectives, and to increase the relevance of 'literacy' conceptualisations to Pasifika peoples by drawing on a sociocultural perspective of literacy and the culturally defined insights, values, and aspirations of Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand. The challenges as they lie are to continue to 'unpack' the complex and multiple constructs of literacy and success for Pasifika at the interface of cultures and to respond effectively to this in policy and practice so that wider material and non-material dimensions of 'success as Pasifika' become attainable for all Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand who seek them.

The current narrow conceptualisation of literacy as 'reading and writing' within a skills-based tradition is simply not sufficient to enable Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand to experience the kind of holistic, transformative, cultural values-based and family-oriented 'success as Pasifika' to which they aspire.



The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) is responsible for funding a tertiary education system in which every tertiary education provider assists all Pasifika New Zealanders to reach their full potential and contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of New Zealand.



# Introduction and Background to the Project

---

## 1.1 The Project's Beginnings

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) is responsible for funding a tertiary education system in which every tertiary education provider assists all Pasifika New Zealanders to reach their full potential and contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of New Zealand. The primary strategic driver for the TEC is the Tertiary Education Strategy 2010–2015 (TES) which sets out the long-term strategic direction for the tertiary education sector as well as the current and medium-term priorities. The TES identifies Pasifika learners as a priority group; the goal being to raise Pasifika success at all levels.

In 2012, the TEC established a Pasifika Tertiary Education Working Group, which drew upon sector-wide expertise to consider best practice in the sector and provide advice on how this can be embedded across the sector. The Working Group was charged with reviewing and improving the draft Tertiary Education Pasifika Strategy 2013–2017. ACE Aotearoa was selected to be a member of this group and invited to share the ACE experience in working with Pasifika adult learners who had not experienced prior success in the education system in relation to literacy and numeracy. The current project was commissioned, funded, and supported by the TEC and sponsored by ACE Aotearoa through the Adult and Community Education Professional Development fund.

ACE Aotearoa is committed to collating existing research published on Adult and Community Education and conducting ongoing research against priority areas. The ACE Professional Development Steering Group (ACE PDSG) works to foster and coordinate actions to achieve the aims of the ACE Professional Development Strategy and Action Plan 2006–2020. Part of the group's role is to promote research into adult and community education, which can then be drawn on for professional development. The ACE Aotearoa Professional Development Steering group saw the need for research specifically on Pasifika peoples, as they make

up around seven percent of the population in Aotearoa New Zealand (MPIA statistics as at 2006 census), and represent a growing proportion of the uptake of adult and community education within the country. Accordingly, the PDSG led the process, which resulted in the commissioning and undertaking of this project under the sponsorship of ACE PDSG member Pale Sauni.

## 1.2 The Scope of the Project

The "Pasifika Success as Pasifika" project builds on previous work, including findings that sustainable Pasifika ACE providers are strongly linked to their communities and that Pasifika learners who are given appropriate preparation and support are likely to achieve success in pursuing tertiary study qualifications.

Initial briefings regarding the scope of the project indicated that the project was intended to extend the body of knowledge by exploring broader areas of adult and community learning including, but not limited to, "Pasifika Literacy, including financial literacy and its place in Pasifika success, including educational success"; "the interface of Pasifika Literacy with 'mainstream' society (including education, economic and social practices) in Aotearoa New Zealand"; and "identifying and testing what is meant by 'Pasifika success' in specific communities." Having ascertained a focus on 'success as Pasifika', the project's sponsor, coordinator, researcher and reference group collectively identified 'literacy' as core to most understandings of development and success and saw this as an appropriate and needed focus for this, the first of the PSAPiA series.

The project's overall aim was to promote research on ACE that could then be drawn on for professional development, with an emphasis on action research with, by, and for ACE practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand. In this sense, the project has always been "solution- focused", "dream forming" and "destiny creating" (Alderson & Giles, 2008:3),

The project's three part design incorporated a review of selected relevant literature, Pasifika consultation groups, and wider consultations with Pasifika via an online survey.

designed to facilitate “Hope filled dialogue”, with a view to “restoring holistic and transformative educational practice” and making it the norm for our Pasifika and other learners.

### 1.3 The Research Team

#### *Project sponsor and commissioning body ACE Aotearoa*

As previously stated, the commissioner of this report is **Adult and Community Education (ACE) Aotearoa**. ACE Aotearoa Te Tumuaki/Director, **Dr Jo Lake** provided project oversight and the necessary resource and other support as required by the project, nominating **Analiese Robertson** (*Professional Development and Networks Manager*) to undertake core project coordination and vital project support at all levels. The project’s sponsor, **Pale Sauni** (*Pasifika Education Consultant, Open Polytechnic*) has also provided essential project oversight, direction and guidance throughout.

*The Pasifika Success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand (PSAPiA) Reference Group members are:*

**Dr Cherie Chu** (Tahitian/Chinese descent)  
*Senior Lecturer and Co-Director*

He Parekereke: Institute for Research & Development in Māori and Pacific Education, Te Kura Māori, Faculty of Education Victoria University of Wellington

**Peter Stowers** (Sāmoan descent)  
*Pacific Community Advisor*  
ASB Community Trust

**Bruce George** (Cook Island Māori descent)  
*Curriculum Development Manager*  
Literacy Aotearoa

**Maureen Tukaroa-Betham**  
(Cook Island Māori descent)  
*National Business Coordinator*  
Pacific Business Trust

**Christine Nurminen** (Tongan descent)  
*Chief Executive Officer*  
Pasifika Education Centre

#### **The Researcher**

The researcher commissioned to undertake the project is Ruth Toumu’a (PhD, MA, DipTESOL, BA). Dr Toumu’a is of Papua New



TOUMU'A  
Research & Consultancy

Guinean and New Zealand descent and holds a Doctorate in Applied Linguistics. Her work in New Zealand has included various research, support, and executive roles at Victoria University of

Wellington as well as a range of research and consultancy roles in the field of education and Pasifika peoples. Her research interests and experience include: academic reading; academic literacy and learning skill development in higher education; Pasifika student participation, retention, achievement and completion in higher education; student transition and preparedness for higher education; adult and community literacy amongst Pasifika peoples.

### 1.4 The Aims of the Project

#### *The project's nature, beginnings, context and purpose have given form to three specific aims:*

**1) Contribution to the body of knowledge about Pasifika literacy, adult education, and success.** The focus of this project is on literacy, what it means to Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa, and literacy’s role in the success of Pasifika peoples as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand. The project arose out of the need to provide clarity and understanding in the area of literacy and Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand, and to begin to actively build a sound, research-informed evidence base upon which to grow further understanding and to make informed decisions for Pasifika success in literacy and adult education initiatives.

**(2) Contributions to educational policy development and practice and agenda setting.** The PSAPiA series is intended to contribute to a further strengthening of the research-policy nexus in ACE in Aotearoa. The project team acknowledges that the relationship between research and policy is complex but has envisioned this project contributing in a number of possible ways:

- by providing greater clarity and understanding relating to the aspirations of Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand, to ensure that Pasifika have a voice in setting the

agenda for the education of their own selves and communities

- by identifying priority areas for the focus of attention and resourcing for maximum benefit

- by highlighting why “business as usual” regarding literacy and success for Pasifika in this country will not suffice but will be likely to be detrimental for both Pasifika and Aotearoa New Zealand as a whole

- by supporting the need for the establishment of an ethical space (Smylie, Williams & Cooper, 2006:525 ) in which all key stakeholders can be brought together to consider what is required for positive change

Such positive change in the “literacy” outcomes and experience of “success” by Pasifika as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand requires the attainment of conceptual understanding, followed by the commitment to the movement “from rhetorical commitment to practical engagement” and towards the building of capacity to act against the problems, barriers, and inequities faced by Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Change-oriented research such as this project seeks to address the conditions of inequity and disempowerment for Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand. This project takes a step in this direction by working to create greater conceptual clarity around Pasifika understandings and aspirations concerning “literacy” as Pasifika, and “success” as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand.

**(3) Contributions to raising knowledge and awareness and building research capacity.** This project directly contributes to a largely unexplored field in Aotearoa New Zealand – Pasifika conceptualisations of “literacy” and “success” as Pasifika in their family’s adoptive homeland. It is intended that the project will raise awareness of literacies other than “conventional literacy” (reading and writing) and will open the way towards greater exploration of the nature and role of these multiple literacies in the lives of Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand. In this way, the project aims to be a foundational document upon which further research can build.

The project’s findings are also intended to inform and assist in the awareness and capacity building of ACE sector practitioners working with Pasifika communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. The project itself was designed to encourage awareness raising and discussion amongst Pasifika participants and their individual and community contexts, and to build research capacity within the research team.

### **1.5 The Structure of this Report**

*This research report is presented in six sections:*

- 1. Introduction and Background to the Project**
- 2. How the Project was Carried Out**
- 3. Findings: What the Literature Tells Us**
- 4. Findings: Insights from Pasifika Survey and Consultation Group Participants**
- 5. Understanding the Findings**
- 6. Concluding Thoughts**

Change-orientated research, such as this project, seeks to address the conditions of inequity and disempowerment for Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand.



## 2. How the Project Was Carried Out

This section explains the way in which the Pasifika Success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand (PSAPiA) project was carried out. It provides a brief description of the ways in which information was gathered for the project, the people who participated in the project, and the way in which the project was firmly underpinned by a commitment to shared Pasifika values.

### 2.1 How Information Was Gathered – The Three Strands of the Project

Just as a rope of three cords is stronger than a single cord, this project is composed of three strands, three sources of information, knowledge, insight, and understanding: (1) a review of relevant literature, online documentation, and research, (2) focused and facilitated group consultations in the North and South Islands of Aotearoa New Zealand, and (3) wider discussions, survey, and social media-based gathering of Pasifika people's insights into and aspirations for literacy and success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand.

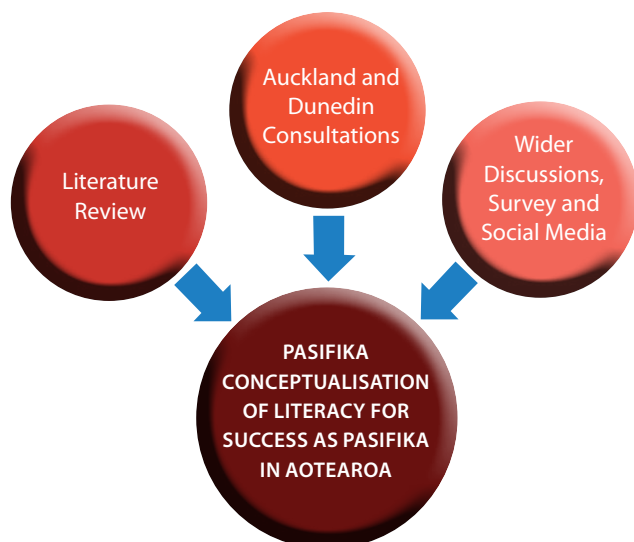


Figure 1: PSAPiA three-strand project design

#### 2.1.1 The Literature Review

A selective review of relevant literature was carried out to gain an understanding of the following broad areas:

- the major historical and theoretical trends in literacy studies and applications of literacy in society
- definitions and understandings of key concepts in literacy and literacy education internationally and locally, by western and indigenous and minority peoples
- Pasifika 'success' in New Zealand. Included in the review are scholarly publications, international literature, research reports, and online documentation.

#### 2.1.2 The Consultations

To provide a means of hearing and collecting the voice (stories, insights, understanding, and aspirations) of Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa, the project's coordinator, sponsor, and researcher undertook group consultation sessions with Pasifika in Auckland and Dunedin. The consultation sessions were undertaken at regional ACE Aotearoa conference/fono events.

#### 2.1.3 Wider Discussions - The Survey

Mindful of the need to consult wider than those who attend conferences/fono of the kind at which the consultation groups were facilitated, an online survey was designed and utilised. The survey was constructed using the online survey design software SurveyMonkey. The survey was then piloted among the reference group, adapted as necessary, and set up on a purpose-designed webpage on the ACE Aotearoa website, containing project information for participants and interested parties.

The survey comprised eight questions: five simple demographic questions (ethnicity, gender, age range, place of birth, language/s spoken) and three prompt-type research questions shown below. Participant anonymity

was factored into survey design, analysis, and reporting. To assist participants to think about their personal perspectives on the questions, several associated prompt questions (labeled “Question help”) were included, as shown below.

**Survey question prompts**

**(i) As a Pasifika person in Aotearoa New Zealand, my understanding of literacy as Pasifika includes ...**

*(Question help: As well as reading and writing in English, what else is important for Pasifika people to be able to know, to do, and to understand? Does literacy have anything to do with the culture, language and identity of Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand?)*

**(ii) In 15 years’ time (2028), a person who is literate as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand will be someone who can ...**

*(Question help: A literate Pasifika person will be able to do what? be what? know what? accomplish what? take part in what? have what? become what?)*

**(iii) Being literate as Pasifika will help me and my family be successful as Pasifika in education, health, home, work, community, the wider economy, and politics in Aotearoa New Zealand by ...**

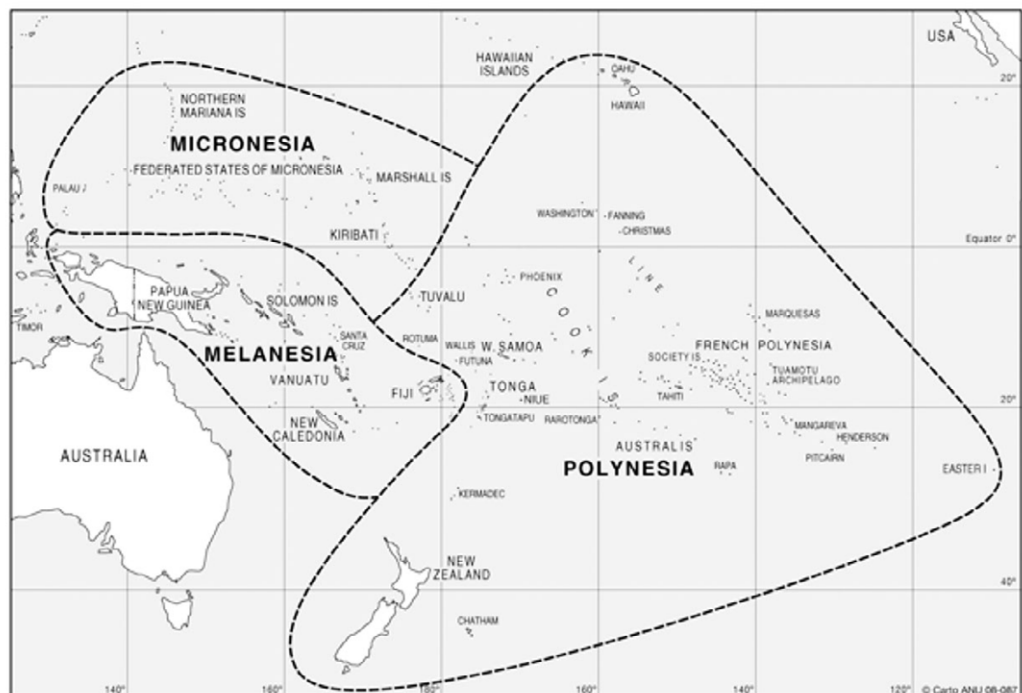
*(Question help: How can being literate (with a Pasifika understanding of literacy) help us and our families to be successful in all the areas of life that we want to be successful in? And what does this “success” mean?)*

The webpage on the ACE Aotearoa website and survey was widely promoted via email and Facebook, assisted by contacts within the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, the reference group, and various key Pasifika institutions and community leaders.

**2.2 People Who Participated**

**2.2.1 ‘Pasifika in Aotearoa’**

For the purposes of this project, the definition of ‘Pasifika’ is consistent with that expressed by the Ministry of Education (2013:3): Pasifika or Pacific (people) are collective terms used throughout this document to refer to people of Melanesian, Micronesian, and Polynesian descent or heritage or ancestry who have migrated to or have been born in Aotearoa New Zealand. The term Pasifika includes recent migrants or New Zealand-born Pasifika people of single or mixed heritage. While identifying themselves as Pasifika, this group may also identify with their ethnic-specific Pacific homeland. Pasifika people are not



*(Source: Map courtesy of ANU Cartographic Services, RSPAS, Australian National University, Canberra. Used in Language Distribution in the Pacific. Accessible at [http://epress.anu.edu.au/oceanic\\_encounters/mobile\\_devices/ch02s02.html](http://epress.anu.edu.au/oceanic_encounters/mobile_devices/ch02s02.html))*



homogenous, and Pasifika or Pacific does not refer to a single ethnicity, nationality, gender, language, or culture.

The term Melanesian refers to people who trace their ancestry to Pacific nations within the South Western portion of Oceania, including the main island nations of: Fiji, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands. Micronesia is the term for the Pacific nations spanning the northern Pacific and including: Kiribati, Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Marshall

Islands, Nauru. Polynesia is the term given to the largely Eastern Oceanic nations comprising: Hawaii, French Polynesia, Easter Island, Cook Islands, Norfolk Island, Pitcairn Islands, Niue, Sāmoa, American Sāmoa, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Wallis and Futuna, and New Zealand.

The majority of Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand were in fact born in New Zealand, and are no longer 'migrant' peoples. The term Pasifika is thus a very heterogeneous term.

### 2.2.2 Consultation Groups: Participants

#### Auckland Consultation

**Host event:**

*Pasifika Literacy and Numeracy Symposium*

**Date:** 30 November 2012

**Venue:** Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT)

**Number of people attending:** 66

Figure 2: Auckland Consultation Group participant ethnicities

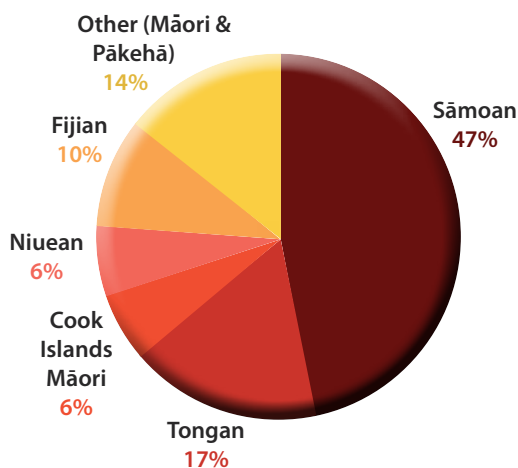
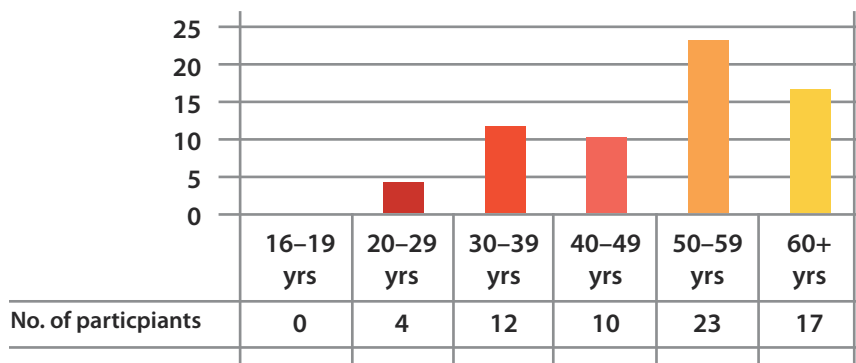


Figure 3: Auckland Consultation Group participant age ranges (n=66)



### Dunedin Consultation

**Host event:**

*Māori and Pasifika Adult and Community Professional Development Hui-Fono*

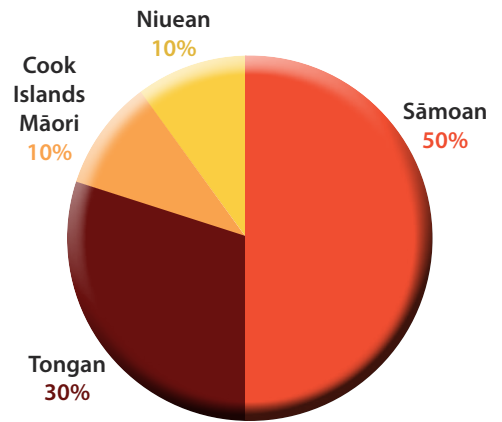
**Date:** 28 February 2013

**Venue:** Otago Museum, Dunedin

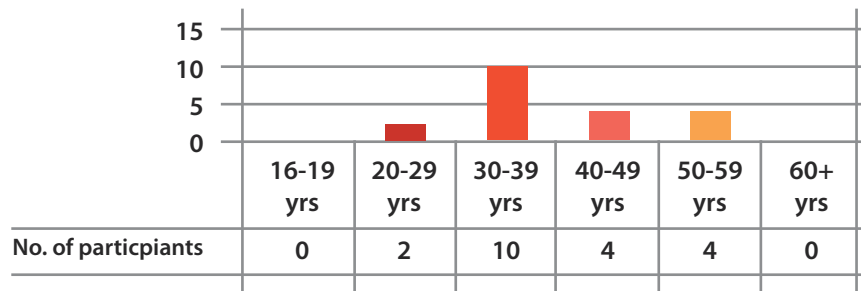
**Number of people attending:** 20

**Pasifika ethnicities represented by those attending:**

*Figure 4: Dunedin Consultation Group participant ethnicities*



*Figure 5: Dunedin Consultation Group participant age range (n=20)*



### 2.2.3 Wider Consultation: Online Survey Participants

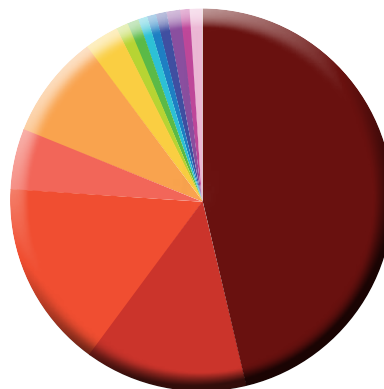
To ensure wider consultation than the attendees at the North and South Island consultation groups, the project team chose to utilise survey creation tools to construct an online survey for the project and to promote it via social media.

**Time period:** The survey was available online and open between 4 March 2013 and Friday 22 March 2013.

**Numbers of people participating:** A total of 181 people responded to the online survey. Of that 181, 118 were viable responses (i.e. had completed the survey questions on literacy, as well as key demographic information as required).

**Pasifika ethnicities represented:** Of the 118 complete responses, participants self-identified the following ethnic affiliations:

- Sāmoa: 46%
- Tonga: 14%
- Cook Islands: 16%
- Fiji: 5%
- Niue: 8%
- Tahiti: 3%
- Wallis & Futuna: 1%
- Rotuma: 1%
- American Sāmoa: 1%
- Kiribati: 1%
- Papua New Guinea: 1%
- Tokelau: 1%
- Tuvalu: 1%
- Nauru: 1%



*Figure 6: Survey respondents' self-reported Pasifika ethnicities*

These percentages closely reflect the proportions of the various Pacific ethnic communities within Aotearoa New Zealand. The Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (n.d.) records the five largest proportions of the Pasifika population in New Zealand as follows:

Sāmoans	almost 50%
Cook Island Māori	20%
Tongan	18%
Niuean	8%
Fijian	4%

The remaining small percentage comprises the other Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian ethnicities.

Of these participants, a proportion reported mixed ethnic heritages:

Figure 7: Survey participants' Pasifika heritages

(Valid responses only)

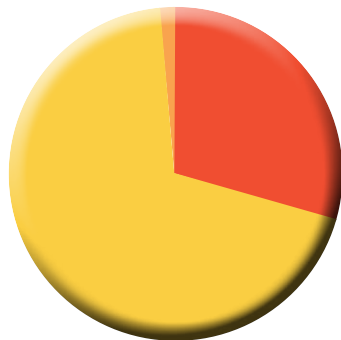
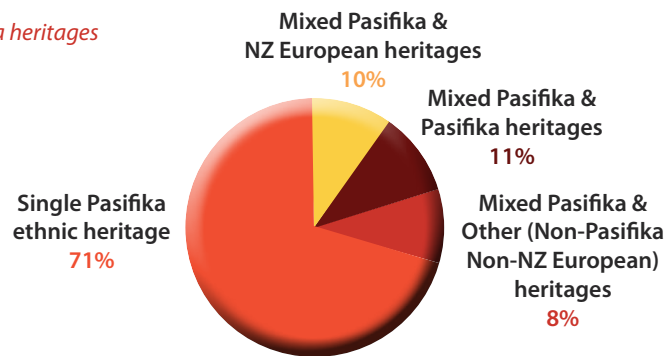


Figure 8: Survey respondents' self-reported place of birth  
(Valid responses only)

- Series1: Pacific nation born, 54, 30%
- Series1: Born elsewhere, 2, 1%
- Series1: New Zealand born, 125, 69%

Figure 9: Survey respondents' self-reported gender

(Valid responses only)

- No gender specified, 10%
- Males, 26%
- Females, 64%



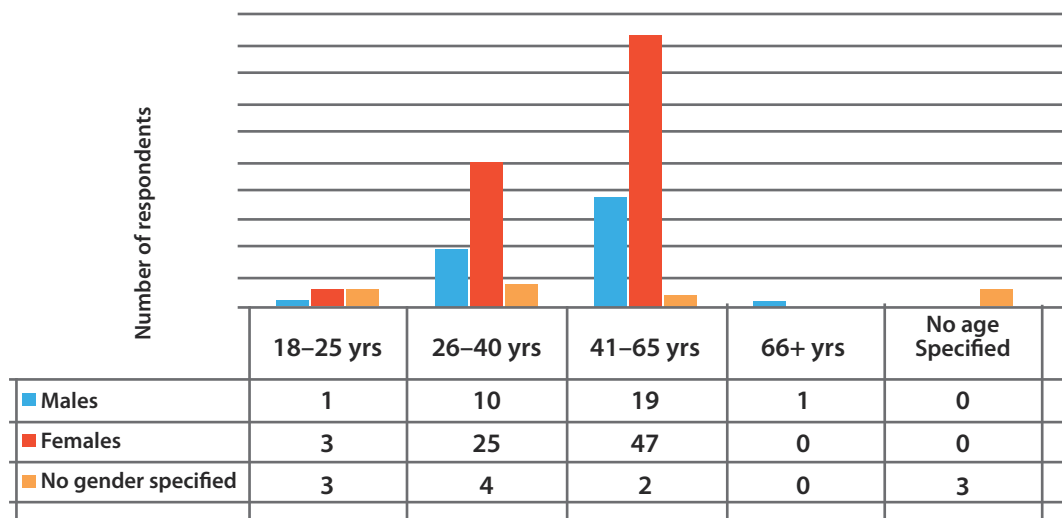


Figure 10: Survey respondents by age and gender

### 2.3 Pasifika Values Guiding the Project

This project has been sponsored, designed, coordinated, led, undertaken, overseen, and guided by Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand. As such, it has represented an opportunity to uphold shared Pasifika values at all stages and to model a process of collaborative, committed cooperation by Pasifika team project members representing Sāmoan, Cook Island Māori, Tongan, and Papua New Guinean heritages. Project team members have strived at all times to consciously uphold and practically demonstrate the central values of respect, relationship and reciprocity in all aspects of the project. Project design and implementation has reflected Pasifika orality, communality, connectedness, and consensus-seeking as well as harnessing modern technology and the ability of Pasifika in Aotearoa to articulate their understandings and aspirations via conventional literacy and current technology.

The clear focus of the project on collective knowledge generation to produce new knowledge and understandings, and its commitment to progress towards more optimal educational and developmental outcomes for Pasifika, both echo the principles expressed within *Teu Le Va – Relationships across research and policy in Pasifika education* (Airini et al., 2010), leading publication concerning the

social, moral, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of Pasifika research. This is particularly demonstrated in three aims of the project, which involve making a contribution to policy direction, understanding, and the growth and development of the capacity of those involved to continue this work beyond this particular project.

These values are also clear in the process intended to follow the report’s publication – a process of ongoing dissemination of findings back to the Pasifika communities that participated and back to key stakeholders. This is planned to occur alongside the development of tools and resources to enable practitioners in adult and community education (and others) to better succeed in their roles of nurturing and facilitating growth of the kind of ‘literacy’ that will bring about success for Pasifika as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### 2.4. Limitations of the Project


As with all research projects, it is important to note the limitations encountered in order to both consider how these may impact upon the findings and their significance, and also to provide valuable learnings for future projects. The project’s roughly 3 ½ month time frame and budget necessarily imposed limits on the scope and breadth of consultation. Also, perhaps as to be expected, the proportion of

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participants and respondents of Polynesian ancestry vastly outweighed those of Melanesian or Micronesian descent. Similarly, achieving a better gender balance and wider representation from younger Pasifika in Aotearoa would also have been desirable and should be a focus for future Pasifika Success as Pasifika projects.

The use of an online survey was also a carefully considered one, with full cognisance of the fact that this mode is heavily dependent on participants' written English abilities and technological know how. This was weighed against its expediency for reaching a wide and diverse population, its ease of handling as raw data, and the fact that it was balanced in the three-part project design against more traditional face-to-face consultation with Pasifika and ongoing informal discussions, as well as the review of relevant literature. The literature review itself borrows heavily from the considerable body of literature available on Canadian aboriginal and US First Nations indigenous literacy, with limited ability to refer to a similar body of knowledge directly relating to Pacific peoples or specifically to Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand.

It is important also to note that some participants at the Auckland consultation were also present at the Dunedin consultation and that it is also likely that some of the consultation groups may have contributed to the online survey responses, effectively duplicating their individual contributions to the project. In upholding the anonymity of survey respondents, it was not possible to gauge to what extent this 'doubling up' of responses may have occurred. Although survey respondents were not identified, the survey tool used did record respondents' IP (Internet Protocol) addresses, enabling the research team to rule out the likelihood of any occurrences of multiple answering by a single respondent.



This project aims to enable Pasifika to collectively construct a holistic and culturally relevant conceptualisation of 'literacy' for Pasifika success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand.



## 3. Findings: What the Literature Tells Us

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This project aims to enable Pasifika to collectively construct a holistic and culturally relevant conceptualisation of 'literacy' for Pasifika success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand. To demonstrate the importance of this aim, it is necessary to gain a broad base of understanding about the concept of 'literacy', its contested and evolving nature and function over time, both internationally and locally. This section presents the key learnings from a selective review of relevant literature relating to eight main areas.

### 3.1 Pasifika and 'Success' in Aotearoa New Zealand

Dictionary definitions of 'success' typically refer to the favourable outcome/achievement of something desired, planned, or attempted, and the attainment of wealth, fame, and so forth. These definitions reveal that: (1) 'success' is often thought of in terms of economic or financial outcomes, and (2) 'success' is inherently subjective (i.e. the true meaning of 'success' for any given person depends on what it was that they had desired, planned, and attempted). This highlights how very problematic it can be for one group of people to define what 'success' is for another group of people – even within their own country.

This project is the first of a series entitled Pasifika Success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand and provides the opportunity for Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand to begin to collectively and coherently articulate what it means to achieve success as Pasifika. In this particular project, Pasifika participants and respondents express their conceptualisations of literacy and its role in success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand. The insights gained from this project are not intended to replace traditional and current definitions of literacy (or success) in New Zealand, but rather to enrich current understandings and draw on culturally defined values and aspirations to make these current economically-driven understandings of literacy more relevant to and meaningful for Pasifika.

There is a small but significant body of existing research on 'Pasifika success' in Aotearoa New Zealand, and a sizeable proportion of this research has been conducted in the context of compulsory and tertiary education. For example, Airini, et al.'s (2010) *Success for All* sought to identify the teaching and learning practices, barriers, and strengths involved in Pasifika students achieving success in university contexts. Core to the project was the assumption that "Success is more than we think" (2010:4), and that Pasifika success has to do with (i) holism and (ii) the links between the individual and their community. In the context of higher education, "success" is seen to include not only academic success but also:

*... a sense of accomplishment and fulfilling personally important goals and participation in ways that provide opportunities for a student to explore and sustain their holistic growth. The concept of "success" is a broad one that links with individual and community notions of potential, effort and achievement over time* (Airini et al., 2010:4).

The insights gained from this project are not intended to replace traditional and current definitions of literacy (or success) in New Zealand but rather to enrich current understandings and to draw on culturally defined values and aspirations to make these current economically-driven understandings of literacy more relevant to and meaningful for Pasifika.

Other important learnings from the project that can be applied to an understanding of success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand include the following observations:

- Pasifika seek skills to be successfully both *independently* and *interdependently*.
- Pasifika seek the ability to be both academically strong and culturally strong.
- Pasifika success is greatly fostered by ongoing positive and collaborative relationships between stakeholders, and by drawing on the collective knowledge of Pasifika themselves about what works to hinder and foster their success.
- Pasifika have clear views about what constitutes successful teaching/learning in general and also about the important influence of context on teaching and learning style.
- The creation of environments for very effective teaching and learning is facilitated when bilingual educators are involved.
- Pasifika do well in environments where they feel they belong and can thrive.
- The quest for Pasifika success necessarily involves change and a move from the status quo.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education's *Compass for Pasifika Success* (Ministry of Education, 2013:5) within the New Zealand education system places the Pasifika learner at the very centre, surrounded by Pasifika values, Pasifika identity, and a host of other factors affecting the success of educational outcomes. In the field of education and employment links, a study of the features engendering 'success' for Māori and Pasifika in post-school private training providers entitled "*It's all about feeling the aroha*" (Phillips & Mitchell, 2010) confirmed the importance of the following (among other things) for 'success': genealogy; history and place; sense of belonging; safety; envisioning possibilities; holistic support; people-centredness; locating provision in context; meaningful and enjoyable learning; role modeling; looking after relationships; utilising a 'network approach'; flexibility, resourcefulness, and innovation; and having strong leadership and sound governance systems in place.

Importantly, Phillips and Mitchell document the education providers' deliberate decision to re-frame 'success' in ways that were meaningful for their practice as providers and their young people" (2010:70). This re-framing firmly valued and encouraged participation by young people and their families and communities and validated heritage language and knowledge.

While literature on 'success' for Pasifika is largely dominated by education-related publications, Pasifika success in health also features to a certain extent. The focus of this work has largely been the development of health-related models, frameworks, or structures that hold true to Pasifika concepts, knowledge, values, practices, and understandings of health and wellbeing. This has been complemented by work to produce accompanying sets of values, tools, and practices to inform and shape health promotion amongst Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand. Past models for Pasifika 'success' in health have included Karl Pulotu-Endemann's Fonofale model, and Sione Tu'itahi's Fonua model, encompassing the five interconnected dimensions that must be holistically maintained for Pasifika wellbeing:

- *Sino* (physical)
- *Atamai* (mental)
- *Laumalie* (spiritual)
- *Kainga* (collective/community – relational)
- *Atakai* (environment – both built and natural).

Tu'itahi's Fonua model also stresses that the achievement and maintenance of 'success' for Pasifika (understood as holistic wellbeing) involves addressing health issues at all levels of Pasifika society: *tautaha* (the individual); *kainga* (the family); *kolo* (the village); *fonua* (the nation); and *mamani* (the global). At the core of this model are indigenous Pacific knowledge systems centred around core values such as *fe'ofa'ofani* (love); *fetokoni'aki* (reciprocity); *fefaka'apa'apa'aki* (respect); *fakapotopoto* (prudent, judicious, wise leadership and management).

Such health models clearly extend the understanding of 'success' and how to achieve it beyond what is monetary. It is more difficult, however, to find literature that clearly and specifically articulates economic or financial 'success' from a Pasifika viewpoint. However, a recent analysis of Pasifika statistical trends in

the Auckland region by Airini and Sutton (2011) entitled *Education in the City A snapshot of Pasifika education in Auckland 2011* pointed to the following as particularly necessary to future economic participation and 'success' by Pasifika in Auckland:

- entering and completing tertiary education at higher levels, and linking to areas of sustainable economic growth and jobs
- promoting Pasifika cultures "to create a unique visitor, talent and investment proposition"
- shifting Pasifika qualification and employment choices to higher-demand industry sectors
- enabling Pasifika to move from low-skilled to high-skilled jobs within high-growth industry sectors.

While this work provides a useful but often statistics-based understanding of the direction of Pasifika economic/financial success, 'success' in a great many other areas still remains to be clearly articulated through authentic Pasifika lenses. This project aims to contribute to knowledge about 'literacy' and 'success' by working collaboratively with Pasifika participants to gain a deeper understanding of what 'literacy' means to Pasifika people and what role it plays in Pasifika success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### 3.2 Links between 'Literacy' and 'Success'

*Literacy has been equated with freedom, economic development, and even civilization. Literacy comes with many different definitions, historical trends, and serious implications for individuals and societies all over the world.* (Wagner, 2010:161) An exploration of relevant western-oriented literature on the links between 'literacy' and 'success' reveals strongly held beliefs about a link between conventional literacy (narrowly defined as the ability to read and write) and positive economic and social life outcomes. Often times, to support these links, the statistical correlations between 'illiteracy' and poverty are cited, and almost always a direct causal relationship is assumed. This forms the basis for governmental decision-making and directs the focus for international aid and humanitarian resourcing. The international literature reviewed also reveals that the links

between the narrow conception of literacy as reading and writing skills and life 'success' are predominantly economically driven.

*Globally, literacy's associations with prosperity and social status are deep rooted and equated with being able to read and write in a conventional sense. Furthermore, these skills are widely regarded as synonymous with being 'educated'* (Lawton, et al. 2012:102).

In fact, entire systems of education are constructed on the cornerstone of the narrow conception of 'literacy' as reading and writing, and an equally narrow (and ultimately economically driven) conception of 'success'.

Over the decades, conventional literacy (reading and writing) has been actively promoted as having the following direct benefits and associations:

- improved self-esteem in the individual
- positive social transformation and personal empowerment
- active and passive participation in local and global social community
- expansion of democracy
- rapid economic development
- justice, and personal and collective freedom
- preservation of cultural diversity
- promotion of gender equality and economic growth
- informed decision-making. (UNESCO *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, 2005; Stromquist, 2005: 12; UNESCO, 2004:5; Anderson and Bowman (1965), cited in Wagner 2010:165)

The connections between early literacy (in early childhood) and 'success' in many areas later in life is much discussed and documented, as is the correlation between scores on certain measures of 'literacy' (reading and writing skill sets) and personal and demographic features and characteristics. Conventional literacy is widely held to be crucial to career aspirations, employment and earning power and working conditions, access to education and training opportunities, educational outcomes, health outcomes, participation in society,

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(Wagner, 2010:161)

understanding of social issues, use of The Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALL) survey of 2006 found correlations between literacy scores (defined here as 'document literacy' in English) and "a range of individual characteristics, including completed education, age, gender, geographical region, ethnicity, immigrant status, first language, labour force status, occupation and industry" in Aotearoa New Zealand. Not surprisingly perhaps, the survey found that "Among young adults in current employment, document literacy scores tended to be higher among those in white collar occupations (managers, professionals, technicians or clerks), and among those employed in finance, business or community services including education and health" (Lane, 2011:3).

In the New Zealand Tertiary Education Commission's (TEC) discussions of literacy and success, the economic benefits of conventional literacy are well documented. There is also some mention of the perceived "social benefits" of literacy, claiming improved personal wellbeing, social development of individuals, whānau and communities, better health, and better parenting as direct outcomes of reading and writing (in English) for Pasifika New Zealanders.

Conventional literacy (reading, writing) and numeracy are also said to provide the "essential base" for:

- building a competitive, highly skilled and productive workforce
- gaining access to information
- giving voice to people's opinions and ideas
- taking action to solve problems
- creating future opportunities in the form of further qualifications
- achieving the purposes people set for themselves
- effectively fulfilling people's roles in society as workers, family members, and community members
- enhancing to people's family, communities and overall wellbeing. (TEC, 2009:3-12).

Specific benefits of literacy skills to employers

are emphasised, with direct bottom-line benefits, such as the following, all cited as being the outcomes of increased English language reading and writing skills amongst employees: increased job outputs; reduced error rates and less time per task (by both supervisors and employees); improved workplace communications; increased attachment to work; improved progression to higher level qualifications and jobs; greater contribution within workplaces; improved health and safety; better skills utilisation; reduced wastage and rework; accident reduction; improved quality of work; better staff retention; a reduction in absenteeism.

The TEC also cites important but 'less tangible' workplace benefits for employers, such as: better team performance; increased participation in team and other work meetings; improved capacity to cope with change; improved customer satisfaction; a greater understanding of the company's 'big picture'; increased take up and achievement in vocational training (TEC 2009:24). Employees in Aotearoa New Zealand are said to have reported a range of benefits with increased worker literacy, including the opportunity to progress in their jobs, more job satisfaction, and an improved sense of self-worth. Overall, raising people's skills in reading and writing and numeracy is expected to contribute to a more flexible, skilled, and adaptable workforce who can contribute to improving competitiveness and productivity.

The TEC's *Literacy, Language and Numeracy Action Plan 2008–2012* states that: *New Zealand's low levels of literacy, language and numeracy have been identified as contributors to our relatively low productivity. Low literacy and numeracy levels can affect employees' level of engagement in the workplace and potential for advancement in the labour market* (2008a:18).

The TEC also reports that research undertaken in 2004 found that approximately 1.1 million New Zealanders (43 percent of adults aged 16 to 65) have (conventional) literacy skills below those needed to participate fully in a knowledge society, and 51 percent of adults have numeracy skills lower than those needed to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work. This is considered of great

concern in the face of the New Zealand context wherein *Changing technology, globalisation, a shift to knowledge based industries, and an increasing focus on quality are all contributing to the demand for a more literate and numerate workforce.*

Conventional literacy is also said to bring about “improved social integration and a society where everyone gets the opportunity to participate, contribute and share in the benefits of a knowledge economy” (TEC, 2008a:18). Conversely, failure to acquire and be able to utilise these literacy skills (reading and writing) is said to render a worker: “less likely to take part in any kind of industry training”; “less able to benefit from or participate in workplace learning”; more likely to “not have the increased skills they need to adapt to workplace changes in the future” (TEC, 2008a:23). Similarly, from an international perspective, just as ‘literacy’ has been largely defined by default as ‘reading and writing’, ‘illiteracy’ has almost exclusively been defined as ‘the inability to read and write’, and it has been argued that *...the map of illiteracy closely coincides with the maps of poverty, malnutrition, illhealth, infant mortality, etc. Hence, in the typical case, the illiterate is not only unable to read and write, but he—or more usually she—is poor, hungry, (and) vulnerable to illness...* (Wagner 2010:168).

However, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the optimistic faith held by international agencies, organisations, and governments in conventional literacy (reading and writing) as the cure for poverty and a range of other (often related) issues has wavered somewhat over the past 20 years as intensive efforts to raise the basic reading and writing abilities of populations have simply not corresponded to the expected improvements in negative statistics for these populations.

*If it were just a matter of an injection of ‘basic skills’ into the literacy learners, it is reasonable to suppose that the so-called ‘problem’ would have been cured many decades ago, judging by the amount of human capital and physical resources expended on this effort.* (Falk, 2001:314).

There are even arguments put forward to the effect that the assumed direct causal link between literacy and positive economic outcomes is severely flawed. Blaug (1985)

reportedly came to the conclusion that *neither years of schooling nor specific literacy rates have a direct effect on economic growth*, and points out that despite this link remaining excessively vague, *today there are few national policy makers who do not act as if literacy levels are one of the most important drivers of social and economic progress* (Wagner, 2010:167). While attainment of high levels of conventional literacy does appear to increase one’s chances of social and economic progression through access to education and employment, actual ‘success’ in these areas should be acknowledged to be the result of a wide range of internal and external factors and characteristics.

The effect of the mass promotion of literacy as a narrow skill set is further clouded by the fact that in many cases, as fast as reading and writing levels are grown in developing countries, population grows, too. The rapid expansion associated with this often then leads to decreases in the quality of basic education. This is coupled with the fact that in both developing and industrialised countries the increasing pervasiveness of technology and a number of other modern day factors has resulted in steep increases in the number and type of skills required to be ‘literate’ (Wagner, 2010:162). All of these factors further blur our understanding of the precise links between conventional literacy (reading and writing) and the many assumed direct benefits listed previously.

Mirroring international trends, the link between conventional literacy (in English) and success had been defined largely in economic terms in government literature in Aotearoa New Zealand, with considerably less direct discussion of the non-economic impacts associated with conventional literacy. Whilst there is certainly empirical support for a correlation of some sort between ‘literacy’ (as defined and measured by traditional western systems) and indicators of ‘success’ (again, as defined by western world views and a strong economic focus), the claims upon which the assumed direct causal relationship are built begin to closely resemble what Street (1984) referred to as the assumptions underlying the ‘autonomous’ model of literacy (explained in the following section).

The effect of the mass promotion of literacy as a narrow skill set is further clouded by the fact that in many cases, as fast as reading and writing levels are grown in developing countries, population grows too.



In fact, some question whether illiteracy causes poverty and powerlessness, or whether illiteracy is a “symptom of powerlessness rather than a cause of it” (Lankshear et al., 1997, cited in Dunn, 2001:678). Furthermore, it has been argued that the “deterministic algorithm” of literacy leading to liberation and development should perhaps be understood in reverse: “from literacy to liberation to liberation to literacy” (Bialostok & Whitman, 2006:390). While *international surveys convincingly demonstrate that individual literacy levels are strong predictors of income in adults (OECD and Statistics Canada, 1995, 2000)*, the purely economic focus is also flawed in that it effectively *denies the real possibility that literacy ability might have some concrete utility beyond one’s social status relative to his or her neighbour* (Wagner 2010:169).

Furthermore, economically-driven arguments for ‘literacy’ also lack an acknowledgement and way of dealing with concepts such as the links between literacy and personal and collective language, culture and identity, and the powerful and pervasive impact of these on many other aspects of life and one’s achievements therein. While it has been said that the modern conception of literacy in the western world “opens up the project of the self” (i.e makes possible the journey of self-development of the individual), it is clear that it does so *under conditions strongly influenced by standardizing effects of commodity capitalism (Giddens 1991:196)* (Bialistok & Whitman, 2006:384).

Literacy is “at its very heart, a pivotal component of nation building”, and is inextricably tied to the (often debated) concepts of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship (Māori Adult Literacy Reference Group, 2001), however the links between ‘literacy’ and social, economic, political progress, and the development of cognitive skills are at best “mired in ambiguity”. It is this ambiguity and the repeated promised benefits that give the ability to read and write its “mythical reputation for predicating almost automatic or magical transformation” (McHugh, n.d.:3). Sadly, this reputation has not been lived up to, and current conceptions of ‘literacy’ and ‘success’ have often proven too narrow and simplistic to capture the complexities of how

‘literacy’ is actually acquired and practiced and how ‘success’ is actually defined, aspired to, and attained by minority people groups.

We know from the current situation of the majority of Pasifika peoples in New Zealand that: (1) this type of ‘literacy’ is not attained by all, even in a developed and largely peaceful nation such as New Zealand, and (2) the promised ‘freedom’ (economic, societal, intellectual) made possible by attaining this narrow conception of ‘literacy’ is simply not currently being enjoyed by all who can read and write (i.e. all who are ‘literate’ by the narrow conventional definition).

Yet, despite this, the prevailing belief in the simple, direct, causal connection between conventional narrowly defined literacy and its benefits is so strong that the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003–2012) adopted the motto: “Literacy as Freedom” (UNESCO, 2004:6). However, the concerns that have been raised do lead to the question of whether there is perhaps something more to the ‘success’ equation than mastery of the skill of reading and writing in the dominant language? Perhaps the ‘literacy’ that equates to ‘freedom’ means more than simply being able to read and write in English in Aotearoa New Zealand, and perhaps our conceptualisation of literacy requires a broader and more holistic approach? Accordingly, this project seeks to contribute to a broader and more culturally inclusive conceptualisation of literacy for Pasifika success, as Pasifika, in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### 3.3 Historical, Current, and International Conceptualisations of Literacy

What ‘literacy’ actually means and what its relationship is to the people and the social systems it exists within are issues that have been debated by educators, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers for decades. Yet despite the recognition that ‘literacy’ is a contested term and that nations such as the US readily declare that they are currently facing a ‘literacy crisis’, few appear to *move beyond this level of critique and truly problematise the very nature of literacy itself* (Mitchell & E Weiler 1991:xviii). It is clear also that, over time, the definition of literacy evolves. It does so because



it is inextricably tied to people (and their languages and cultures) and technology – all of which change and evolve over time. It is fitting therefore that we look internationally, and locally, and back in time over the past half century in particular to get a sense of how ‘literacy’ has been defined, constructed, and conceptualised in its evolution through a variety of western-oriented perspectives. From this point, it will be possible to consider moves towards an authentic understanding that will work for Pasifika people moving forward in Aotearoa New Zealand in the early 21st century.

### 3.3.1 *Evolving Conceptualisations of Literacy Leading to the Present*

Largely up until the middle of the last century, ‘literacy’ was equated purely with the ability to read and write. However over the past 50 years in particular, ‘literacy’ as a construct (complex idea) has become intimately interwoven with the constructs of society, politics, history, economics, education, equity, and discrimination.

*At first glance, ‘literacy’ would seem to be a term that everyone understands. But at the same time, literacy as a concept has proved to be both complex and dynamic, continuing to be interpreted and defined in a multiplicity of ways. People’s notions of what it means to be literate or illiterate are influenced by academic research, institutional agendas, national context, cultural values and personal experiences. (UNESCO, n.d.)*

Like many other theoretical constructs, the historical understanding, definition, teaching, and learning of ‘literacy’ has been swayed and influenced by many strong schools of thought over the decades. In its evolution, it has been shaped by many things, including ‘how’ it has been studied and ‘who’ it has been studied by.

The study of literacy *combines all social science disciplines, including psychology, linguistics, history, anthropology, sociology, and demography*, encompassing childhood through adulthood, and has powerful implications beyond research to both policy and practice and ultimately to society itself (Wagner, 2010:161). In spanning so many disciplines it is subject to investigation using an extremely wide range of research methods and approaches. For example, anthropologists

studying literacy-related phenomena would typically use qualitative description, whereas psychologists and educators often tend to use “psychometrics and inferential statistics” (Wagner, 2010:164). Nevertheless, it is possible to chart some of the major historical trends and schools of thought in the historical evolution of ‘literacy’, and to draw on the understandings within these in attempting to construct an understanding of literacy fit for our modern, technological, and multicultural world.

Over the past 50 years, the definition and understanding of literacy internationally has taken some important turns. In the several decades encompassing and prior to the 1970s, ‘literacy’ was widely understood as being a set of skills enabling one to read and write with understanding. The 1970s saw a strong focus on the study of individuals and skills that were argued to be universal, neutral, and inherently good (bringing about a range of life benefits for the user and the society to which they contributed). The 1980s then saw a movement away from the skill-based models of literacy and the focus on individuals and a strong shift towards the understanding of ‘literacy’ as inextricably tied to society and culture. Understandings of literacy became strongly tied to social context and even began to gradually encompass other symbol systems used within communities (in addition to reading and writing). There was a resurgence of interest and support for previously ‘marginal’ perspectives of literacy, driven by social justice agendas.

The 1990s largely saw the expansion of this understanding and, importantly, the broadening of ‘literacy’ conceptualisations from almost exclusively print-related to embracing a variety of media and digital technologies and embracing the strong connection established between literacy and digital technologies. Discussions around ‘literacies for the 21st century’ relate to the need to expand our understanding of literacy because of technology, globalisation and the explosion of information in the age we live in. The development of new digital technologies *also creates a range of interconnected textual, visual and iconic means of communicating that have implications for our understanding of*

**What ‘literacy’ actually means and what its relationship is to the people and the social systems it exists within are issues that have been debated by educators, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers for decades.**

*what literacy means* (Street, 2001 in Crowther & Tett, 2011:136).

From the late 1990s, the conceptualisations of literacy began to respond to globalisation, migration, and multimedia, becoming a permanent feature of the world of communication and education. Also from the late 1990s onwards, the term 'literacy' became commonly used to refer to competence or knowledge in a specified area. The evolution in the understanding of 'literacy' continued into the 2000s, drawing on this rich and varied history and furthering the movements and schools of thought mentioned here.

The international perceptions of literacy (reading and writing) as a 'good cause' and the assumed direct causative links between (i) education, (ii) conventional literacy, (iii) people reaching goals and potential, and (iv) participating in democratic community and society continue to be prevalent and are reflected in the adoption of a focus on 'literacy' (in its conventional sense) by international bodies such as UNESCO over the past decade.

### **3.3.2 Various Theoretical Conceptualisations of Literacy**

*The period from the early 1960s to the early 80s also brought landmark work by scholars working at various interfaces between philosophy, classical studies, anthropology, history and linguistics. This work profoundly influenced the development and direction of literacy studies from the mid 1980s.* (Lankshear, 1999).

The two major camps appear to align with one or the other of the following conceptualisations of literacy:

- (1) Functional Literacy (literacy as a skills-based commodity for the economy)
- (2) Critical Literacy (literacy as a sociocultural practice with the power to transform). A number of associated understandings of literacy are also worth briefly describing.

#### **Alphabetic Literacy as Cognitive Advantage Leading to 'Civilisation'**

The concept of the transformative power of 'literacy' has given rise to some diverse and sometimes contentious schools of thought. One understanding of the transformative

power of literacy was held by those who explored the link between Western civilisation, development, democracy, and literacy and claimed that conventional literacy (reading and writing) was a primary determinant of technological advancement (such as Goody, 1977, 1986 and Levi-Strauss, 1966).

Work in this area was situated principally in the humanities and social sciences and positioned literacy as *a powerful independent variable which was instrumental in cultures moving from 'primitiveness' to 'advanced' states of development* (Lankshear, 1999). More extreme proponents of this view claimed that conventional literacy had a profound impact on cognition, modes of thought, and cultural organisation over time, and in literate societies, led to the development of 'superior' intellectual powers to oral ('primitive') cultures. These theorists supported a binary conception of the 'civilised literate' and the 'primitive non-literate'. It was argued that the intellectual and cognitive advantage provided over time by literacy in alphabetic script (conventional literacy) then gave rise to social, political, and military 'development'.

However, there are many critics of this ideology, who point to the *dangers of employing literacy as a diagnostic category for making generalizations about types of societies or, more perniciously, using it to rank them in some evolutionary schema* (Collins & Blot, 2003:49, cited in Lee, 2011:257). Moreover, more recent shifts in anthropological theories are found to have provided strong evidence which contradicted these *sweeping generalizations associating literacy (specifically, alphabetic literacy) with properties attributed to modernity and with progress (and, conversely, orality with primitive)* (Bialostok & Whitman, 2006:382).

Research has now largely moved towards an understanding of the immense diversity that exists under the term 'literacy' and has embraced the concept of literacies. Yet, despite this clear change in the wider theoretical understanding of literacy/ies, today there is still underlying evidence of beliefs about the assumed "consequences of literacy" being strongly retained. There is also evidence of retention of the "unquestioned assertion that

literacy in and of itself leads to betterment” and to intellectual and societal “development” (Bialostok & Whitman, 2006:382).

### **Conventional and Functional Literacy**

Conventional literacy is the term used in this report to refer to the ‘default’ understanding of literacy as the ability to read, write, and comprehend (usually in English and in alphabetic script). Functional literacy as a concept was born in the 1960s and 1970s, as a result of new attention being given specifically to the links between literacy and socio-economic development, and has most often been defined in relation to the level of conventional literacy a person needs to function in a given society. Conventional literacy had previously (1940s–1960s) been conceptualised as consisting of a set of learnable technical skills that were a neutral and universal good, and a right for all. Conceptualising literacy as a set of skills enabled the documentation of skill sets that were believed to be isolatable, and teachable. For instance, reading is now firmly held to require the following technical ability: phonological awareness (ability to recognise alphabetic symbols on a page and correctly correlate symbols (letters) with their associated sound/s); decoding; word recognition; and literal comprehension (connecting the recognised print word to the learned meaning of those words, and from there to construct literal comprehension).

The concept of *functional literacy* took conventional literacy (the skill set of reading and writing with comprehension) together with education and tied them closely to social and economic development by focusing on literacy’s nature and use in workplaces and daily life functioning.

*A functional literacy ideology is reflected in a curriculum that teaches students the skills deemed necessary to successfully participate in school and society specifically, skills to be a productive citizen or member of the workforce and, as such, to support marketplace ideologies.* (Cadiero-Kaplan & Smith, 2002:374).

Thus, this understanding of literacy helped to slightly expand the general understanding

of literacy “beyond the imparting of basic technical skills”, however, this was done with the prevailing financially-related motivation of “increased productivity” (UNESCO, 2004:9). As such, functional literacy and numeracy regards literacy skills predominantly as attributes to help an individual contribute productively to the labour market. The functional literacy ideology appears to support the idea of literacy as a “commodity” – a “portable commodity that can be effectively packaged and delivered” to support a focus on credentialism (a strong emphasis on qualifications – certificates, diplomas, degrees – when hiring and assigning status).

So, while proponents of functional literacy argue that it enables a learner to use printed information to function successfully in their world and increase their chances of economic and social advancement, objections to the functional literacy model include that:

- functional competence in literacy is defined *so that it is merely sufficient to bring its possessor within the reach of bureaucratic modes of communication and authority* (Levine, 1982, p. 261, cited in Wagner 2010)
- as a definition of literacy, it serves some parts of the population better than others, failing to reveal social and educational inequalities in the way that other conceptions of literacy can
- it deprives literacy of its social context, rendering literacy often irrelevant to peoples’ social and cultural lives, which give birth to its very meaning (Lee, 2011:260)
- it serves primarily to encourage learners to aspire to the lowest levels of mechanical performance required to function in a given context
- it tacitly positions learners as deficient, and teaching as remediation (Cadiero-Kaplan & Smith, 2002:374).

A further criticism of an exclusively functional literacy approach is that it treats texts as objects and encourages the development of prescribed skill levels and progressions and associated standardised assessment tools, which is said to

The concept of functional literacy took conventional literacy (the skill set of reading and writing with comprehension) together with education and tied them closely to social and economic development by focusing on literacy’s nature and use in workplaces and daily life functioning.

lead to the promotion of “a hierarchical model of skills with clearly identifiable levels, like rungs on a ladder” (Crowther & Tett, 2011:135). This is associated with a ‘lock-step’ approach, often described as *pre-packaged and restrictive; with a pedagogical focus that is individualistic, behaviourist and competitive* (Kelly, 1997:10, cited in Cadiero-Kaplan & Smith, 2002:374).

In the same vein, it has been argued that equipping a person with the skills of reading and writing in a dominant language will enable them to recognise, decode, comprehend, and produce literal meaning, but if effort is not similarly made to (re-)engage with an understanding of literacy as a social practice, then a familiar current ‘crisis’ will become predominant – populations will exist who can carry out the mechanics of reading and writing, but who *cannot use language (oral or written) to learn, to master content, to work in the new economy, or to think critically about social and political affairs* (Gee, 1999:358). This is because these additional ‘literate’ behaviours must be learned and practiced in order to be successfully utilised in any given sociocultural context, and this requires more than simply technical reading and writing skills.

Although often criticized by supporters of the social and cultural views of literacy (discussed next), the standardisation and package-ability of the functional literacy approach has the advantage of being ‘easier to measure’ and ‘more useful for empirical analysis’ (Lane, 2011:12) than other definitions, which require, research using expensive and time-consuming ethnographic studies (richly descriptive studies of how real people actually use and experience literacy in their lives). Perhaps for this main reason, the expedient and economically-driven, functional, skills-based conceptualisation of literacy continues to dominate national understanding and assessment of literacy in Australasia.

#### **Literacy as a sociocultural practice, underpinned by ideologies**

There is slowly widening acknowledgment that narrow definitions of literacy with a primarily economic focus are simply one part of a much bigger picture. It has been observed that, slowly, *Euro-Western educators are moving*

*away from the restricted definition of literacy as being only empirically measurable against skills in reading, writing and numeracy* (Collins, 1998; Court, 1997 cited in Paulsen, 2003: 25). This is accompanied by strong arguments that the ‘basic skills’ approaches to literacy must be actively reintegrated with the understanding of literacy as a social practice (i.e. involving interactions with other social beings that reveal a person’s skills, values, knowledge, and identity). In other words, acknowledging the social nature of literacy means embracing a fuller and more complete understanding of what it means to be ‘literate’ – a fuller understanding of the connection between literacy and language, culture, and identity. This fuller understanding of literacy ... *requires a suite of skills, knowledge, thinking and social resources to be integrated with the so-called ‘basic literacy skills’* (Falk, 2001:314).

Around the late 1980s, early 1990s, important shifts in understanding were being made concerning literacy. These understandings firmly asserted that ‘literacy’ is shaped, defined, understood, and lived out in people’s lives according to the cultural, historical, political contexts of the communities in which communication takes place (Knobel, 1999). This thinking produced the understanding that ... *literacy needs to be seen as providing not just technical skills but also a set of prescriptions about using knowledge. In this sense literacy is a socially constructed phenomenon, not simply the ability to read and write. ... by performing the tasks that make up literacy, we exercise socially approved and approvable talents. Literacy as socially constructed is both a historically based ideology and a collection of context-bound communicative practices.* (Cook-Gumperz, 1986:1).

From this work, we draw the following important understandings, which underpin the very endeavour of this current project:

- Literacy = technical skills and set/s of prescriptions about using knowledge
- Literacy = exercising socially approved talents
- Literacy = a historically based ideology and a collection of complex, situated, context-bound communicative practices



- Literacy = a set of practices to understand the world around us and a set of statements about the value/necessity of these activities.

These definitions and understandings of literacy ensure that literacy is seen as inextricably bound to the language/s, culture/s and identity/ies of the people who use it and is shaped by the impacts of society, education, policy, politics, and power in their daily lives. Moreover, these understandings give rise to important questions for policy and practice in education: ... *whether the types of literacy taught in schools and adult programmes are relevant to the present and future lives of learners* (Gee et al., 1996 cited in UNESCO, n.d.).

In 1990, prominent literacy researcher James Paul Gee argued that literacy, like language, is firmly situated within social contexts. Gee introduced the concept of Discourse (with a capital D), and defined Discourse as a collection of *ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing* (1990:xix). Being 'literate' therefore, means being fluent in these Discourses, which in turn marks the literate person as a member of particular groups of society and relates not only to how group members use spoken and written language, "but also how they act, what they think, how they feel, and what they value" (Richgels, 2002:730).

Similarly, Barton (1994:32) described literacy as a *set of social practices associated with particular symbol systems and their related technologies* saying that *to be literate is to be active; it is to be confident within these practices* (cited in Jiménez & Smith, 2008:29). Children raised in any particular community will use the language, behaviours, values, and beliefs of that particular sociocultural context to give "shape" to their experiences of the world (Gee, 1990), and particularly of the classroom and the educational journey. Gee (1999) argues that by de-emphasising or not properly contextualising discussions of 'literacy' or 'reading' within the complex socio-cultural worlds and their social, institutional, and political realities, one cannot "tell the truth" about literacy or about the world in which 'literacy' is meant to make a difference.

It is further argued that every discourse is, moreover, underpinned by ideologies – shared

and taken-for-granted sets of understandings about what is 'normal' and how it is 'right' to behave, think, and feel about things. This means that, essentially:

*There can be no disinterested, objective, and value-free definition of literacy: The way literacy is viewed and taught is always and inevitably ideological.* (Auerbach, 1991:71)

Cadiero-Kaplan and Smith (2002) explain that schools and educational institutions also hold to ideologies that determine their curriculum, teaching methods, and educational policies. The authors draw a useful distinction between ideological constructions of literacy that either:

- (1) value learner empowerment, personal development of basic morality, and development of skills to critically engage with their world and the texts within it, or
- (2) value educating literate citizens who are able to compete in the labour market, developing functional job skills, with a focus on the mechanics of reading and writing.

Both of these can be found to varying degrees in compulsory education settings, but with a larger emphasis often on the latter.

#### **Autonomous Literacy vs. Ideological / Critical / Transformative / Emancipatory Literacy**

Leading literacy theorist Brian Street drew the useful and influential distinction between what he called the 'Autonomous' and 'Ideological' views of literacy (Street 1984). Street's (1984) Autonomous model of literacy represents the previously discussed conventional/functional understanding of literacy as a set of skills that, once learned, will – autonomously – have positive effects on a wide range of cognitive and social practices. This autonomous approach to literacy is criticised as hiding and disguising the powerful influences of cultural and societal ideology on conceptions of literacy, and instead, presenting the literacy 'skill-set' as neutral and universal. It is argued that, upon inspection, one can easily recognise that this autonomous approach is in fact most likely to have predominant influence upon most current western-oriented models of literacy and the teaching and learning practices they support.

There is slowly widening acknowledgement that narrow definitions of literacy with a primarily economic focus are simply one part of a much bigger picture.

Alternatively, Street's Ideological model of literacy is widely held to offer *a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another* (Street, 2011:61). Its starting point is not literacy as skills, but rather literacy as a social practice that is always embedded in socially constructed principles about what constitutes 'knowledge' (Street, 2011:61). Importantly, the ideological model of literacy acknowledges that even to those who hold to the narrow view of literacy, the *ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being* (Street, 2011:61).

Moreover, the ideological understanding of literacy has implications for both research and practice led by people from the dominant culture. Street stresses the importance of dominant culture researchers not simply "privileging the particular literacy practices familiar in their own culture" but being able to *suspend judgement as to what constitutes literacy among the people they are working with until they are able to understand what it means to the people themselves* (2011:62). In this respect, this project offers the strong benefit of having been commissioned, carried out and participated in by representatives of the very groups that the project wishes to benefit. The process of conceptualising 'literacy' is conducted by Pasifika with Pasifika, through a process of collective knowledge building, providing Pasifika participants with the opportunity to freely articulate the particular meaning and possibilities of literacy for them.

Current leading thought regarding the two major schools of thought summarised by Street as 'autonomous' and 'ideological' is that both in fact represent an understanding that literacy must come first, then development will follow – how this comes about is where these two schools of thought appear to differ. The autonomous/functional view of literacy is based on the assumption that conventional literacy (reading and writing) leads to new knowledge, which in turn leads to 'development' (i.e. reading and writing to new knowledge to development). While the ideological view is built on the assumption that conventional literacy (reading the writing)

can be instrumental in leading to critical/ emancipatory thinking and action, which in turn leads to "liberation and a new social order" (Rogers, 2001:206) (i.e. reading and writing to critical and emancipatory thinking to liberation and development of a new social order).

Ideally however, these two perspectives of literacy - functional and transformative - would both be able to bring something valuable to the cause of 'development' and 'success'. Understandings of literacy as functional skills would contribute to the social and economic betterment through increased efficacy and participation in employment, whilst the understanding of literacy as transformative would actively promote "thinking and habits conducive to continuous learning" and act as a political tool to empower and liberate the learner (McHugh, n.d). As Rogers (2001:206) describes it:

*The process of development then is not inputs but social action. And once again education and training are required to help the target groups to understand their true lifeworld, to determine their desired course of action, and to implement it against the opposition they face. Again literacy is the starting point for this process of comprehending, deciding and acting ...*

The reality however is that in most mass education systems, a "culturally narrow approach to literacy predominated by Western-based philosophy" (van Broekhuizen, n.d.) dominates – in many cases because it is seen to be neater, easier, and more manageable than any as-yet unformulated and transformative alternative. Thus, while both can be seen to be vital to turning around the negative social, educational, and economic outcomes often currently experienced by minority peoples, the functional/autonomous literacy approach currently dominates policy and practice, and the critical/emancipatory literacy still remains largely ideational.

### **New Literacy Studies**

The conceptualisation of literacy as closely tied to politics, power, society and development has been a strongly influential movement in the study of literacy. It arose in various forms, one of which is known as New Literacy Studies, and whose proponents included Barton and Ivanic (2000); Gee (1999); Heath (1983) and Street



(1984, 1993). According to Street (2003), New Literacy Studies is characterised by:

- reconsidering the nature of literacy
- refuting the 'banking' model of education and reframing literacy not as the acquisition of a set of skills but rather as a social practice
- recognising multiple literacies, which are inextricably tied to and influenced by time, space, and power contestation
- examining in any given time/space whose literacies are dominant and whose are marginalised and/or resistant
- recognising and resisting the assumption that (Western) literacy comprises a set of neutral and universal cognitive skills that will benignly enhance the lives of those who are introduced to them
- seeking to examine the issues of text, power, and identity, and recognising instances wherein there is an imposition of Western conceptions of literacy on other cultures within a country
- understanding literacy as a practice that varies from context to context, always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles (i.e. that the ways people address reading/writing are rooted in what they conceive knowledge to be, identity to be, and how people 'be'). This is then also filtered by the social practices of specific contexts (like workplaces or institutions)
- recognising that new literacy practices brought to a local context are usually appropriated and adapted to the local circumstances by the local people and that the result of the local-distant encounter is usually a hybridised literacy practice.

The New Literacy Studies movement was a manifestation of what James Paul Gee (eminent researcher and theorist in literacy and linguistics) called "the social turn", in which research surrounding literacy, language, and education turned *away from focusing on individuals and their "private" minds and towards interaction and the social practice* (cited in Lankshear, 1999). Gee (2008:2) describes the New Literacy Studies as:

*...really just a way to name work that, from a variety of different perspectives, views literacy in its full range of cognitive, social, interactional, cultural, political, institutional, economic, moral and historical contexts. As such, this collective movement has not only given rise to expansive bodies of research, theory and knowledge, but has also raised important and challenging implications for educators working with learners within their own "cultural milieus" (Street,2003:83).*

Those supporting the strongly socio-cultural approach to literacy stress the need for *reorienting the focus of discussion from differences in individual performance, that is, the inability to read and write, to a concern for the social / cultural / historical context of literacy* (Mitchell & Weiler, 1991:xviii).

#### **In the New Literacies approach:**

*literacy is, in a sense, "multiple": literacy becomes different "literacies", as reading and writing are differently and distinctively shaped and transformed inside different sociocultural practices. Additionally, these sociocultural practices always have inherent and value-laden, but often different, implications about what count as "acceptable" identities, actions, and ways of knowing. They are, in this sense, deeply "political." Furthermore, these practices always fully integrate language, both oral and written, with nonlanguage "stuff" that is, with ways of acting, interacting, feeling, valuing, thinking, and believing, as well as with various sorts of nonverbal symbols, sites, tools, objects, and technologies. Thus, the New Literacy Studies seek, as well, always to study literacy and literacy learning as they are integrated with oral language, social activities, material settings, and distinctively cultural forms of thinking, knowing, valuing, and believing. (Gee, 1999:356).*

#### **Critical Literacy**

Another widely accepted understanding of the transformative power of 'literacy' today is the conceptualisation of literacy known as Critical Literacy – a view of literacy held by those who explore the nature and function of literacy within social and political systems. Advocates of Critical Literacy for example, *emphasize the empowering role that literacy can and should play in re-shaping the world in which one lives and works* (SIL, n.d.:3).

The conceptualisation of literacy as closely tied to politics, power, society, and development has been a strongly influential movement in the study of literacy.

A renowned proponent of this view is Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, philosopher, and theorist who is among the most influential 20th century thinkers regarding the use of literacy for political action to bring about social justice and positive change the poor and oppressed.

Critical literacy and similar movements, such as Transformative Literacy and Emancipatory Literacy, connect conceptually with Street's ideological conceptualisation of literacy, and involve understanding and acting against the social relations that enforce oppression. They are based on the strongly held beliefs that literacy is associated with power and the ability to define what counts as knowledge. Supporters of critical literacy believe literacy's goal should be to empower people to recognise, criticise and act to change political and economic oppression. "As Freire (1972) reminds us, education is never politically or ideologically neutral" (Crowther & Tett, 2011:136).

Critical literacy argues that the social order in place in many parts of the Western world works to the benefit of some groups more than others. Some critical literacy theorists argue that social order is often maintained not through force or obvious domination but through more subtle but effective means such as reinforcing "compliance and ideology" through the very structure and content of compulsory schooling. There has been much discussion of how "school literacy" often results in a top-down transfer of standardised knowledge that does little to empower the individual or promote his consciousness. In situations such as these, it is argued that *the goal of literacy is not to promote cognition, raise awareness or allow the identity of the self to emerge, but to subjugate learners to patterned thoughts and ideas*, and in doing so to ensure that education "reproduces the dominant ideology" (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p.38, cited in McHugh, n.d.:11).

"Literacy comes already loaded with ideological and policy presuppositions" (Street, 2003:78). In response to this, Powell (1999:20) states: *what is needed in our society is a different definition of literacy, one that acknowledges the hegemonic power structure and that values the discourses of groups traditionally marginalized.* (cited in Cadiero-Kaplan & Smith, 2002:378).

Critical literacy argues that literacy education should provide people with the *knowledge and skills necessary for them to understand and analyse their own historically constructed voices and experiences as part of a project of self and social empowerment* (Giroux, 1989:33-34). Critical literacy "moves literacy beyond text to social action" (Cadiero-Kaplan & Smith, 2002:378).

For literacy to liberate people "it has to address both literacy practices and the relationship of oppression which the exploited experience" (Crowther & Tett, 2011:136). As an educationalist, Freire's pedagogy for adult education was not focused only on teaching adults to read, but also on "how to read in relation to the awakening of their consciousness" (Freire, 1996a, p. 43, cited in McHugh, n.d.:13). Thus, being literate is conceptualised not merely as having learned a skill set or attained a certain state, but rather it is a way of being actively and critically engaged in life.

### **Multiliteracies**

A further movement in the evolution of 'literacy' has been the introduction of the concepts of multiple literacies. 'Multiple literacies', 'multi-modal literacies', 'multiliteracies' are all terms used to encompass the idea that there can no longer be considered to be one, single, adequate definition of 'literacy' in today's world. The meanings and practices of literacy are "necessarily contested" and according to Gee (1990), particular versions and interpretations of literacy are "always rooted in a particular world view and a desire for that view to dominate and to marginalize others" (cited in Street, 2001:8).

The **Multiple Literacies** movement not only challenges the skills-based, cognitive tradition but also directly challenges those doing literacy work in developing countries where issues of dominance, hierarchy, and power are more central to policy discourse. The movement gains much of its evidence from ethnographic studies of literacy practices in diverse communities and is now widely considered as a 'standard' viewpoint in the understanding of 'literacy'.

*In effect, we can no longer speak simply about literacy but must acknowledge that there are*

multiple literacies. The notion of multiple literacies has come to the fore, fuelled in part by the dynamic changes brought about by globalisation. (McHugh, n.d.:3).

Viewing literacy as a socially situated and interactive practice (Barton et al., 2000), we support the, now mainstream, argument for a conceptualisation of literacy to include a much broader range of activities, utilising different modes, artefacts and drawing on diverse skills and abilities (Bearne, 2003; Kress, 2000). This emphasis on multiliteracies and multimodal literacies is widespread (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000; Flewitt, 2008; Marsh, 2005). (Lawton et al., 2012:101).

Much of the literature of the past decade speaks of a multiplicity of literacies, and we have come to appreciate that literacy has many facets (Collins 1995; Gee 1996). From this perspective, we see that earlier research took an exclusively Western-centric view, so failing to take into account the true diversity of the world's literate cultures (Collins and Blot 2003). By treating Western social

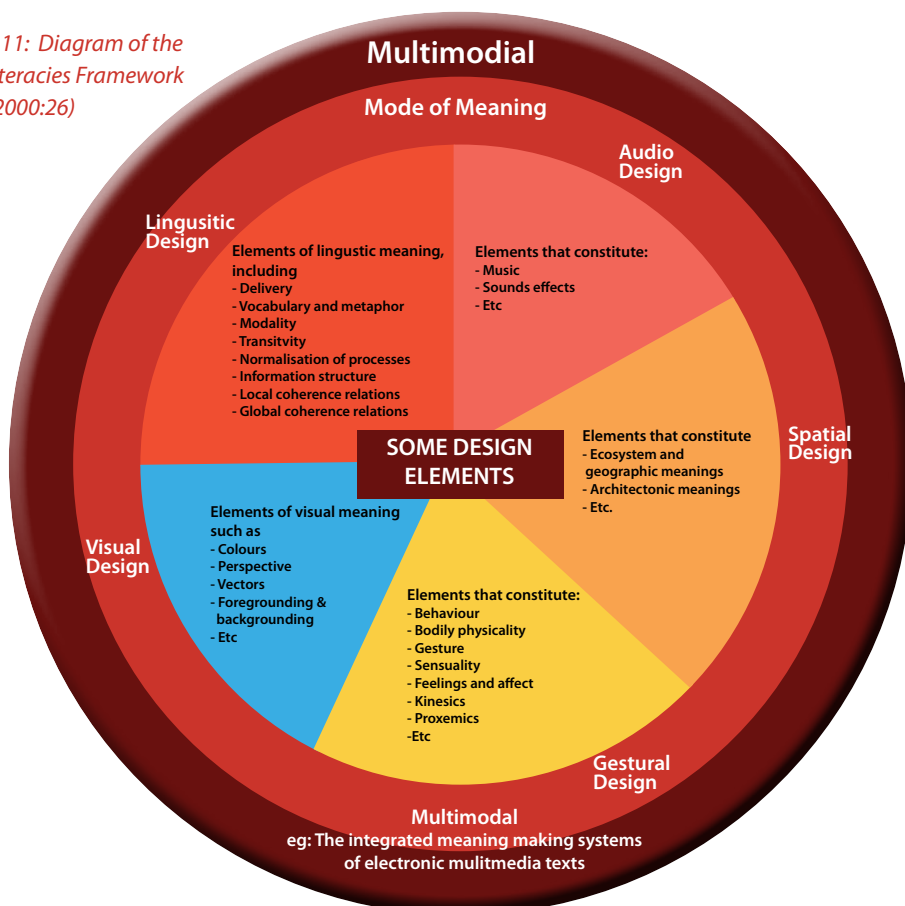
development and uses of literacy as central to the history of literacy itself, it distorted the idea of what it meant to be literate. (Cook-Gumperz, 1986:2).

The definition of literacy as multi-modal is also increasingly accepted as encompassing spoken, printed, and digital literacies (Flewitt, 2008, cited in Lawton, et al., 2012:105). The traditional definitions of 'texts' and 'modes of communication' are now opened up to be comfortably inclusive of different modes such as "images and sounds in printed and electronic media and in face-to-face interaction". These modes are also frequently combined with other modes (such as in gesture, music, language, and so forth) to enable people to make and to express meaning in ways that reach far beyond traditional definitions of 'text' and of 'literacy' as reading and writing.

The New London Group (NLG) (2000:26), comprising renowned literacy theorists from the UK, USA, and Australia devised a useful framework for understanding 'multiliteracies':

“The definition of literacy as multi-modal is also increasingly accepted as encompassing spoken, printed, and digital literacies” (Flewitt, 2008, cited in Lawton, et al., 2012:105).

Figure 11: Diagram of the Multiliteracies Framework (NLG, 2000:26)



The NLG multiliteracies framework incorporates:

- linguistic mode relating to the elements of language
- audio mode relating to elements such as music and sound
- visual mode incorporating the keys to visual meaning
- gestural mode including elements that constitute behaviour, physicality, gesture, and so forth
- spatial mode, which incorporates elements that relate to ecosystems, geography, and so forth
- multimodal, which incorporates electronic media texts.

Finally, Rush (2003) in turn added:

- ecological mode, incorporating the interpretation of both physical and social contexts and the reading of the natural environment.

However, despite the widespread theoretical acceptance of multiple literacies, two things are apparent:

- that this understanding has not been as successful in influencing literacy related policy and practice in the 'real world', and
- that these 'literacies' do not "live together in harmony", but are in fact "often deeply in contestation with one another" – with some forms of literacy continuing to be highly privileged whilst others are "demeaned", some being dominant, whilst others are continually marginalised (Rogers, 2001:208).

### Cultural Literacy

*Cultural Literacy* is a term coined by Eric Donald Hirsch in 1987, who proposed that being 'culturally literate' was equally as important as gaining mastery of the technical skills of reading and writing. Today the concept of cultural literacy has broadened to be used almost synonymously with terms such as 'cultural competence' and 'cultural capital'. For Americans, to whom Hirsch introduced the idea, cultural literacy involved knowing the history and geography of their nation, being familiar with canonical literature and its

authors, and possessing other basic shared foundational knowledge that made Americans 'American'. In essence, Hirsch was trying to restore the connection between literacy as skill and literacy as competence, knowledge, values, and the shared collective knowledge and body of text that reflects centuries of a nation's "collective experience" (Cook-Gumperz, 1986:2).

A cultural literacy ideology focuses on what the readers/learners bring to the conventional literacy (reading and writing) situation and whether or not they possess common background knowledge, moral, and values. In school contexts, the cultural literacy curriculum includes literature that is considered classic or canonical in the culture. To be successful, competent, 'literate' citizens, it was felt that everyone should know certain "core knowledge", and while it was recognised that different people had differing levels of access to this core knowledge, it was felt that this could be fixed through a process of assimilation.

*Individuals who promote a cultural literacy ideology [Bloom, 1987; Hirsch, 1988; Bennett, 1995] assume that this knowledge is part of the upper-middle-class culture. As a result, those from lower socioeconomic classes or ethnically diverse groups must learn this cultural knowledge to be successful in school, have access to the mainstream culture, or acquire cultural capital. (Cadiero-Kaplan & Smith, 2002:375).*

While the cultural literacy model was, in a sense, altruistic in wanting an 'even playing field', it has also been criticised on the following grounds.

- Who decides what cultural knowledge, language, social interactions and meanings are 'core knowledge'? Thus far, this has been defined by "a select group of individuals, such as Hirsch and others of the politically conservative elite."
- The contributions of minority and repressed cultures to mainstream society are seldom considered for inclusion into cultural literacy learning.
- The approach brings about (wittingly or unwittingly) cultural assimilation of minority groups.

- The cultural literacy curriculum is said to attempt to “control the spaces where knowledge is produced” (Cadiero-Kaplan & Smith, 2002:375).

**Literacy as ‘specific area competence’**

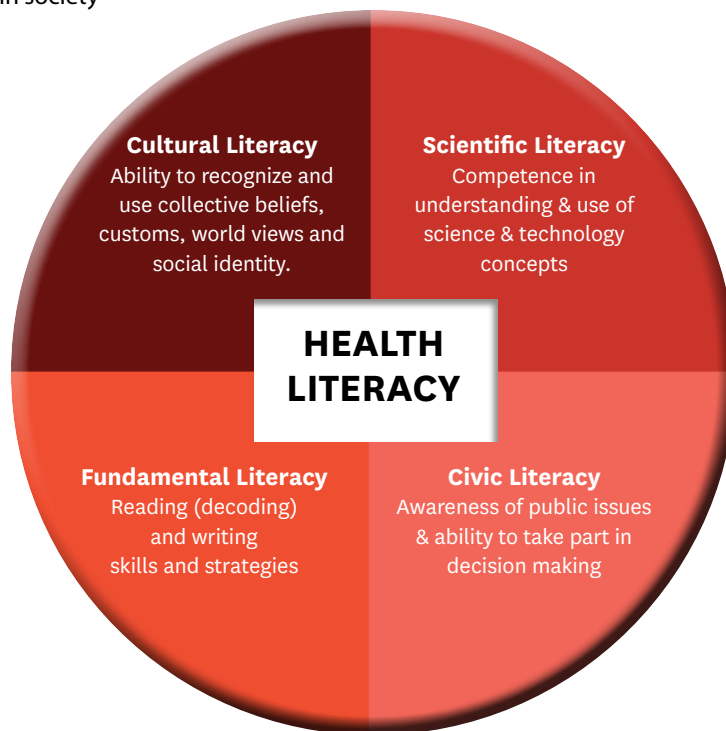
Since the 1990s, the term ‘literacy’ has also seen widespread use as a “statement of, or measure of competence to do a given task or work in a given field” (SIL, n.d.:2). Numerous examples of the conceptualisation of ‘literacy’ as a specialised area competence exist: ‘computer literacy’; ‘information literacy’; ‘financial literacy’; ‘health literacy’; ‘media literacy’; ‘workplace literacy’; ‘environmental literacy’; ‘ecological literacy’; to name just a few.

This understanding of literacy became quickly entrenched and can be seen mirrored in the OECD’s definition of literacy when working specifically with what it calls the “Literacy Domains”:

- Reading literacy - the ability to understand, use and reflect on written texts in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential, and to participate effectively in society

- Mathematical literacy - the capacity to identify, understand and engage in mathematics and to make well-founded judgments about the role mathematics plays in an individual’s current and future private life, social life with peers and relatives, and life as a constructive, concerned, and reflective citizen
- Scientific literacy - the capacity to use scientific knowledge, to identify questions and to draw evidence-based conclusions in order to understand and help make decisions about the natural world and the changes made to it through human activity. (OECD, 2001: 21-23).

As an example of the further progression in the use of the term ‘literacy’ in this way, it is useful to look at an expanded model by Zarcadoolas, et. al., (2006) who sought to provide a holistic understanding of the literacy domains required for health literacy. Their model incorporates the following:



\*Cultural Literacy also included the ability to usefully frame mainstream information in ways that accommodate cultural understandings and other forms of knowledge.

Figure 12: Zarcadoolas, Pleasant & Greer’s Model of Health Literacy (2006)

‘Cultural Literacy’ is a term coined by Eric Donald Hirsch in 1987, who proposed that being ‘culturally literate’ was equally as important as gaining mastery of the technical skills of reading and writing.



Zarcadoolas, et. al's model of 'health literacy' draws together multiple literacies and, importantly, acknowledges the role that 'cultural literacy' plays in health. It also acknowledges the way in which multiple bodies of collective knowledge and experience are simultaneously drawn on as integral elements of 'health literacy' – which can be thought of as a form of literacy as 'specific area competence' (like financial literacy, computer literacy, and so forth). The model is also interesting in that it clearly acknowledges that 'literacy' consists of skills, competencies, understandings, world views, thinking/ decision-making, and corresponding actions, as well as the fluid flow of information; its interpretation and re-interpretation across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

### 3.3.3 Definitions of Literacy by Selected International Bodies

As previously described, global changes to perceptions of literacy are widespread (Haworth, 2010:32). While there is common agreement that the term 'literacy' involves and connotes the acts of reading and writing with comprehension, there is still much continuing debate around the wider scope of the concept, its nature and how it should be measured. For international bodies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 'literacy' has been a topic of deliberate focus and effort over the past decade in particular. Of interest then, are the definitions of literacy adopted by such international organisations.

It has been observed that *UNESCO, an organization that has devoted much energy and resources to promoting literacy, opted for the rather general notion of "functional literacy"* (Wagner, 2010:164). UNESCO's 2006 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* notes that in 1978, UNESCO's General Conference adopted a definition of functional literacy – still in use today– that states that: *A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development (UNESCO, 2006:154).*

In the late 1980s and the 1990s there was a broadening of UNESCO's conceptions of 'literacy' to *accommodate the demands of globalisation, including the significance of new technologies and other information media.* Accordingly, 'literacy' was defined by UNESCO as *the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts* (cited in Haworth, 2010:18).

Having then recognised, at the outset of the United Nations (UN) Literacy Decade (2003-2012), that the traditional narrow definitions of 'literacy' were no longer sufficient, in a position paper, UNESCO urged all stakeholders in literacy (listed as "communities, non governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society, national governments and the international community itself") to take account of literacy's *many meanings and dimensions by addressing the full range of contexts, languages, purposes, and means of acquisition and application employed by learners* (UNESCO, 2004:6). The position paper sought to *clarify the plural notion of literacy and to suggest concrete actions through which policy-makers and programme providers might more effectively address the needs of learners* (UNESCO, 2005).

According to the 2006 *Global Monitoring Report*, UNESCO subsequently distinguished between *literacy as a skill and literacy as a set of culturally and socially determined practices, and later endorsed efforts to promote the acquisition of literacy – newly conceived as 'basic learning needs' – on a continuum including formal and non-formal education, extended to people of all ages* (2006:155). This "continuum of learning" was said to lead to the achievement of individual goals, knowledge, potential, and to full participation in society (UNESCO, 2004, cited in Haworth, 2010).

These moves, while positive indicators of a desire to achieve inclusive definitions of 'literacy', still only invited a broadening in the understanding of the uses of conventional literacy (reading and writing) by diverse peoples and appear to fall short of embracing 'literacies' other than those based on the printed word. By stopping well within the boundaries of defining 'text' as "printed and written materials", such understandings effectively exclude non-print communication



such as art, music, dance, nonverbal communication, speech, and other 'literacies'. Similarly, it would also appear that any references to 'indigenous literacy' refer almost exclusively to conventional literacy (reading and writing) in indigenous languages.

UNESCO's 2004 position paper did officially recognise *that there are many practices of literacy embedded in different cultural processes, personal circumstances and collective structures*, however, it also went on to concede that, nonetheless, "much remains to be done to incorporate this new thinking in literacy policies and programmes" (UNESCO, 2004:6). Tellingly, the position paper also noted that:  
*while reference to the plural notion of literacy abounds in theoretical and academic studies and a number of international declarations support it, actual literacy work has failed to keep pace.*

Further evidence of a slowly widening conceptualisation of literacy is apparent in UNESCO's *Global Monitoring Report in 2006 Education for All* and accompanying background papers. In a background paper on the benefits of literacy, prepared for the global monitoring report, Robinson-Pant (2005:2) specifically acknowledges that: *'literacy' has come to mean much more to individuals and communities than just reading and writing...*

While UNESCO's conceptualisations of 'literacy' appear to have slowly broadened, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) 'literacy' focus is considerably and deliberately narrowly defined. The International Programme for Student Assessment (PISA) is a programme designed to monitor the educational outcomes in terms of 'student achievement' in member countries. One of the OECD/PISA's focus areas is literacy, and more specifically, reading literacy. The definition of 'reading literacy' is: *Understanding, using and reflecting on written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society* (OECD, 1999:12). In operationalising the concept of 'literacy' and specifically 'reading literacy', the OECD/PISA seeks to cover the following dimensions of literacy in its assessments of reading: (i) the form of the reading material;

(ii) the type of reading task, (iii) the use for which the text was constructed (its context/situation) (1999:13). In this way, within a clearly narrow, conventional, and predominantly functional conceptualisation of 'literacy', the OECD does also acknowledge that conventional literacy is clearly situated within contexts.

However, one of the problems inherent in positioning literacy firmly within a functional ideology is that "functionality" must essentially be based on the norms of any given society and thus "fails precisely because adequate norms are so difficult to establish". Moreover, although national models of literacy generally attempt to reflect the culture of the majority of its citizens, as populations within nations become increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, there is the danger that such models "may exclude groups outside the mainstream" and may not be in their best interests (van Broekhuizen, n.d.).

Overall, literacy as defined by leading international bodies still appears to be underwritten by the view of literacy that Street has labeled 'autonomous' – the concept of literacy as a *general, uniform set of techniques and uses of language, with identifiable stages and clear consequences for culture and cognition* (Collins, 1995:75). As such, these bodies and institutions operate under the assumption that there is a direct relationship between learning literacy skills and improvements in seven indicators of development:

- confidence/autonomy and empowerment
- children's effective participation in schooling
- family hygiene, nutrition, and health
- family size
- increasing livelihoods
- participation in community and political life
- better understanding of radio information.

However, as discussed previously, the relationship between these 'indicators', conventional 'literacy', and 'development' still remains a complex one. For this reason, the international bodies' promises of development programmes that hold essentially

While there is common agreement that the term 'literacy' involves and connotes the acts of reading and writing with comprehension, there is still much continuing debate around the wider scope of the concept, its nature, and how it should be measured.

functional conceptualisations of literacy have been critically described as "... easy platitudes" (Rogers, 2001:205). It remains to be seen therefore in the coming decade whether the slow progression in the opening up of definitions of 'literacy' by international bodies continues towards inclusion of literacies other than reading and writing.

### 3.4 Current Definitions of Literacy in Aotearoa New Zealand

Having gained a sense of the evolution of international conceptualisations and theoretical understandings of 'literacy', we look now to some of the 'official' current definitions and conceptualisations of 'literacy' in Aotearoa New Zealand. The picture that emerges from a selective survey of the various definitions of literacy in New Zealand institutions appears varied. The breadth and focus of 'literacy' definitions appear to vary between the various levels of education and between formal and informal learning contexts. Differences also appear between the way in which literacy is 'officially' defined and how it is 'done' and 'measured'.

Observers of the situation of 'literacy' in education in Aotearoa New Zealand note how the nation is increasingly reflecting global ethno-linguistic diversity. Haworth (2011) notes that:

*... while schools in New Zealand have been keen to embrace the multimodal literacy opportunities offered by new technologies and greater global connectivity, increased ethnolinguistic diversity has been slower to impact on literacy pedagogy. As a result, New Zealand's educational policies have tended to reinforce literacy practices that are largely English dominant, and New Zealand teachers are often found to be negotiating literacy-related pedagogy within intercultural classrooms by trial and error.*

Haworth (2011:141) also highlights the challenges that increasing ethno-linguistic diversity presents to 'literacy' learning in Aotearoa New Zealand. While there has been an emphasis on responding to (i) "multimodal literacy practices that are radically altering international concepts of literacy" and (ii) "technological advances", there has been considerably less emphasis placed on "meeting the significant challenges that ethnolinguistic

diversity poses" both for the understanding of 'literacy' and for its teaching and learning.

In reviewing conceptions of literacy in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Whāriki, the Early Childhood Curriculum in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 1996), is recognised as being more inclusive in its definitions of 'literacy' than the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) for primary and secondary education. Evidence of the inclusiveness of 'literacy' definitions in ECE documents can be seen in the stated emphasis on "oral, visual and written literacy", the opportunities and contexts for bilingualism, and the acknowledgement of diverse "symbol systems and technologies for making meaning". In addition to a host of the usual mechanics of reading and writing activities, ECE approaches to the learning and teaching of 'literacy' in Aotearoa New Zealand appear to extend the use of "literacy for a purpose" to include the following literacy practices:

- storytelling
- waiata (songs)
- poetry
- "reading" photographs and "culturally significant symbols"
- "recognising the significance and place of cultural patterns" (e.g. tapa) and oral traditions
- connecting in a range of ways with family
- being aware of culturally and socially significant intonation and oral forms. (Ministry of Education, *Early Childhood Education*, n.d.).

In this way, the Early Childhood system in Aotearoa New Zealand makes a firm and boldly culturally inclusive statement about the value of literacies other than reading and writing and the importance of having opportunities to learn these in both informal and formal learning contexts.

It appears however that whilst Te Whāriki embraces both Te Reo Māori and English and incorporates all the "language and symbols" of a child's "own and other cultures", the primary and secondary school curricula still affirm the primary importance of the English language

and the mastery of reading and writing skills in this dominant language (Haworth, 2011:144). Thus, it would appear that when a child transitions into the formal compulsory schooling environment in Aotearoa New Zealand, the focus shifts from a rich and culturally inclusive understanding of literacy to a considerably more conceptually focused and culturally narrow one.

In the (largely online) literature surveyed, Ministry of Education documents relating to primary and secondary education appear to use the word “literacy” to refer almost exclusively to conventional literacy – reading and writing, and at times speaking and listening. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) states that: *Literacy is defined as: the written and oral language people use in their everyday life, learning and work. It includes reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Skills in this area are essential for good communication, active participation, critical thinking and problem solving. (NZQA, n.d.:4).*

The Tertiary Education Commission’s (TEC) recent major contribution to ‘literacy’ in Aotearoa New Zealand has been the development of the standardised framework of literacy and numeracy skills known as the Learning Progressions. These set out to describe the “literacy knowledge, skills, and attitudes” that students in Aotearoa New Zealand need in order to meet the “reading and writing demands of the curriculum”. The Learning Progressions are based on the understanding that there are three main types of ‘literacy’ learning that students in Aotearoa New Zealand need:

- (1) learning the “code of written language”
- (2) learning to make meaning from text using background information and understanding about words and language
- (3) learning about how to “think critically” when reading and writing.

These represent a clear effort to include aspects of both a ‘functional’ and a ‘critical/transformative’ approach to ‘literacy’ but, like international definitions, they fall short of encompassing any ‘literacies’ other than reading and writing or explicitly acknowledging culturally-defined ‘literacy’ conceptualisations or practices. In these documents also, ‘literacy’

is primarily equated to reading and writing, and “the importance of literacy in English” is emphasised. Importantly in this respect, the TEC does acknowledge that in some of the TEC’s current literacy and numeracy initiatives the perspectives of Māori and Pasifika, “risk being overshadowed” (TEC, 2012:5).

The TEC’s *Learning Progressions for Adult Literacy* (2008b) focuses on four strands: Listening with Understanding; Speaking to Communicate; Reading with Understanding; and Writing to Communicate. These skills are situated primarily in the context of the English language, with acknowledgement in the document of Te Reo Rangatira (Māori language) as also an official language. While these skills are covered comprehensively and with a thorough research base behind them, again, they do not appear to directly incorporate non-conventional elements of literacy from a holistic or particularly culturally inclusive perspective (i.e. encompassing the knowledge, values, and ways of knowing and being other than those of the dominant culture).

Yet, in another of the interesting variations in New Zealand’s ‘literacy’ landscape, the ‘steps’ within the Learning Progressions have been described in the document through the use of a powerful indigenous symbol – the koru and pikopiko – and the metaphoric connections between the Māori language concept of “ako” as a means to “give and sustain intellectual and spiritual life” and the “natural and gradually unfolding growth pattern” of the pikopiko plant. All of which is tied metaphorically in the TEC document to a largely skills-based, conventional/functional model of ‘literacy’ and numeracy development. Metaphor (a powerful tool of orality), sustenance, and spirituality are all touched on in this one section of the Learning Progressions for the adult literacy document, providing a tantalising glimpse of an understanding of ‘literacy’ that is holistic and embedded within cultures other than the dominant one. This understanding is, however, limited to the one small discussion regarding the chosen visual image for the Learning Progressions booklet covers.

In the context of the New Zealand workplace, the TEC’s work relating to the development of conventional/functional literacy skills in

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the workplace presents another interesting opportunity to examine current conceptualisations of 'literacy' in Aotearoa New Zealand. TEC's literacy and numeracy focus in this area is on "improving workforce literacy, language and numeracy skills" through skills learning that occurs in the familiar context of the learner. *Strengthening Literacy and Numeracy: Theoretical Framework* (TEC, 2009) outlines the theoretical basis upon which "principled decisions" are to be made concerning strengthening 'literacy' and numeracy in vocational training. Although the framework comprises a comprehensive synthesis of research-based understandings about: how conventional literacy is developed and assessed; features of and resources for effective provision; and understandings of the workplace as a place for strengthening literacy and bringing about change, it is only in the glossary at the very end of the document that 'literacy' is defined:

... the written and oral language people use in everyday life and work. A person's literacy refers to the extent of their oral and written language skills and knowledge and their ability to apply these to meet the varied demands of their personal, study and work lives. (TEC, 2009:41).

This definition clearly includes orality and incorporates knowledge as well as skills but does ultimately still reflect an economically-driven and culturally narrow conceptualisation of literacy.

TEC's *Literacy, Language and Numeracy Action Plan 2008–2012* for raising the literacy skills of the New Zealand workforce focuses on building the demand for and supply of 'literacy' learning opportunities in the workforce. The Plan defines literacy as:

...the written and oral language people use in their everyday life and work; it includes reading, writing, speaking and listening. Skills in this area are essential for good communication, critical thinking and problem-solving in the workforce. It includes building the skills to communicate (at work) for speakers of other languages. (TEC, 2008a:6).

This definition incorporates oral as well as written modes and also focuses cognitive and communicative aspects of literacy, with a deliberate focus on developing the ability

to speak in English for non-native English speaking workers. Thus, this conceptualisation of literacy once again remains focused on the dominant language and the workplace context, with economic productivity as the ultimate desired outcome.

In the Adult Literacy learning context, Literacy Aotearoa (*a national organization of adult literacy providers and ... a leading commentator on literacy issues in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Literacy Aotearoa, n.d.)), provides what is perhaps one of the most comprehensive and inclusive definitions of 'literacy' for the Aotearoa New Zealand context – one that takes into account the *skills* and the *knowledge* and *values* embedded within understandings of 'literacy' in any given community:

*Literacy is listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and critical thinking, interwoven with the knowledge of social and cultural practices. Literacy empowers people to contribute to and improve society.* (Literacy Aotearoa, n.d.).

The Literacy Aotearoa definition includes orality and ways of thinking as well as reading and writing and, importantly, it also acknowledges that these elements are inextricably tied to one's *knowledge of society* and *culture*, and the ways of being in that society.

A final formal definition worth reflecting on is the definition of 'literacy' utilised by the OECD's international Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALLS) survey, which Aotearoa New Zealand participated in in 2006. In accordance with the narrow conceptualisation of literacy utilised by the OECD's PISA, the definition of 'literacy' in the ALLS relates only to the ability to read and write English prose (continuous texts such as news stories and instructions manuals) and the ability to read "discontinuous texts" (such as maps and timetables). Accordingly, it incorporates measures for 'literacy' based on these narrowly precise, English language, text-oriented, and 'measurable' definitions.

Interestingly, the findings of the ALLS survey's precise and narrowly defined constructions of 'literacy' are referred to in the TEC's *Literacy, Language and Numeracy Action Plan 2008–2012* as providing an indicator of the target recipients of the Plan (the Plan states that it sets out to explicitly target those who fall in the



bottom tiers of the ALLS survey). Bearing in mind that, for its own purposes, ALLS defines literacy only in terms of reading and writing English 'prose' and 'discontinuous texts' and that TEC varyingly defines literacy as including or not including wider aspects such as spoken communication, some more of the variability in the conceptualising and operationalising of 'literacy' in Aotearoa New Zealand can be seen.

Thus, the picture of 'literacy' in Aotearoa New Zealand is indeed a varied one. It would appear that at either end of the education spectrum (early childhood, and some forms of adult education) there is movement towards formulating an understanding of 'literacy' that willingly embraces the linguistic and cultural diversity of the people of Aotearoa New Zealand. But in other parts, understandings of 'literacy' remain both narrow and inconsistent. Haworth (2010:29) notes that *Interculturalism may still represent a radical new perspective for New Zealand and evidence of a major epistemological shift is not consistently present within educational policy.*

The current prevailing situation appears to be that 'literacy' is "traditionally narrowly conceptualised as a set of skills related to accessing and generating written or printed text" (Lawton et al., 2012:101). The danger inherent in this is that for people who are unable (for whatever reason) to attain this narrowly defined set of skills, the term 'illiterate' or 'semi-literate' becomes a label, bringing with it a range of connotations and implications. In this way, the presence or absence of conventional literacy is still widely seen as *an individual attribute that either transforms a person's life chances or exists as a sign of social and personal failure* (Cook-Gumperz, 1986:2). Moreover, when literacy is framed from a deficit perspective such as this, learners (especially adult learners) are viewed by "the perceived limits of their literacy abilities, not by their existing, diverse, literacy capabilities" (Crowther & Tett, 2011:134), and become viewed as necessarily less capable contributors to society and the economy.

Encouragingly though, the call for a broader and more inclusive understanding of 'literacy' in

Aotearoa New Zealand is being taken up. Signs of the desire to expand the traditional and narrow definitions of 'literacy' and 'education' are apparent in academic thought in Aotearoa New Zealand. Alderson and Giles (2008), for instance, call for an overall experience of education that is "holistic and transformative". Like the Appreciative Inquiry research model and movement, which they espouse, such an approach "energises the researcher and participants alike to reach for higher ideals" (Hammond, 1998; Hammond & Royal, 1998). These authors refer again to how holistic and transformative educational processes involve the "fullest development of learners", including *the learner's character, knowledge, understandings, and skills – described in current literature as focusing on the head, heart and hands* (2008:2). Here again it is apparent that the holistic understanding that is sought incorporates not only *skills*, but also *knowledge and understanding and character* – which relates to *values*.

In the school 'literacy' context in Aotearoa New Zealand, Haworth (2010:19) comments on the precedence of written texts over spoken ones and the continued assessment through standardised tests designed solely around traditional reading and writing skills in English. Noting the presence of increasing numbers of children of Pacific Island descent in New Zealand schools, Haworth points to the continuing lack of acknowledgement that forms of communication and literacy other than reading and writing are also highly valued in these cultures, going on to suggest that the continued promotion of such a state of affairs could quite easily be understood as *the politically dominant persuading subordinated groups that their language and culture are inferior* (2010:19).

Failure to recognise, acknowledge and respond to the diverse conceptions of 'literacy' amongst the New Zealand population also risks allowing the nation's education system to become one that "domesticates and under-develops rather than liberates the learner"; one that produces workers for the job market but does so through adherence to an understanding of 'literacy' that offers "transmission and mastery of a unitary Western tradition" (Giroux, 1987:3,

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cited in McHugh, n.d.:11). We are reminded of the power of conceptualisations of 'literacy' to either divide or to reconcile and unite:

*In a world which is simultaneously coming together as a global society while it splinters apart into ever smaller ethnically defined pieces, the two-faced potential of literacy to both open and bar doors of opportunity becomes increasingly evident.* (Hornberger, 1997:3, cited in van Broekhuizen, n.d.).

It has been observed that *if the meaning of literacy and the enactment of literacy practices and interactions are challenged and extended, the process and status of 'becoming literate' might be opened up* (Lawton, et al., 2012:102). It is therefore important to work to more clearly and coherently conceptualise 'literacy' in our own specific national context in Aotearoa New Zealand, because conceptualisations of literacy have the potential to create opportunities for transformative alternative practice within a nation (Crowther & Tett, 2011).

### **3.5 Holistic and Culturally Inclusive Conceptualisations of 'Literacy' by Indigenous Peoples Internationally**

In English-speaking countries globally, concern about the scope and role of 'literacy' in society has been driven predominantly from an economic perspective, causing 'literacy' to be defined so that "the language of economics often triumphs over the language of the heart and home" (van Broekhuizen, (n.d.)). This has resulted in systems, policies, assessments, and so forth, that have (1) largely served this economic end, and (2) largely not served the needs of indigenous peoples or peoples from ethnic or linguistic minorities. The end result has been widespread over-representation of indigenous and minority peoples in the negative 'tail end' of conventional literacy statistics and a clear failure by conventional understandings and practices of literacy to deliver the promised ideals of liberty, employment, fulfillment and escape from poverty. Accordingly, there is wider acknowledgement today of the "grave disservice to indigenous communities throughout the world if we do not recognise *their ability to determine for themselves the literacy practices most culturally relevant to them*" (van Broekhuizen, n.d., emphasis added).

*Since the mid-1980s, Indigenous literacy scholars have been advocating for the use of Indigenously defined sociocultural frameworks* (Smylie, et. al., 2006:S21) and emphasising the need for researchers and practitioners to clearly understand and respond to local socialcultural contexts. The dissatisfaction with narrow, conventional, Western understandings of 'literacy' has prompted the exploration and articulation of indigenous peoples' own conceptions of 'literacy'. As a result, it is observed that:

*Today Indigenous peoples worldwide are deconstructing Western paradigms, including the classic constructs of literacy connected to alphabet systems, and articulating and constructing their own distinct paradigms based on Indigenous epistemologies and rooted in self-determination and social justice.* (Romero-Little, 2006:399).

Work published by indigenous scholars in Canada particularly within the last decade (the 2000s) reflects this and the persistent (and sadly indicative) concern that 'literacy' learning *...should be about more than acquiring an official piece of paper that provides no guarantee of employment or independence* (Gaikezhongai, 2000:30, cited in Antone et. al. 2003:9).

Whilst research with indigenous peoples around the world highlights the various struggles and triumphs of each people group and their unique contextual strengths and constraints, a selected review of this research also reveals some core common themes across indigenous peoples' conceptions of literacies other than 'reading and writing in English'. In the studies reviewed, indigenous peoples frequently spoke of 'literacy' as:

- more than just reading and writing to get a job
- lifelong, holistic in nature, and nurturing of positive identity
- tied to: daily life and learning and language
- tied to emotional / physical / psychological / spiritual wellbeing and quality of life
- able to provide connection to people, place, language, heritage
- about relationships between self, community, nation



- a tool for the learner's self-expression, self-determination, and community development through self improvement.

Research literature surveyed reveals that for indigenous peoples, 'literacy' means more than just reading, writing, and numeracy for access to mainstream employment. Instead, literacy is inextricably tied to languages, ways of knowing, and positive cultural identities, which nurture the spirit, heart, mind, and body equally (George, 2003:29) and can facilitate the development of self-determination, affirmation, achievement, and a sense of purpose. It is acknowledged that from indigenous peoples' perspectives, "literacy is equivalent to learning in the broadest sense as an endeavour that spans a lifetime" (Antone, et. al. 2003:6), and practitioners and researchers note that both conventional and indigenous literacy "is part of everyday life" (2003:7; Antone et. al., 2003).

Not all research on indigenous literacy is carried out by indigenous researchers, and reporting on the involvement of non-indigenous researchers with indigenous and/or minority ethnic communities is of highly varied nature and quality. Many studies do however involve at some point, a realisation by non-indigenous researchers that conventional definitions of literacy are "impoverished and narrow" (Balanoff & Chambers, 2005) and that they do not reflect the "richness and multiplicity of literacies" that are practised and observed within indigenous communities. There is recognition that indigenous literacies often do not resemble the "narrow and decontextualized literacy associated with reading and writing and privilege in educational institutions" and that they and the ways of understanding the world that they represent, are often "excluded or marginalised in education and public schooling" (Romero-Little, 2006:399). First-hand observation of the ways in which people can "read their world, make meaning of it, and engage with it" as well as "recognise and interpret symbols, decode, understand, imagine, create and pass on knowledge" (Balanoff & Chambers, 2005:18) draws attention to the paradox of labeling such people 'illiterate' if they cannot perform on standardised tests of reading and writing alphabetic script in a dominant

(non-indigenous) language.

It is strongly argued that indigenous languages, mother-tongues, cultures and traditions are at the forefront of 'literacy' and 'literacy learning' for indigenous peoples. *When Aboriginal people develop our own methods of measuring literacy, we reframe, re-story and revalidate learning and education within our own cultures and epistemology* (Antone & Córdoba, 2005:10). Just as narrowly defined notions of literacy will "elevate certain competencies while undervaluing others" and result in feelings of "inadequacy and low self-esteem" for the learner, definitions of literacy that validate and encourage an indigenous learner's ways of knowing, being, and communicating will act instead to affirm and strengthen the learner (Antone & Córdoba, 2005:9).

The link between spoken language and literacy is a complex one. Not surprisingly, indigenous/mother-tongue languages often struggle for inclusion in understandings of literacy. This is due to the dominance of 'official' languages, usually with higher prestige, wider use, and entrenched connections with upward mobility.

For many indigenous peoples, the struggles of 'literacy' have been tied to the struggles for the survival of their mother tongue and culture, and "many consider literacy to be essential to their continued existence" (van Boekhuizen, n.d.). As Antone et. al. (2003:10) puts it: *Many factors such as healing; self-determination; and reclamation of identity, language, and cultures play a major role in the complex issue of Aboriginal literacy.* Models of literacy that have been successful and meaningful in these communities have, therefore, been ones where literacy has been identified as a means to "expanding opportunities, improving prospects, and preserving, perpetuating, and maintaining indigenous languages" (van Boekhuizen, n.d.).

For indigenous peoples, literacy is very much tied to daily life and learning. *Ways of knowing and ways of being, wholistic learning, oral tradition storytelling, culture, language: these are some of the aspects encapsulated in the definition of Native Literacy* (Paulsen, 2003:23). Whereas, it has been said that in many

“Since the mid-1980s, Indigenous literacy scholars have been advocating for the use of Indigenously defined sociocultural frameworks” (Smylie, Williams & Cooper, 2006:S21),

developed Western nations, the mainstream definition of 'literacy' is often so far removed from the daily life of a language that it has largely turned its back on its roots and ignored the importance, complexities and enduring nature of orality and traditional literacies (Balanoff & Chambers, 2005:18).

From an indigenous perspective, literacy in its fullest sense is holistic in nature, lifelong, and nurturing of positive identity. In a number of studies, it became quite clear that indigenous peoples defined literacy "more inclusively and wholistically" than the country's relevant government Ministry did (Antone, et. al., 2003:22). *Aboriginal literacy is more than just the development of skills used in the reading and writing process ... it is necessary to develop the whole being and not just concentrate on the mental* (Antone, et. al., 2003:13). The vital links between literacy and identity, learning, as well as holistic emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing form the basis of most indigenous constructions of 'literacy'. Attempts at "re-storying" adult literacy for indigenous communities, therefore, actively encourages a "wholistic approach to literacy and learning" that "embraces learning for life through body, mind, heart and spirit" (Antone & Córdoba, 2005:11). This holism includes not only all relevant aspects of communication but integrally includes "spiritual and emotional literacy" as well.

Literacy in its fullest conceptualisation can also be seen as a means of providing connections to people, place, and heritage and between the generations. For many indigenous peoples who now form minority groups within other dominant cultures, periods of colonisation have disrupted the flow of indigenous knowledge through oracy from generation to generation (covering all aspects of life from how to parent, philosophies for life, through to how to work the land, and so forth). This has resulted in the loss of intergenerational learning and (in addition to the effect of formal western schooling) has led to the loss of respect for indigenous languages and cultures as well as a decline in respect for elders who no longer hold the roles they once held. From an aboriginal perspective though, Paulsen (2003:26) affirms that:

*When teachings are passed from the Elders to the younger generations, literacy takes on the traditional form and is being lived out in contemporary society. Thereby literacy becomes the active form of learning, evident in one's development of knowledge, values, and way of being. Literacy is brought back into the everyday lives of Native peoples – reconnecting intergenerational ties and being infused into the lifelong process of affirming Aboriginality.*

Research on this issue stresses the need for a holistic approach that enables indigenous peoples to reclaim and relocate "space, place and time" through the present "knowledge economy"; and for this to also become part of their educational experiences within institutions of learning. It is observed that this enables indigenous peoples to recover and reclaim distinct cultural identities and to demonstrate the knowledge, strength and value of these. Hence, literacy becomes emancipatory, and *a vehicle by which the oppressed are equipped with the necessary tools to reappropriate their history, culture, and language practices* (Antone & Córdoba, 2005:4). 'Literacy' in its fullest sense then becomes pivotal in sustaining world views, and the survival of distinct and vital cultures – cultures that inevitably evolve in and of themselves and in contact with other cultures. Moreover, literacy is not a static concept but is subtly evolving with people over time. Thus, being 'literate' is about resymbolising and reinterpreting past experience, honouring traditional values, living out these traditional values in contemporary times, whilst also visioning a future in which the indigenous ways of being can continue to thrive (Antone, et. al., 2003:22; Gamlin, 2003:16).

Literacy for indigenous peoples is also about connectedness, diversity, and unity. Literacy is about people, and Antone et. al (2003:9) stress that "aboriginal literacy is not individualization; it is about relationship". The literature also reveals that indigenous people approached literacy through their shared "aboriginality", whilst at the same time holding particular understandings in relation to their own distinct areas of knowledge, expertise, and cultural context. As a result, definitions

of literacy amongst neighbouring indigenous peoples’ “way of life and faith tradition” in the cultural context of each community. In this way, indigenous literacy involves and fosters “relationships between self, community, nation and creation” (Antone, et. al., 2003:22).

Smylie, et. al., (2006:S25) stress the importance of acknowledging that the “intrinsic connection of everyday pragmatism to metaphysical and symbolic realities” is a common feature and strength of indigenous world views. Accordingly, they state that *it is therefore not surprising or contradictory that Indigenous definitions of literacy describe both a diverse set of skills and a pathway to self-determination and empowerment of the spirit*. They argue also for an ideological understanding of literacy as constructed and enacted within social, cultural, and political contexts, and “knowable” by the way in which “it is defined and practiced by different social and cultural groups” (2006:S25).

In guiding work towards literacy development in First Nations peoples, the importance of developing models of literacy and education that are firmly structured by and embedded within local cultures is stressed (Gaikezhongai, 2003; George, 2003). Research, practical and theoretical works by indigenous scholars from Canada to Africa, to Australia, and to New Zealand (Māori), all point to the existence and the legitimacy of alternate literacies to reading and writing. Priscilla George (2003), creator of the Rainbow/Holistic Approach to Aboriginal Literacy, drew on both indigenous knowledge and the ‘mainstream’ western theoretical work of Howard Gardner, whose theory of multiple human intelligences (linguistic; logical-mathematical; visual-spatial; musical; body-kinesthetic; interpersonal; intrapersonal; naturalistic) served to break open concepts such as intelligence that had previously been tightly closed and controlled by cognitive- and individual-oriented research paradigms (George, 2003:33).

The Rainbow/Holistic Approach to Aboriginal Literacy (George 2003), is based on the principles of holism and encapsulates indigenous thinking relating to the interrelated literacies of life as an aboriginal person:

**Red** – symbolising confidence; relating to the literacy of aboriginal languages and the

interconnectedness of life

**Orange** – symbolising balance and choice; relating to the skills required for proper use of the oral traditions, speaking and listening

**Yellow** – often used symbolically for the moon; relating to creativity and communication through symbols and signs

**Green** – symbolising growth; relating to ways of being within the multicultural and multilingual world, and being aware of living in two worlds

**Blue** – symbolic of truth; relating to the sky and the skills required for technology and telecommunication

**Indigo** – the colour of the night sky; relating to spiritual seeing or intuition

**Violet** – symbolic of healing and wisdom; relating to the holistic base of aboriginal literacy (i.e. the interconnection between the spirit, heart, mind, and body).

The Rainbow model and others such as the ‘Medicine Wheel’ have empowered communities, practitioners, and theorists to more meaningfully define and live out a holistic and culturally meaningful ‘literacy’ in their daily lives.

Models of aboriginal literacy such as this serve to *find new ways of incorporating traditional Aboriginal knowledge and methodologies into the learning situations of Aboriginal learners* (Antone et. al. 2003:14), and aim to counter what are seen as assimilation processes at work in mainstream education. The ultimate aim is to support indigenous/aboriginal/First Nations peoples’ “relentless efforts to survive and prosper” (Gaikezhongai, 2003:41), by engaging in a *process of transformation from oppression to revitalization ... reclaiming, revitalizing, and sustaining Native spirituality, world view, culture, and literacy* (Antone, et. al. 2003). Having closely studied the work of leading indigenous scholars, Gamlin (2003:18) concludes that ultimately, “only a wholistic framework will reveal the true complexity and comprehensiveness of Aboriginal literacy”, and could involve ways of thinking, relating, and being as much as it involves various modes of communication.

In line with western theoretical notions of critical, transformative and emancipatory literacy, many indigenous peoples are

The ‘Rainbow Approach to Literacy’ (George 2003), is based on the principle of holism, and encapsulates indigenous thinking relating to the interrelated literacies of life as an Aboriginal person.

documented as viewing literacy as a tool for the learner's self-expression, self-determination, and community development through self-improvement (Antone, et. al., 2003:7). In Australia, it has been commented that *the kind of literacy education Aboriginal people received has essentially maintained the status quo – a position of powerlessness in contemporary Australian society* (Dunn, 2001:679), echoing the type of "status quo" from which many indigenous peoples worldwide perpetually struggle to escape or actively change. Often the struggle not only involves efforts to reconnect with and assert the value of traditional indigenous literacies but also to gain equitable access to conventional literacy (reading and writing). Much of this stems from persistently observed tendencies of majority culture educational institutions to "consider the nature of children's home background as a primary cause of illiteracy" and to believe that inability to acquire conventional literacy is due to "some kind of defect in the cultures and lifestyles of Aboriginal people" (Dunn, 2001:679).

There is a complex and lasting relationship between 'literacy' and the struggle of indigenous peoples for self-determination. In this context, literacy is integrally tied to indigenous epistemologies (understandings about knowledge), self-determination and social justice – which in turn shape the construction and articulation of 'literacy' (Romero-Little, 2006). All of this essentially links back to the "unquenchable hope in the promise of education", and a belief that literacy (in its full indigenous sense) will ...*instruct them in ways to live long and well on Mother Earth and that it will instill in them the wisdom and the capacity to carry their responsibilities in the circle of all life...* (cited in Antone, et. al., 2003:9).

### 3.6 Legitimising Literacies Other than Reading and Writing

Expressed in the preceding section are indigenous conceptualisations of literacies other than the skills of reading and writing of alphabetic script and the skills of speaking and listening in the dominant language. Indigenous scholars face the challenge of re-asserting the value and validity – the legitimacy – of

indigenous literacies in environments that often appear to hold dearly to the conceptualisation of 'literacy' as a narrow skill set relating to reading and writing. They also face the pervasive understanding previously discussed, that conventional literacy (reading and writing) alone, in and of itself, is capable of leading directly to a better life for its possessor. However, the concept of multiple literacies other than reading/writing continues to occur so consistently throughout indigenous literacy literature that it simply cannot be ignored.

It is inevitable though that at least initially attempts to place anything other than alphabetic reading and writing (and occasionally speaking/listening) at the core of a definition of 'literacy' in Aotearoa New Zealand will raise questions regarding the legitimacy of these diverse literacies. This clearly highlights the contested nature of literacy. To address these challenges to legitimacy, it is necessary to ask searching questions: What counts as literacy? What counts as 'reading'? What counts as 'Writing'?, and in fact, What counts as 'text'? Whose 'literacy' is valued? Considering the question of legitimacy necessitates a deconstruction of the concept of 'literacy' and an open-minded examination of associated concepts such as 'text' and 'reading'.

To better understand what 'literacy' is in its most *essential form*, researchers most often choose to examine what they term the 'literacy practices' of communities. Lawton et al. (2012:107) propose that several conditions need to exist in order for 'literate practice' to exist:

- intention to communicate, to share the products of thinking
- the creation of an artefact with distinctive features that can cross the barriers of time and place
- meaning, which is purposively assigned and conveyed.

Therefore, a literate practice is one in which *an individual makes intentional use of some enduring representation (an artefact) in order to purposively assign and convey meaning* (Lawton et al., 2012:107).

In the case of *conventional literacy* (reading and writing) therefore, a 'literate' person uses



their language's orthographic system (alphabet or set of symbols used to write the language) to write something (an enduring artefact) for the purpose of assigning and conveying meaning through it to an audience (perhaps themselves or others who share knowledge of that orthographic system and the language it represents). In the case of *other literacies*, people produce enduring visible signs (such as the particular patterning in a tattoo, the metaphoric lyrics in song, or the repeated pattern on a tapa cloth in some Pasifika cultures) as a means by which relatively specific ideas may be conveyed to others who are literate in this practice and who perceive and interpret it, and can attribute to it its given meaning (Jiménez & Smith, 2008:39). Moreover, these other modes are often employed concurrently – such as the verbal/oral together with the symbolic.

Understanding the legitimacy of literacies other than reading/writing requires the ability to recognise alphabetic reading and writing not as universals (as is often assumed in the autonomous view of literacy) but as cultural artefacts in and of themselves. Hornberger (1996:9), an advocate of indigenous literacies in the Americas writes; "it is true that alphabetic literacy is only one kind of literacy", and points to a growing body of scholarly work on indigenous ways of knowing and explorations into "the nature of writing as it relates to drawing, painting, and to speech, performance, and orality". It is important also, to recognise that: *common practices come not from divining decree, but from choices made sometime, somewhere... , within specific historical and cultural contexts that support political and economic structures.* (Cadiero-Kaplan & Smith, 2002:378).

To understand the validity of other literacies, it is necessary to be able to conceive of worlds in which other (currently devalued) literacies are valued equally – if not more – than conventional literacy. A Pacific example of the re-conception of literacy in this way is reported by Faraclas (1994) within the context of Papua New Guinea:

*Literacy is no longer the power to decode and encode written texts. This is only a peripheral and even nonessential aspect of literacy. For*

*thousands of Papua New Guineans, literacy has become synonymous with the power to critically read and creatively write the discourses, versions of culture, and other structures and systems that determine how and why we live our lives. ...* (cited in van Broekhuizen, n.d.:2).

Pacific nations (within Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia) have had exposure to conventional literacy (reading and writing) from the 19th century, with missionary introduction of literacy in some Pacific nations dating back to the 1830s (Mangubhai & Elley, n.d.: 7). However, preceding and continuing throughout the almost two centuries of written tradition in some Pacific nations, a wide range of indigenous symbol systems, in addition to the spoken word, were used to carry out these very same processes – the conveyance of meaning through the production of an 'enduring artefact'. The meanings conveyed related to a wide range of life and knowledge domains. Tu'itahi (2009), drawing on his Tongan cultural heritage, identifies some of these indigenous knowledge domains:

- Tala-'o-tokanga – farming, horticulture
- Tala-'o-ngatai/toutai – marine, navigation
- Tufunga – architecture, construction, and state craft
- Faito'o – health care and healing system
- Faiva – arts, sports.

Paulsen (2003:25) also reports that *The Native people of Hawaii, the Kanaka Maoli, traditionally used forms of literacy beyond the written word such as hula and oral traditions of storytelling and song* (Kanahele, 1979; Kane, 1997; Liliuokalani, 1898). *These methods of communication were embedded in the traditional social order and formed a collective experience and understanding for the people.*

Understanding and meaning from these and many other indigenous knowledge bases was gathered, generated, interpreted, displayed, shared, and preserved through a range of complex symbol systems within a range of communication modes (visual, oral, gestural, as well as language and print) that constituted 'texts' – when 'text' is understood as "the complex symbol system people understand

To understand the validity of other literacies, it is necessary to be able to conceive of worlds in which other (currently devalued) literacies are valued equally – if not more – than conventional literacy.

and use beyond language and print" (Taylor, et al., 2011:57).

Examining what a cultural group defines as 'text' requires consideration of what it is, who produces it, what people do with it, how they use it, and how it fits into their lives. Likewise in considering what constitutes 'literacy practices' in the daily lives of any given culture, one must consider what resources are involved (including values, ways of thinking, skills, knowledge, in addition to material/physical resources), as well as who is involved in the practice, where the practice takes place, and what actions and rules are part of the practice. Balanoff and Chambers (2005) report on a project by the NWT Literacy Council, the University of Lethbridge, the community of Holman and the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre, which sought to examine "what counts as literacy and what counts as text in the context of a northern/Inuit community" (2005:18). Their findings in the Inuit community included 'text' in the form of the following: weather, sky, land forms, plants and animals, dreams, facial expressions, spiritual beings, tattoos, food, clothing, drums, songs, names, games, stories, art, prints, tapestry, and writing. It was also acknowledged that literacy practices in the community included: naming ceremonies, genealogy, tools, and astronomy, and that these literate practices were carried out in particular places, by particular people, with a range of other "visible and hidden" entities (such as spiritual entities) also involved in the practice.

Scholarly work on Mesoamerican indigenous writing systems and cultures indicates that in addition to writing scripts, "some forms of Mesoamerican literacy on the other hand, made use of the entire body" through the use of choreography, hand gestures, spacing, clothing as well as verbal utterances (Monaghan, 1994, cited in Jiménez & Smith, 2008:37). Mesoamerican literacy practices also incorporated colour, music, dance, storytelling, group recitation, and the powerful use of metaphors and symbolism. *These literacies contributed to their users' sense of identity and place in their world and communicated ideas and information that helped tie the region together* (Jiménez & Smith, 2008:38).

Thus, literacy (in its fullest sense) is by no means new to indigenous peoples.

*For centuries Indigenous peoples have had their own distinct understandings, forms, and processes of literacy that provided children with many rich and meaningful daily opportunities to acquire the cultural symbols and intellectual traditions of their local communities.* (Romero- Little, 2006:399).

All too often though, *Indigenous literacies are framed within oral societies and are neglected and viewed as inferior and not suitable for modern life/society* (Romero-Little, 2006:399). As discussed previously, for quite some time in the mid 20th century, Western scholars proposed the so-called "great divide" between those societies that communicated through writing (the "civilised"), and those that did not (the "primitive"). By this reasoning, 'primitive' was equated with 'traditional' (meaning "rural, communal, magic-religious, non-rational") and with 'illiterate', and it was considered that *only the literacy that existed in the West promised enlightenment and the rise to civilization* (Besnier 1995) (Bialostok & Whitman (2006:382).

However, despite this difficult past and slow progress, literature reveals that efforts are clearly underway around the world to validate the daily reality of alternative 'literacy practices', 'texts' and ways of 'being literate' other than the small set recognised and valued by dominant cultures and languages. Hornberger (1996:9) stresses that, "given the dominance of alphabetic literacies in the world today", the efforts towards the "promotion of indigenous literacies" is vital to ensuring that "indigenous ways of knowing and being are able to survive and contribute to our global society", and that there is "fuller social participation of hitherto marginalized sectors of society".

### **3.7 Work By Māori to (re)Conceptualise Literacy in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Closer to home, Māori have recently begun to also seek to collectively articulate a more inclusive and culturally meaningful understanding of 'literacy'. To this end, and inspired by Friere and Macedo's *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (1987), a report by the Māori Adult Literacy Reference Group (2001) entitled *Te Kawai Ora* defines literacy



in the following way: “Literacy is the lifelong journey of building the capacity to ‘read’ and shape Māori and other worlds”. This is wrapped within a vision to connect the history of the nation with its future and, as globalisation influences it, to build on these new possibilities for the strengthening of its people.

The *Te Kawai Ora* report (2001) identifies three essential themes that must be considered in any attempt to meaningfully conceptualise ‘literacy’ for Māori:

1. the social and historical contexts in which literacy is understood
2. the skill bases that literacy, when broadly defined, encompasses
3. the competencies that the literate person is able to demonstrate.

Usefully, the report also draws attention to three particular bodies of knowledge that must be drawn upon to inform ‘development’ for Māori: (i) knowing about Māori knowledge / world views (epistemology); (ii) doing things the Māori way / Kaupapa Māori (methodology); (iii) being Māori/Māori realities (ontology).

The report also clearly expresses that, for Māori, becoming ‘literate’ includes: learning to speak, read, and write in both English and Māori language; gaining cultural and political knowledge; possessing knowledge of one’s ancestry and geographical history; and developing the ability to “read the Māori world view”.

The report strongly stands by the need for Māori to be functionally bi-literate (to read and write) in both English and Māori languages. In addition to this, and in accordance with the list above, Māori understanding of ‘literacy’ also includes other indigenous forms of literacy such as the ability to:

- ‘read’ the geography of the land
- recite one’s tribal ancestry and know the geographical boundaries of these
- ‘read’ Māori symbols such as carving, tukutuku, kōwhaiwhai and their context (such as within marae)
- ‘read’ body language (paralinguistic symbols of their culture)

- know about and ‘read’ the signs of the nation’s colonial past. (Māori Adult Literacy Reference Group, 2001).

The *Te Kawai Ora* report acknowledges that ‘literacy’ (in its fullest sense) is a “social, political and economic necessity” and that its mastery is important for: self-esteem; whānau development and building strong families in the future; functioning fully as citizens “critically literate in their history and in their world”; and gaining sustainable and highly skilled jobs. In achieving this, the report stresses that for Māori, successful learning depends on identifying solutions that accord with Māori values. Those working with Māori learners need to take into account Māori definitions, priorities, and teaching and learning styles. The moves by Māori towards redefining literacy through a Māori world view are an important part of this.

In 2010, Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi brought together leaders and experts in conventional literacy as well as leaders and experts in Māori values, world view and knowledge systems, in a hui (gathering/ assembly) to provide direction for the use of the terminology “Māori literacy” and “Literacy for Māori”. Authors note that:

*At Awanuiārangi, this process sparked new discussions about the use of the term ‘Māori literacy’. An emerging debate centred around the notion of Māori literacy and in particular the width and breadth of multiple interpretations of the term ‘literacy’.* (National Institute of Māori Education, 2010).

The new collective understandings generated as the outcome of these discussions at the Māori literacy hui were symbolically and metaphorically depicted as driving an anchoring stake into the ground with regards to literacy and Māori.

The resulting conceptualisations clearly distinguished between the terms “Māori literacy” and “Literacy for Māori”. “Māori literacy” was defined as Māori customary and historical values, knowledge, non-paper-based literacies relating to people, the environment, and art forms. “Literacy for Māori” was defined as the teaching and learning of conventional literacy (reading, writing, and numeracy) through teaching and learning strategies and

Closer to home, Māori also have recently begun to seek to collectively articulate a more inclusive and culturally meaningful understanding of ‘literacy’.

tools, frameworks, and resources designed specifically for, and most effective for use with, Māori learners. These efforts represent what Edwards (2011:2) describes as the courage and confidence within a people to “ethnovision, to re-invent and to reconnect with our own ways of knowing, doing and being”, and to know that they are capable of taking responsibility for developing their “own frameworks of being.”

### 3.8 Conceptualising Literacy for Pasifika at the Interface of Cultures

*The link between literacy, language, and identity is that literacy and language are the symbolic representation of concept, and thereby language becomes the verbal means of expressing one's beliefs, knowledge and values. Language is also the method by which people live their culture; it is the connection between one's heritage and community. Therefore, language and literacy are prominent factors in the development of identity.* (Paulsen, 2003:25).

For Pasifika and other peoples for whom literacy and holism are bound together, any definition of ‘literacy’ that is going to transform, emancipate, and empower will need to insistently embrace the role of Pasifika language, culture, and identity in Aotearoa New Zealand, and necessarily, to wrestle with the challenges this brings. Dialogue to bring this about must also occur at the interface of multiple world views – a difficult and contested area. This space (i.e. between Western and Pasifika spheres of culture and knowledge) has been referred to as the “ethical space”, and in this ethical space, “the notions of equity and mutual respect for different ways of knowing are critical” (Pool, 1972; Ermine, 2004; cited in Smylie, et. al., 2006:525).

The re-visioning and re-conceptualising of ‘literacy’ for Pasifika in Aotearoa will involve elements of re-claiming and re-forging identity, as has been apparent in the case of North American and Canadian indigenous populations and their struggle to re-connect with literacies long marginalised and undervalued. For Pasifika people in Aotearoa New Zealand, however, the challenges in doing so are compounded by many factors, not least of which that ‘Pasifika’ involves a population whose heritages can be traced directly to more than 20 nations within an oceanic region

known to be one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse on the planet. It is further complicated by the various distinctions between being ‘indigenous’, being ‘migrant’, and being ‘a New Zealander’ and the transitions between these ‘states’. It is a deeply complex process involving a population that could be described as anything but homogenous and is occurring at a time in which generational bands are emerging that are often distinguished from one another by their varying access to, proficiency in, and allegiance to the linguistic and cultural skills, knowledge, and values of their various heritage cultures.

As such, Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand face the daunting task of pressing for a more inclusive understanding of literacy in the face of uncertainty about what that ‘broader and more inclusive’ definition actually entails for its ethnically-, culturally-, linguistically-, and age-diverse population. The nature of the quest, however, clearly echoes that occurring in nations across the globe and closer to home in Australia, where indigenous Australians also face the need/challenge to *take the initiative in determining literacy learning according to their own perceptions of literacy needs and social practices in living at the interface of two cultures, their own and Western* (Hanlen, 2002). It is essentially about *the right of peoples to construct knowledge in accordance with self-determined definitions of what is real and what is valuable* (Smylie, et. al., 2006:525).

The daily reality of Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa involves walking in multiple cultural worlds, with multiple sets of skills, multiple bodies of knowledge, and multiple sets of (sometimes conflicting) values, all being rewarded to differing degrees and in differing ways in differing contexts. However, Pasifika no longer wish to occupy the clichéd space of cultural minorities being ‘divided by’ or ‘caught between’ two cultures (Baumann 1996: 2), but seek instead to be (and be seen as) comfortably and competently bridging and spanning the interface of cultures that is their daily reality. There is little doubt that Pasifika peoples value ‘education’ and ‘literacy’ – many having left their Pacific nation homes for this very purpose – however, the challenge is, as it is for any settled migrant peoples, how to achieve these desired goals whilst valuing and retaining the ways of

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knowing and the cultural practices that shape individuals, families, and communities and help interpret how people live and interact with each other and make sense of their world?

For second and subsequent generation Pasifika New Zealanders, the questions relating to whether (and to what extent) to retain the cultural knowledge relating to place/land/family living in the traditional sense (extended families in villages) and which aspects can be meaningfully translated/adapted for meaning making in modern New Zealand life persistently demand answering in the process of conceptualising 'literacy' for 'success as Pasifika' individuals, families, and communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. The challenge lies in conceptualising 'literacy' in a meaningful and transformative way for communities who are effectively facing: *...new and old technologies, media, and modes of expressions, emergent hybrid cultures and institutions, and forms of cultural identities and life pathways for which we have few precedents.* (Luke, 1998:306, cited in Lee, 2011:261).

Accordingly, Luke (1998) emphasises the importance of a shift from simply looking for better and better ways to teach the same narrow conception of conventional literacy (reading and writing), towards actively empowering communities to "investigate and shape and reshape their literate practices in response to ever-changing social and cultural practices" (cited in Lee, 2011:261).

This project does not claim to answer all these questions but offers an initial window of insight into Pasifika conceptualisations and understandings of 'literacy', 'success', and the role of literacy from a Pasifika perspective in bringing about success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is from this starting point that further research and collective knowledge-making and consensus-seeking must continue in the years to come.

The link between literacy, language, and identity is that literacy and language are the symbolic representation of concept, and thereby language becomes the verbal means of expressing one's beliefs, knowledge, and values.



# 4. Findings: Insights from Pasifika Survey and Consultation Group Participants

The previous section of this report presented the findings of the literature review strand of the research and provided a broad understanding of the evolving, socially and culturally constructed and contested nature of 'literacy', as well as the movements by indigenous and minority peoples to (re) construct understandings of literacy that encompass and validate their whole persons as 'literate'. This section presents the findings of the other two strands of the current project (consultation groups and survey) for an understanding of how the Pasifika participants and respondents collectively conceptualised and articulated their understandings and aspirations concerning 'literacy'; what it means to be 'literate' as a Pasifika person; and how this 'literacy' can and will contribute to attaining 'success' as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This section is presented in two main parts: (1) main thematic findings relating to Pasifika understandings of 'literacy' and 'being literate as Pasifika', and (2) main thematic findings relating to Pasifika understandings of 'success as Pasifika' in Aotearoa New Zealand. The findings are presented largely as spoken/written by the participants – in order for the voices of the participants and respondents to speak for themselves.

## 4.1 Conceptualisations of 'Literacy' and Being 'Literate as Pasifika' in Aotearoa New Zealand

Presented below are the main themes in the Pasifika participants' conceptualisation of literacy and being literate as Pasifika. The Pasifika participants' aspirations concerning attaining excellence in conventional literacy (reading and writing) are clear. Hence, the first section of these findings presents Pasifika participants' thoughts on conventional literacy. Following this is a presentation of the key themes emerging from the Pasifika survey and consultation groups' constructions of literacy for success as Pasifika in our nation. This

is followed by a summary of the key themes in expressed aspirations for 'literate' Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2028, further expanding the expressed insights into literacy from a Pasifika perspective. As would be expected though, there are differences of opinion, and the perspectives of the few participants who supported retaining a narrow definition of literacy as reading and writing are explored in light of current Pasifika academic thinking.

### 4.1.1 Pasifika Thoughts on Conventional Literacy (Reading & Writing)

While the following sections will reveal the broad, inclusive, and holistic understanding of 'literacy' possessed by Pasifika peoples in New Zealand, the ability to fluently read and write with understanding and for a wide range of purposes remains undoubtedly at the centre of this expanded (re)conceptualisation of literacy by the participants in this research project. Some key thoughts from the project's Pasifika participants are shared below.

The importance of **reading and writing ability in one's Pacific heritage language/s** (in addition to conventional literacy in English): *"Literacy for a Pasifika person in NZ should include not only a good knowledge & command of written, oral & grammatically correct English but also your own native language(s). For me it is Samoan, Chinese & German language(s), culture, customs & religion, as these are also important parts of my ethnic & cultural identity & make-up."*

*"Being able to read and write in English and the language of one's Pacific descent. I think it is about knowing the origins of your Pacific heritage and the journey of your people from inception to the present day. It's a big ask, but it also is something that is built over the course of a lifetime. I think that a literate Pasifika individual is one who knows where they come from, ideally can converse in written and oral forms in their mother tongue and English, has respect for the differences between their own culture and other's and is able to navigate through the various oceans of culture in which they find themselves."*

This section presents the findings of the other two strands of the current project (consultation groups and survey) for an understanding of how the Pasifika participants and respondents collectively conceptualised and articulated their understandings and aspirations concerning 'literacy'; what it means to be 'literate' as a Pasifika person; and how this 'literacy' can and will contribute to attaining 'success' as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand.



*“Being able to not only read and write in English, but your own mother tongue. ... Being literate is vital for any person no matter what ethnicity they identify with. I guess for Pasifika people we have always been identified in the New Zealand education system as having lower literacy levels compared to other nationalities. I can see that in the last 10 years or so, different groups have worked hard to change these statistics and break stereotypes, so I guess it’s about continuing to improve stats and break these stereotypes that Pacific people in NZ fall behind in this area.”*

**The importance of knowing both the historical and contemporary culture/s and contexts that the language is embedded with, and recognising the evolving nature of our understanding of literacy:**

*“Being able to read, write and more importantly comprehend not only English and Pacific languages but having an appreciation for all of the world’s cultures and languages. Cultural, linguistic and identity literacy must be promoted.”*

*“Possessing high levels of cultural currency in their own ancestral societies and communities as well as English in numeracy and literacy. This is very difficult as Europeans only have one cultural competency that they have to adhere to (e.g. only having to speak and read and write and communicate in English). The more I age, the more I know that cultural competency in our own languages and cultures and societies better equips us to deal with the dominant culture’s requirements.”*

*“Literacy includes reading, writing, being able to converse. But more importantly it is about the language and culture. Literacy is stories....people’s stories. There is a lot of Pacific literature out there, but a lot of us are unaware of it. It’s more than just being able to read and write, it’s about creating your own stories and sharing them.”*

*“I think that the word literacy initially only meant reading and writing. Now-a-days, I believe that the word literacy should encompass culture, language, and identity as the societal make-up of Aotearoa New Zealand is becoming more and more diverse. By allowing literacy to encompass culture, language, and identity we are validating the Pacific nations’ culture and not just restricting it to reading and writing.”*

**The importance of reaching high standards in conventional literacy and broadening knowledge about text as discourse (way/s of thinking expressed through language) within a social context:**

*“Understand and use English to a level that puts Pasifika on an equal playing field with everyone else in the school/workplace.”*

*“Having a certain standard of literacy to be credible in the eyes of other New Zealanders, admired and looked up to by our youth and not compound the current trend of ‘fobulising’ or ‘freshing’ up our accents because it’s trendy, funny.”*

*“It is not just reading and writing, it is also comprehension of what is written, the context and intent of the written work and how to apply the information.”*

*“Understand the context, the intent, and the value base, and world view/s operating in a piece of writing.”*

*“Being not only literate in the English language in writing and speaking but being financially and health literate, understanding the importance of health in New Zealand and the economy. If I understand this, then I will understand my place in the palagi world.”*

**What conventional literacy provides for Pasifika:**

*“Literacy to me means that written English and numbers are not a barrier to Pasifika participating in New Zealand society. Having literacy skills allows us to make decisions for ourselves and our families that benefit us and adds to our development and future success.”*

*“Literacy gives me the ability to understand the correspondence I receive about my house, my finances, my children and grandchildren’s world so we can communicate and I can contribute confidently to their health and wellbeing. Literacy is also important in our church life as reading the Bible, in English and Cook Islands Māori and Sāmoan is central to our knowledge and understanding of our spiritual life.”*

*“Confidently applying their reading and writing skills in culturally appropriate and relevant ways within their family, church, and other educational contexts (sports coaching for example). This is for*

*the purpose of establishing strong parallels between the written word (theory) and practical wisdom of Pacific protocols and ways of doing. While written text will not always be necessary in all practical Pacific contexts - the awareness and ability for one to do this can be a sure sign of fluency between two worlds and also demonstrates their critical and creative thinking in this 'edge walking' as a way of bettering themselves and empowering other Pacific peoples in their development and learning in Aotearoa New Zealand."*

#### **4.1.2 Participants' Conceptualisations of Literacy for Success as Pasifika**

The Pasifika understanding of 'literacy' expressed within this project is encompassing of, but far broader and more holistic in nature than, the conventional understanding of literacy as the ability to read and write for meaning and understanding. The following are key thematic elements within the Pasifika understanding of literacy as Pasifika for success as Pasifika, which was expressed during the consultation groups, survey responses, and informal conversations undertaken during this project.

Literacy as Pasifika encompasses:

- the ability to speak, read, and write one's own Pacific heritage language/s
- knowledge of one's Pacific cultural heritage, and personal and collective identity
- knowledge of and respect for other cultures within Aotearoa New Zealand
- skills in oration and expressing one's self well
- ability to read a non-verbal communication, understand it, and respond appropriately
- possession and understanding of Pasifika values, principles, beliefs
- knowledge of ways of doing and being appropriate to both one's Pacific heritage/s and the New Zealand context
- knowing one's history and genealogy
- the ability to read and produce cultural designs and patterns with understanding
- understanding and fulfilling obligations and responsibilities to self and family
- understanding and utilising digital/information technology knowledge.

It should be noted though, that while these themes are presented in a linear way, they are not separate or discrete units/fractions of 'literacy' but instead are parts of a whole and are often overlapping. These often intertwined aspects of literacy from a Pasifika perspective have been presented separately in this research to help illustrate the holistic way in which Pasifika participants construct their understanding of 'literacy' for success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand.

#### **Ability to speak, read, and write one's own Pacific heritage language/s:**

Participant responses indicated that core to the kind of 'literacy' that brings success as Pasifika for people of Pacific descent in New Zealand is the ability to read, write, and speak with understanding in their Pacific heritage language/s. The fact that all consultation groups involved spoke of the importance of heritage language is an indicator of its central importance in the Pasifika conceptualisation of literacy.

*"Being able to read/write/communicate in a heritage language alongside English; understanding and identifying with the values/customs/perspectives attached to that language; transferring those understandings and skills to other Pasifika languages and cultures."*

*"It is important for Pacific children to know their culture as well as the language of their parents. This enhances their identity and helps them identify who they are as Pacifica people in New Zealand. It is also the individual's choice to choose if they wish to pursue who they are or just be another Kiwi."*

Participants also expressed the valuable role of conventional literacy (reading and writing) in the maintenance of Pasifika languages amongst Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand:

*"Literacy lifts the language to another level where it is preserved, nurtured, and developed. There are realities that are encapsulated in the language, in its arts, rite and rituals, and symbols."*

*"Literacy has everything to do with culture. Literacy should be the vehicle or the enabler for Pasifika to understand our identity, our mission and our destiny in all phases of life."*

**"Being able to read, write and more importantly comprehend not only English and Pacific languages, but having an appreciation for all of the world's cultures and languages. Cultural, linguistic, and identity literacy must be promoted."**

It is clear also that participants are not just seeking a surface or textbook knowledge but an authentic and deep access to their heritage languages.

*“Having an understanding of the language and the context behind various word(s). The Cook Islands Māori language for example includes words with several meanings and can't be used loosely or whenever.”*

*“Need to learn when to use the language, e.g. time to tease, time to instruct, time to praise, time to be polite.”*

*“Proverbial sayings carry our knowledge and understanding.”*

*“Literacy is very important in our Tongan culture – it is a form of identity through language.*

*Understanding the Tongan language is a gateway to our knowledge of our heritage and tradition – knowing that Tongan is a very hierarchical (king, nobles /ministers/chiefs and commoners) country, which requires us to approach each hierarchical stage with different applications of language.”*

*“Our ability to communicate not only in English but also in our own language. But not limiting ourselves to language itself, acknowledging our cultural practices and relationships and how that influences our actions everyday as Pasifika people.”*

*“Verbal communication using native tongue is important to identity ... we are able to distinguish ourselves from the Western in using our language, which holds such a rich history. Language links the understanding of native cultures, customs, and traditions. Verbal interaction within a native tongue is ignored within English literacy. The richness of the language and concepts cannot exist in the English language .... Acknowledging and including aspects of this will see an increase in Pasifika Educational Success.”*

**“Language is conceptual, metaphorical. The mana of the language is diminished when it is translated.”**

### **Knowledge of one's Pacific cultural heritage, and personal and collective identity:**

Participants also emphasised the strong and vital link between language and culture and that possessing knowledge and understanding of one's Pacific heritage culture/s is a core part of 'literacy' for success as Pasifika peoples in New Zealand. This knowledge was seen as fostering a strong, healthy personal and collective identity, which in turn was very important for subsequent 'success' and wellbeing.

*“Literacy as Pasifika definitely includes knowing who one is, where they come from and what has contributed to their existence. It also includes knowing ones' surroundings and being confident in themselves as with any other human being.”*

*“Reading and writing in English is very important within the New Zealand context. In addition, I feel that cultural literacy is just as important. By this I mean a subjective understanding about what your Pasifika culture means to you and providing ourselves and those around us with the cultural capital necessary to navigate successfully within and between our own Pasifika cultures and New Zealand society in general.”*

*“Ability to navigate confidently in traditional settings through command of Pacific language and understanding of customs and practices.”*

*“Reading, writing, understanding of their culture, ethnicity, heritage, and tradition; knowledge of their faith or what they believe in; speaking their language fluently; being proud of who they are and where they come from, respect for their elders.”*

*“Pacific identity includes food, dance, songs, theatre, drama. Literacy is an integral part of Pacific identity.”*

*“Literacy provides the opportunity to actively participate in society at every level – it includes culture, identity, values, every part of being physical, spiritual, etc. One can be who they want to be, do what they want and with who they want when you are literate.”*

**“I believe that understanding who you are and where you come from gives you strength, resilience, confidence, and the courage to do well in this society.”**

Some participants expressed the view that knowledge of culture was, at times, more important than fluency in a Pacific language, for establishing a strong cultural identity.

*“Absolutely!! Knowing who you are, where you’ve come from gives you the confidence to question, reflect, and debate. Language is important, but I know lots of our Pasifika people who do not speak their parents’ home language but have been brought up in a very cultural home.”*

*“Our languages should be celebrated, encouraged, and (in my opinion) merged with our English speaking/writing capabilities. In saying so, although I see Pasifika language literacy as a marker of identity, not being able to speak or understand one’s language should not make one feel any less Pasifika.”*

One participant shared a poignant personal story of identity, culture, and language and the journey in life towards a truer and more empowering sense of personal identity. Her story illustrates the complex issues surrounding identity, language, literacy, and education for Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand.

*“From my own experience as a Pacific person – growing up in a Southland school, I remember being asked my nationality, and I said Sāmoan and was told no by the teacher and that I was a New Zealander because I was born here. I adopted that and for a long time saw myself as a Kiwi. When I was about 18 – in my first year at uni, I found out about the dawn raids and learnt about the Pacific migration, I also began to turn back to my Sāmoan culture and actually take an interest. It was eye opening and inspiring; my Western university education was no longer from a Western mono lens but I changed my world view and saw it from the fact that I was a Pacific Islander and the knowledge, history, and information I was learning about all helped me to contextualise where my place was in the world and how the world viewed me. This changed me and my perceptions of people and culture. For me, Western education and being literate in English meant the sacrifice of losing fluency in my mother tongue – that was just how it was. Today I understand Sāmoan well, and speak it brokenly. But I can converse excellent in English and understand the Western concepts well, it is quite natural for me to think in this way. ... I have a dual perspective in everything I do... Literacy is*

*more than a skill, and is really intertwined with a lot of different factors when talking about educating our Pasifika children.”*

In addition to advocating knowledge of Pasifika heritage culture/s, there was also a small but noticeable proportion of Pasifika participants who stressed the importance of acknowledging, learning, and respecting the literacy of Māori, as the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand.

*“Being able to respect and have basic knowledge of Maori literacy, language, waiata, as this is their land.”*

#### **Knowledge of and respect for other cultures:**

In this same vein, it was apparent that a number of the Pasifika participants desired a knowledge of other Pacific (and non-Pacific) cultures. These participants stated that possessing a working knowledge of and respect for other New Zealanders’ cultures and languages was a highly desirable trait, and that this was an important part of their literacy for success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand.

***“Understanding your own heritage, (culture, language etc.) but also celebrating and appreciating the similarities of our diverse neighbours and respecting their differences.”***

*“Pasifika literacy is about a familiarity with a range of Pasifika cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand, such as being able to recognise and identify the origins of visual markers of Pacific cultures, such as tapa, tattooing, national dress; being able to identify Pacific languages by ear even if one doesn’t understand them fluently ... knowing some of the basic customs and taboos of different Pacific cultures ... etc. ... as I interpret it, a general Pasifika cultural literacy is about familiarity with a range of cultures.”*

*“Being competent and fluid in multiple languages and world views/perspectives, i.e. being able to understand and see the world as my father does, yet also understand and see the world as my friends do and as my colleagues do. ... bicultural cognitive complexity ... – smarter!”*

*“Recognising the similarities and differences of literacy in our own culture and the many other cultures that have migrated to Aotearoa.”*



At the heart of this was also a strong desire for “diverse potentials” amongst Pasifika to be recognised and for establishing a healthy balance between identifying and celebrating what is common and recognising and respecting what is different.

*“I don’t really like the way decision makers sum us together under the umbrella term ‘Pacific’ because we are not identical as we speak in different languages, experience different world views and ways of life although there are common values. The point is, in order to understand our potential, there is a need for whoever is working for and with us people from Pacific Oceania to consider diversity as a solution and how to build these diverse potentials culturally and ethically. The critical question is why most issues (e.g., literacy, education, health, leadership, etc) regarding Pacific people are increasing over time? The answer is easy and clear: because Pacific people are diverse and there is no way of a single model of literacy or whatever that can address such issues. I believe that decision makers should move beyond viewing us as one people to understand the deep assumptions underpinning our diverse worlds. In other words, it is about moving from one and two to multi-directions.”*

#### **Oration, expressing one’s self well:**

As peoples from historically oral (using speaking and hearing) cultures, Pasifika participants in Aotearoa New Zealand also conceptualised ‘literacy’ as encompassing the many skills and abilities associated with orality (thought and its verbal expression). For the participants, ‘literacy’ skills involved being skilled in spoken performance in appropriate Pasifika languages and cultural contexts and also being able to clearly and skillfully think and articulate their own understandings in any language and in any required context.

*“If I think of this from a Pacific Island perspective, then it would definitely have to include oration skills. The ability to articulate and express through spoken word.”*

*“It is important for Pasifika people to be able to interpret what they read and learn and be able to express themselves clearly. Some have a lot of knowledge but poor expression or delivery of what is in their mind and hearts.”*

Songs, storytelling, and a rich musical heritage were also core to this understanding of literacy as Pasifika. Songs and stories of not only their parents’ and grandparents’ worlds but of their lives as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand were part of this rich oral heritage.

#### **Reading non-verbal communication, understanding it, and responding appropriately:**

Noticing and correctly interpreting and responding to a host of non-verbal communication cues (such as gaze, gesture, posture, touch, proximity, volume, intonation, silence, facial expressions, and so forth) were also considered to be an important part of literacy as Pasifika:

*“A major part of literacy is also the non-verbal communication with our people.”*

*“Both giving and receiving of information, through spoken and body language, that result in ‘understanding’ the intended communication, whether giving or receiving it.”*

**“... sitting, standing, whispering, singing, nodding notions and quiet nuancing are all part of Pasifika literacy.”**

#### **Possessing and understanding Pasifika values, principles, beliefs:**

For the Pasifika participants, holding value systems and principles that are esteemed in one’s Pasifika heritage culture/s was considered as important to Pasifika success as the acts of reading and writing.

*“My thoughts are ... that although we may not think of it as literacy, a person who is able to articulate confidently who they are, what their values are, their family, culture, is being literate.”*

These value sets are tied to practices and protocols and underlie virtually every aspect of life, particularly relationships and power structures within families and wider communities.

#### **Knowing the ways of doing and being which are appropriate to both one’s Pasifika heritage/s and the New Zealand context:**

The participants also spoke of the way in which literacy encompassed knowledge of ‘how to be’ and ‘what to do’ as one conducts oneself as a



Pasifika person in daily life. As well as knowing what one's family responsibilities are, 'literacy' also involved ways of doing things, and being with people (both fellow Pasifika people and amongst wider New Zealand society) in daily life.

*"Literacy is a lived experience and must include our ways and doing in a broader sense."*

*"Literacy is everywhere".*

*"Literacy is culture, language, and everything to do with activities of daily living."*

*"As a Tongan in Aotearoa, my understanding of literacy includes everything that is involved in our social interactions with other people in a given context."*

*"Literacy is also being able to participate in all aspects of New Zealand living and navigate this space, which is often assumed that everyone can do - but is not always possible."*

This knowledge of appropriate ways of being and doing directly fosters and sustains good and harmonious relationships and personal and collective holistic health and wellbeing. There is an acknowledgement of the effort required in the daily task of applying this knowledge in the multiple cultural worlds Pasifika occupy. There was also a sense of hope expressed that a place of balance and harmony can be achieved in the lives of Pasifika, enabling them to succeed within and contribute to New Zealand society without losing who they are as Pasifika.

**We respect that our literacies are both passed down and created, "traditional" and "contemporary".**

#### **Knowing one's history and genealogy:**

Another important part of 'literacy' that participants felt was key to success as Pasifika was knowledge of one's Pacific people's history (both in the Pacific nations and in New Zealand) and an understanding of one's personal genealogy. As one participant put it, literacy for success as Pasifika involves having an "understanding of my own Pacific ancestry." The core role of intergenerational learning and the place of the leaders and elders as teachers of the young was also emphasised in the consultation groups. The role of elders in lifelong learning for the family and community was felt to enable access to "Practical everyday

living wisdom, and treasure in heritage."

Niuean participants in a consultation group stressed the importance of knowing the answers to the following and the full significance of those answers to a Pasifika person's everyday life in Aotearoa:

*"Kohai a koe, haau a mafafaoa? Kohai e higoa he tau matuahaau? Hau a koe he maagafe?"*

(Who are you, and your family? Who are the names of your parents? Which village do you come from?)

#### **Reading and producing cultural designs and patterns with understanding:**

Participants also widely acknowledged that understanding traditional and contemporary Pacific art forms and physical culture practices was an important part of literacy for Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand. They refer to "Art, music, drama, sculpture, tivaevae, tattoo", and "symbols of my culture, art-tapa, carvings" as being "all part of Pasifika literacy". A highly valued aspect of literacy as Pasifika was being able to understand the significance of traditional art forms such as "weaving, carving, tattooing" and the links between this knowledge and the cultures and value systems that these art-forms and designs embody. Participants voiced concern about the misappropriation and mass production of cultural designs, in particular Polynesian tattoos. One Sāmoan participant echoed the warning in the Sāmoan language:

*"A'o le gutuae le ta muamua le pe'a."*

Teach oneself to be vocally capable in the language and culture before having a tatau.

#### **Understanding and fulfilling obligations and responsibilities to self and family:**

Pasifika participants also spoke of the importance of literacy as possessing an understanding of, and acting out an appropriate response to, the obligations and responsibilities that one has as part of a strongly interconnected and extended family and community. Participants expressed the belief that this form of literacy "is part of the package of one's self ... as Pasifika". Participants also touched on the role of service, leadership, and the ability to nurture and maintain good relationships as aspects of literacy for success as Pasifika.

*“Ole alai le pule ole tautua.”* (Sāmoan)  
(The path to leadership is through service)  
*“Nofo vā lelei. Tauhi vā.”* (Tongan)  
(Unity, maintaining good relationships, living well. Nurturing relationships, maintaining (good) relationships).

In this sense, literacy is knowing and acting in accordance with “relationship roles and responsibilities within the family” and wider community, and maintaining good/proper relationships between people.

#### **Understanding and successfully utilising digital/information technology knowledge:**

A small but clear theme amongst responses related to the need for Pasifika in Aotearoa to be fluent and confident users of technology, who can harness the verbal and non-verbal forms of communication that this brings, as part of their literacy.

*“Yes I do believe literacy is to do with the culture, language, and identity of Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand. I also believe it includes the literacy of computer technology.”*

It was clear also that proficiency in digital technology was valued not only for traditional uses, but also new and original uses as well. Informal discussion brought to light examples of the innovative, dynamic ways in which Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand are harnessing technology and digital and information literacy to achieve ‘success as Pasifika’. Participants spoke particularly of utilising technology to “connect with each other”. A proficient Pasifika technology user can draw on this collective wisdom quickly and easily by utilising technology and exercising this form of literacy. One such example is the use of Facebook to gather and draw upon the collective wisdom of extended multi-cultural networks when requiring information from other Pasifika ethnic cultures and languages (such as learning to use appropriate greetings, language terms, or cultural protocols from Pasifika cultures and languages other than one’s own heritage language/s).

#### **4.1.3 Further Themes within Pasifika Consultation Groups**

In addition to the core themes just covered, there were several themes amongst the Pasifika consultation groups that did not feature to such

a great extent in the survey responses. These included the following aspects of ‘literacy’ as Pasifika:

- Thinking skills
- Religion/spirituality
- Numeracy
- Money/finances/wealth distribution/entitlements
- Food/health/wellbeing

#### **4.1.4 Aspirations for ‘Literate’ Pasifika in 2028 in Aotearoa New Zealand**

The previous section presented the core themes within the conceptualisation of ‘literacy’ for ‘success’ as Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand. This section builds on this, presenting the main themes expressed within participants’ conceptualisations of the benefits that literacy as Pasifika would bring them. Framed with a focus on the future, participants in the survey and consultation groups were invited to share their aspirations for themselves, their children and future generations of literate Pasifika New Zealanders.

As seen in earlier sections of this report, the link between ‘literacy’ and ‘success’ has so far been defined from a Western and primarily economic standpoint. This project aims to enrich this conceptualisation of literacy by contributing to our understanding of some of the more holistic as well as non-material outcomes of being ‘literate’ from a Pasifika perspective.

When asked what a Pasifika person who is ‘literate’ will be able to do, be, know, accomplish, take part in, have and become, in 2028, the following themes emerged from the Pasifika participants’ responses. The Pasifika participants shared that the abilities of a ‘literate’ Pasifika would enable them to:

- translate and move with ease between languages and cultural worlds
- use the written word to preserve Pasifika cultural and linguistic heritages
- participate in ongoing, lifelong education
- speak on behalf of, communicate with, advocate for, and lead their people
- participate actively – as Pasifika – in local (mainstream) community
- serve and contribute positively to the lives of others

- access services and information
- actively build strong multiculturalism.

**“A literate person should be confident that their worldview is enabled and confirmed by their understanding of literacy.”**

Literacy for success as Pasifika enables Pasifika people in Aotearoa New Zealand to:

**Translate/move with ease between languages (and the cultures) they represent:**

Pasifika respondents in Aotearoa dream that in future decades they and their families will be multi-lingual, moving between languages (and cultures) with ease, for theirs and others’ betterment.

*“A literate Pasifika person in 2028 is someone who is confident in who they are, because they are literate in their own native language(s) but also command a good knowledge of written, oral and grammatically correct English just as they have of their own native language(s) also quite probably many other languages, customs and cultures. Historically, Pasifika people are adventurers who often travel and reside very successfully in other countries in the world other than Pacific Islands.”*

*“Be able to be multi-lingual; have a strong identity.”*

*“Speak or understand at least one Pasifika language at a colloquial level and know key phrases in multiple Pasifika languages.”*

*“A literate Pasifika person will be a person who can speak their ethnic language fluently, read it, and write it, will be able to talk and discuss their heritage, culture, and tradition with ease and clear understanding, who acknowledges where they come from, their ancestors and living elders, showing respect for them and who they are and recognise they will always be their mentors, who can talk about their faith and its link to their culture and what they believe in, who will teach their children the same values and beliefs and help to keep the language strong so it is not lost, someone who is proud to tell the world who they are and where they come from.”*

*“Translate into Sāmoan all local and international news bulletins daily.”*

*“Speak his own language as well as English, identity without hesitation as a New Zealander of*

*Pacific heritage, be comfortable and confident in his/her own skin as a brown person living in New Zealand in all ways.”*

**“In 15 years’ time, a literate Pacific person is someone who knows how to read and write, speak their language freely, know that as Pacific they add value from their world view and that value is accepted. They will be able to contribute and grow the economy.”**

**Use the written (and spoken) word to preserve and share Pasifika languages/ cultures:**

Pasifika participants expressed the desire that, in the coming decades, they will be able to master and harness conventional literacy (reading and writing) as well as the spoken word to both preserve and share their Pacific heritage languages (and cultures) with others – their own children and families but also other non-Pasifika New Zealanders.

*“The written word not only preserves, protects, and perpetuates the language that vessels the values, the thoughts, and the experience of the community/individual.”*

*“When you can read and write, you have a chance to contribute to the society you live in and also leave a legacy for the next generations to learn the beauty of one’s cultures.”*

*“Lead a group to learn about others in a different land, bring people together, explain to a younger generation the meaning of some past experiences that are hardly understood now.”*

*“Not only have excellent comprehension of new knowledge in written form but also regenerate the sacred knowledge of Pacific peoples and their languages by creating their own written publications one day of their cultural knowledge (i.e. hands-on skills/crafts in the village that can be practiced in New Zealand) and unique mother tongue dialects (particularly for Melanesian and Micronesian peoples) as one way of preserving and passing down knowledge that is often reserved for the elderly and is under threat of becoming forgotten/unknown by our current and upcoming generations.”*

*“Be able to create stories, be able to teach others.”*

*“Become a resource for younger generations and others who want to know more of our own cultures.”*

Pasifika respondents in Aotearoa dream that in future decades they and their families will be multi-lingual, moving between languages (and cultures) with ease, for theirs and others’ betterment.

*"A person who is literate in Aotearoa will be someone who is rich in their culture but is also able to hand it down to their children and their children's children. It also gives them another perspective in life, which enhances their career paths."*

*"So not only will they be able to read, understand, and appropriately respond to communications that enable them to contribute to civil society, they also have the opportunity to open a window so that others can see into our world to understand us better through our communications and writings about us including poems, rap, etc..."*

*"A young person who is able to understand, can speak and read their parents' native tongue, are leaders in their own community, and are not embarrassed to pass on their knowledge, including the protocols of neighbours, to their peers and communities."*

*"Speak or understand their native language; the history of their people and other Pacific Islands, know where they come from - family history, their culture and is able to teach their own children. Really important, considering we will intermarry with other cultures in New Zealand."*

***"Navigate their Pacific vaka through international waters, i.e. be comfortable and fluent in the language and culture they identify with."***

#### **Participate in ongoing, lifelong education:**

Affirming the link between 'literacy', education, and success, Pasifika participants expressed the wish for their future selves to be able to possess sufficient skill in 'conventional literacy' and in 'literacy as Pasifika' to enable them to participate in ongoing education, particularly higher education, with successful outcomes.

*"Access all levels of education and in turn what that offers. Help themselves and hopefully help other people. Contribute to educating our communities to succeed. They will be the leaders of tomorrow. They will be the employers of tomorrow. They will be proud to contribute in positive ways in all aspects of society."*

*"Be taken seriously, access higher education, have the ability to support their children bilingually, have the skills to learn more languages, be anything they want."*

*"Choose how to educate yourself from the many opportunities available. Literacy is all about education, being educated, and turning that into independence and building success financially."*

*"They will be able to communicate strongly where they belong, where they come from, and who they affiliate with. They will be able to go to university AND complete their degree."*

*"Learning, understanding and feeling confident about the processes involved in higher education, economic, political and social life in New Zealand."*

*"Be successful in their study, become leaders in business and their communities; be confident in their identity and be empowered by their own culture."*

*"That a Pasifika person will have the confidence and ability to be whoever they dream to be and have the credentials to achieve that dream. It may be achieving an academic qualification or trade certification, owning a business, running a business, having a job, owning a home. They will know they are a contributor to the society they live in, they will be respected."*

***"Literacy will enable us to go to university and get degrees that advance our health and socioeconomic status in this country so that our children thrive as Pasifika sons and daughters in their rightful place in the world."***

#### **Speak on behalf of, communicate with, advocate for, and lead their people (in both traditional and contemporary contexts):**

Reflecting on the importance placed on oral performance and the ability to speak well and to articulate one's thoughts clearly, the participants' responses indicated a desire for 'literate' Pasifika in Aotearoa to be able to speak to express themselves, participate in discussion and debate in both Pasifika and wider non-Pasifika contexts, and to speak on behalf of those less able within their communities.

*"Communicate in traditional meetings when people and families exchange their feelings of each individual, group, aiga, church, etc."*

*"Articulate thoughts and contribute to discussions orally, in script and in writing."*

*“Will be confident and comfortable to articulate their position/perspective as a Pasifika person irrespective of their environment.”*

*“Be a strong Sāmoan person, know his/her identity, be successful in education, health, home and community, take part in community consultation, have confidence in him/ herself.”*

*“Will be able to articulate and communicate the needs of the Pasifika people.”*

*“Speak on behalf of Pasifika peoples who do not speak out, represent, accomplish whatever the Pasifika needs, take part in Leadership of Pasifika, have courage to be Pasifika and become a humble Pasifika.”*

*“Be fluent, confident, articulate, able to participate in a minimum of their native literacy and English.”*

*“Competent and confident learner and communicator, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society.”*

The ability to utilise this speaking skill in political and decision-making arenas was also a valued outcome of literacy as Pasifika.

*“Be up there where the decision-making takes place.”*

*“They can become advisors, listeners, know the ins and outs, accomplish anything positive they set their minds to, take part in government and community decisions, have a stable, confident life and becoming good Pasifika ambassadors.”*

*“I think we have the unique ability to be leaders and be able to understand things from perspectives that others struggle to. Some of the brightest most exciting and innovative people I know are young Pacific people who live in multiple worlds successfully! We also have amazing skills such as discipline, strength of character and strong social values that are invaluable in negotiating the world.”*

*“Become Prime Minister!!!”*

**Participate actively in the local community, forging a way that works for Pasifika in New Zealand:**

In 15 years' time, the Pasifika participants aspired to be active participants in their local New Zealand communities and to have forged a way of life that works for them – in other words, to have brought about an existence that enables them to experience success in Aotearoa New Zealand society as Pasifika.

*“The ability to participate in any context pertaining to my passions and interests so that my contributions to my local and wider community have a positive and effective impact. Literacy as Pasifika means I have the freedom to seek and share knowledge of my culture, language and identity by employing the many resources already available and creating what new resources are required. Literacy is most important for Pasifika people to fully participate in and contribute to the society we live in.”*

*“To be able to be informed in English and my own language(s) so that I can perform all the necessary activities of daily living participating in civil society.”*

*“Be a decent contributor to community and society as a whole. Know overall rights and wrongs of the law, take part in family as well as community activities, have the freedom to strive for whatever aspirations they have.”*

*“For Pasifika people in Aotearoa, literacy means been able to “marry” our cultural perspectives and values with mainstream, which can be difficult if we are not equipped with the main tools.”*

*“A literate person would be confident to stick up for themselves, know their rights, strong to stand up for social justice, would set higher goals, question and not just agree with whatever, have a sense of competency and confidence, have high self-esteem, strive for higher education for themselves and their families, value education and better life, socially, economically, and health wise.”*

*“A literate Pasifika person will be able to take on the challenges presented in education, employment, health, community living, day-to-day living, communication with different sectors, accomplishing goals in those same sectors and be able to create future objectives.”*

*“Accomplish anything, do anything, be a good contributing citizen.”*



Participants expressed the feeling that in order for this to occur, there were stereotypes and statistics that needed to be overcome.

*"We need better representation in the community and a chance to shine and not be stereotyped."*

*"They will be someone who can stand strong in their culture, continue to learn about their heritage, be open to learning new things, be open to other views and values whilst holding their own. They will be people who ... will not be a "statistic", who will strive for the best."*

They also acknowledged the need to access and utilise technological knowledge and acquire new abilities:

*"Be proficient in English and at least one Pacific language, spoken and written. They will be technology savvy and will be able to move between all cultures easily and be comfortable. They will be proud of their own heritage and confident in teaching it to their children."*

Having overcome these barriers, they aspired to participate actively in the workplace, being financially literate, and thus achieving a comfortable standard of living:

*"I would also like to think that, in 15 years, young Pasifika people would be equally competing in the academic and market sectors, that barriers to learning and career pathways have been reduced by the current Pasifika youth paving the way through providing role models in various cross sectors of industry."*

*"They will also have the financial literacy that allows them to make the best decisions about money for themselves and their families."*

*"Be financially and economically as well as health literate. They can grasp and understand things that make up the environment around them, which should in turn empower them to strive to achieve in whatever field they choose."*

*"A literate person living in Aotearoa will be able to have a better life outcome in terms of getting employment in different areas. Contribute to the economy of New Zealand, culturally, and emotionally, in health and wellbeing. Be able to advocate for one's things to make own life better."*

*"Still retain their Pasifika identity as well as being in whatever profession they desire. Professions that go beyond the cleaning or factory work that*

*many of our Pasifika parents began/begin in and stay in for years."*

**"They will have many options available to them work wise and most importantly they will be able to handle being Pasifika in a multi-ethnic world and to be proud of it. Being Pasifika isn't just about having a taulima, or having a flower in your hair, or wearing MENA clothing it is that absolute faith in the knowledge of where you have come from and the values that you were brought up with."**

**Serve and contribute positively to the lives of others:**

The strong theme of service to family, community, and wider society was apparent in the responses of Pasifika participants. Clearly, being literate was inseparable with being equipped to serve, being community minded, and being both willing and able to bring about success as Pasifika for their families and loved ones.

*"A person who is literate as Pasifika in Aotearoa NZ will be someone who has an understanding of how to access information and utilise that information to benefit not only themselves but their families and the community."*

*"A literate Pasifika person will be a helpful tool and resource for a country and a workplace. ... Their ability will help them communicate the message effectively and efficiently across the workplace."*

*"Working together or partnership, help others to succeed with their careers, passionate to assist and help others."*

*"Make good positive decisions and help other people less fortunate than themselves."*

*"Become part of a Pasifika community within their living areas to help keep the Pasifika nations' unity strong, to help the younger generation realise that they are at advantage with their heritage and to push for them to succeed and reach their potential and goals for the sake of themselves as well as their family and culture."*

*"Advocate for our people and help Pasifika people, be a leader or prime minister in the Parliament or maybe policy maker."*

*"Our Pasifika person will be able to gracefully and confidently live in any society, be respectful and humble, be able to communicate, educate and*

*deliver their personality to the highest standard to achieve their goals, remain focused and always be in a position to help others."*

**"A literate Pasifika person will be able to connect culturally, socially, spiritually, and support a needy person, empower a needy person, and offer direction of success/ health and activities in daily living."**

#### **Access services and information:**

According to the Pasifika participants and respondents, an important activity involved in being 'literate' as a Pasifika person in Aotearoa New Zealand is utilising written and spoken English language and their own Pasifika language/s to be aware of and access key services and to locate, understand, and act upon pertinent information to enhance the wellbeing of their families and communities.

*"How to interact with people who provide services to me, such as doctors, nurses and pharmacists who are of a different culture and language."*

*"Being able to also understand policy, finance and how systems i.e.– law, works in New Zealand for them. Also being able to know the road code ... This effects his employment opportunities and thus it does have a flow-on affect for his family."*

*"Who can find out through communication how their health-related life choices will predictably turn out for them, and choose based on both their preferences and what this information provides."*

*"Will have knowledge and experience to grow their own potential to be successful and healthy in themselves, their family, and their community."*

*"Use all the tools necessary at their disposal to make the best informed decisions for their wellbeing and that of their aiga/whānau. This means that Pasifika people are not heaped at the lower end of the socio-economic scale of poor health and underachievement in education. For me, the key is having security in knowing and choosing those parts of your ancestral culture that is best for your wellbeing."*

#### **Actively build strong multiculturalism – by knowing about and respecting other cultures, Pacific cultures and the Māori culture:**

A theme expressed widely amongst the Pasifika participants was the desire for 'literate' Pasifika

in Aotearoa New Zealand to have knowledge of and respect for the other Pasifika cultural groups within New Zealand, and also to respect and have some awareness of (and ability to operate in/with) the Māori culture and language, as well as the ability to be fully confident within the 'mainstream' non-Māori/Pasifika culture/s in Aotearoa.

*"I guess the shift would not only be that one has knowledge of his or her own heritage but is able to again make links across Pasifika cultures to be a common voice for this growing population, but that one also would use literate skills to influence positive and collaborative change that would be beneficial for all including Pasifika peoples."*

*"Literacy is a tool for better understanding new knowledge not only your culture, but other ethnic cultures."*

*"Will be able to communicate across multiple cultures. Demographically by 2028 most likely most PI will be New Zealand born and will have different needs and be integrated into New Zealand. More PIs will have multi-cultural backgrounds/parents etc."*

*"Can recognise and accurately identify different languages and cultural icons of Pasifika cultures and nations other than their own; can adapt to and conduct themselves respectfully and appropriately in a variety of Pasifika cultural contexts."*

*"We can affirm who we are through our language, but we can also find commonalities with other languages and encourage where we have things in common and have as a shared tradition."*

*"Relate to and identify with all the ethnicities that make up our Pasifika community; represent our viewpoint and be able to speak succinctly and with appropriate sensitivity on behalf of the majority of this community; make calculated, discerning decisions for the benefit of all."*

*"Be able to establish relationships with people of different ethnicities. This is a must for a country that is becoming multicultural, multi-lingual and with multi-literacy. Communicative competence is importance for the future of our children to be able to participate, be involved and survive in globalisation."*

*"Integrate through culture, language, and ideals with other ethnicities."*

*“Someone who strongly identifies his Pasifika cultures and is able to speak his own language and is an active family and community leader having great respect for self and other cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand.”*

#### **“Celebrating the diversity of the multiple Pacific cultures in New Zealand.”**

##### **4.1.5 Acknowledging Difference of Opinion amongst Pasifika Participants**

However, in addition to these common threads running through the understandings of the Pasifika peoples consulted in this project, it is important to note once again that there is no such thing as a single, unanimous, hole-proof definition of Pasifika literacy. Whilst this section has presented the themes expressed by the clear majority of consultation group participants and survey respondents, it is also worth noting that there were several Pasifika respondents who held quite different views on literacy and how it should be defined. In response to the invitation to comment on whether Pasifika language, culture, and identity had anything to do with ‘literacy’ for success as Pasifika, two (out of 118) survey responses strongly espoused the conventional understanding of literacy as reading and writing, rejecting the idea that literacy relates in any way to Pasifika language, culture, or identity.

*“NO! Learning to read and comprehend (comprehension is a critical outcome) is imperative. Basic mathematic skills will be enough to begin with. Everything else can be built upon a solid foundation of the basics. If you’re using literacy in the Palagi context, then teach it in the Palagi context DO NOT intertwine it with culture, language, etc. That’s just annoying and fuels motivation for under-achievement!”*

*“I think of literacy as very tightly defined, involving reading and writing as components of understanding language. Culture and identity are not literacy in my view.”*

It is likely that these views do represent a proportion of Pasifika peoples and would likely be welcomed by many majority-culture people as well, particularly those who hold dear to the ‘when in Rome, do as the Romans do’ approach to literacy and education.

There are certainly a number of arguments concerning the perils of bringing ‘culture’ into the picture. Wagner (2010:168) reports the argument that ... *adopting different criteria [for literacy] for different regions and communities would ensure the perpetuation of educational inequalities and the differential access to life opportunities with which these standards are associated* (Scribner, 1984, p. 10). However, arguments such as this assume that definitions for minorities would in some way be necessarily lower than those of the mainstream. Moreover, arguments such as this fail to acknowledge that literacy “is the means through which people articulate the expression of their consciousness and experience”, and that, ultimately, “when one culture’s form of literacy is forced on another, it then becomes cultural and cognitive assimilation” (Paulsen, 2003:25).

Views that Pasifika languages, cultures, and identities have nothing to do with ‘literacy’ are also increasingly at odds with both emerging Pasifika educational theory in the wider Pacific, and with the voice of the clear majority of Pasifika in Aotearoa who participated in this study – those whose mandate it is in this project to set the direction for future policy and practice in our nation as it pertains to Pasifika and their aspirations for success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In a recent publication edited by leading Pasifika educationalists Associate Professor Kabini Sanga and Professor Konai H. Thaman, entitled *Re-thinking Education Curricula in the Pacific: Challenges and Prospects*, the call for Pacific cultures, languages, and identities to be re-positioned squarely at the centre of learning for peoples of the Pacific is clear.

*A wave of awakening is sweeping across the Pacific. By a wave, I refer to the paradigm shift in local and regional focus of all things Pacific from economics to politics. Within education this is manifested as a call for reform via the rethinking, reclaiming and re-imagining of education...* (Koya, 2009:103).

Furthermore, the desire for unity through recognition and respect for diversity, which was strongly expressed by the Pasifika participants in this project, does hold potentially significant

implications for those holding assimilationist views of learning, literacy and society (i.e. those desiring the minority group/s to lose the cultural characteristics that make them 'different', and become the same as the dominant group). As Fasi (2009:91) points out: *Cultural inclusiveness requires understanding and application of the equity principle. Philosophically, adherence to the equity principles involves the right of diverse groups to define and maintain their different ways of life and their obligation to have genuine mutual respect for each other's way of life (Gopaul-McNicol and Armour-Thomas, 2002). But Recognising the equity principle this way brings to the fore the essence of cultural pluralism, which poses enormous challenges to established systems and the status quo.*

It is understandable that the aims and findings of this project will challenge the long-held beliefs of many, however, it is, the spirit of this project that this be done respectfully and in a way that offers and invites forward movement together towards an understanding of literacy that embraces rather than further excludes any groups.

#### 4.1.6 Conceptualisations of Literacy Participant age And Place of Birth

It is a well-known fact that a person's age, gender, background, and cultural orientations all act to shape the way they think and express themselves. This project has attempted to collect the shared insights into literacy and success for Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand from a wide range of Pasifika people. While the previous sections have presented the broad themes across all participants, it is also important to examine the responses for any trends amongst certain groups of participants and respondents. Although a detailed demographic-based analysis was not undertaken as part of this project, the following are some general observations of patterning emerging from the survey participant responses.

##### With respect to age:

- The Pasifika participants aged 66+ years (all overseas-born) showed a clear orientation to speaking, reading, and writing in Pasifika languages and a desire that literate Pasifika contribute to the building up of their families.

- At the opposite end of the age-range, for many Pasifika participants between 18 and 25 years of age, being literate involved understanding heritage language/s and culture/s, knowing oneself and being personally "secure" in both identity and conventional literacy first as a means of helping oneself, then helping others.
- Common among responses by participants aged 26–40, were insights into the value of Pasifika world views and traditional knowledge in allowing one to better see, understand, and articulate the issues in the world around them and to be equipped to respond to modern-day challenges in a way that does not compromise one's heritage and values.
- For participants aged 41–65 years, many responses concerning literacy for success as Pasifika related to possessing breadth of knowledge, skills, and abilities as a means to enjoying all-round and balanced 'success' in a multicultural and many-faceted world.

##### In terms of place of birth:

- Responses from overseas-born participants incorporated a desire to be confident and competent navigators of both mainstream New Zealand and Pacific heritage worlds, possessing a sense of self-worth, and being able to broker meaningful and productive connections between their own Pasifika communities and mainstream New Zealand.
- For New Zealand born participants, the messages were similar, but with additional ideas relating to security and strength in identity, Recognising the value of multiculturalism, possessing an understanding of the 'systems' and 'how to play the game' in New Zealand, and the drive to see and be involved in the making of a better future.

#### 4.2 Conceptualisations of 'Success as Pasifika' in Aotearoa New Zealand

'Success' is a concept that is potentially as difficult to achieve consensus on as 'literacy'. Conceptualising 'success' for Pasifika in Aotearoa is difficult to do for many reasons, including the fact that attempts to do so must struggle for recognition within a field already



defined from a Western, mainstream and largely economically-driven viewpoint; and that 'success' is an inherently subjective term, being defined differently by each individual according to their own lives, backgrounds, and aspirations. However, bearing this in mind, Pasifika participants in the survey and respondents in the consultation groups shared their understandings of what elements make up 'success as Pasifika' to them. It was possible to observe some clear themes emerging across the participants' responses, and these are presented in this section.

Similar to their conceptualisations of 'literacy' as Pasifika, the Pasifika participants' conceptualisations of 'success' as Pasifika were holistic and were clearly family- and values-oriented. Pasifika participants spoke of success as Pasifika encompassing the following areas:

- identity
- language
- culture
- personal qualities/values
- families
- workplace
- multicultural New Zealand
- service to family and community
- civic life.

Again, it is important not to view these elements of 'success' as separate or discrete but as interconnected in powerful ways within a Pasifika person's life in Aotearoa New Zealand.

#### **Success as Pasifika involves:**

**"The ability to navigate and connect the links between Pasifika peoples, their language and respective customs, to know what has been lost and what has been gained, and to meet the aspirations of the initial migrants of Pasifika peoples to New Zealand."**

#### **'Success as Pasifika' in Aotearoa New Zealand involves: Success in identity:**

Success as strength in identity was a strong theme in participants' responses. Possessing a sure knowledge of who you are, what your "roots" are, and what you aspire to as a Pasifika person in Aotearoa New Zealand were all considered vital components of 'success as Pasifika'.

*"It will give us a sense of security to know that we KNOW ourselves and where our 'roots' are before trying to fit into society as a whole. You can be a Kiwi but still know where your roots were. When you carry this Pasifika spirit around with you, people respect you and your culture instead of looking down at it. It will push us forward in our homes, community, businesses, etc."*

*"Having a sense of self-worth. Being strong in my identity, making a difference in my community, my family."*

*"If you know who you are and where you came from and understand where you want to go in future, then you have a good chance of reaching your goals in life, especially if you are well grounded in your culture, language, traditions, religion, and your family and communities. Success is something that we all aim for in life, and it means lots of different things to different individuals and ethnic groups, depending on their upbringing, core beliefs, status, etc., etc."*

*"The great Sāmoan and Pacific writer Albert Wendt once wrote something to the effect that self-expression is the first step towards self-esteem, and self-esteem is the key to decolonisation, and by using their multiple literacies (including digital/technological and even indigenous dietary/medicinal literacies) to express themselves, Pasifika people can overcome and conquer any cultural cringes or psychological colonisation that might be preventing them from achieving their full potential."*

**"A literate Pasifika individual will essentially be a global citizen; one who knows and respects his/her heritage and can draw upon the best it has to offer them in order to excel in all areas of life. Not only that but to build others up in the process."**

#### **Success in language:**

As was apparent in the participants' constructions of 'literacy', Pasifika languages are valued and aspired to. Success as Pasifika for the majority of participants involved achieving equal strength, confidence, and fluency in Pasifika language/s and the English language.

*"Have working knowledge of own language and English to be comfortable in most everyday situations."*



*"...utilising words appropriately and with real confidence."*

*"Allowing me to articulate ideas and communicate clearly and within an appropriate cultural context."*

It is important to note though that there was a general understanding that language alone was not sufficient (i.e. knowledge of culture and values, etc, was necessarily tied to this for 'success'), and that if a Pasifika person was immersed in and had positive attitudes to their heritage culture/s, their lack of language did not exclude them from being considered successful 'as Pasifika' in Aotearoa New Zealand. Generally, however, it was felt that a Pasifika person who was strong in cultural knowledge would be likely to also seek to acquire their language/s if they did not already have them – with the ultimate aim of possessing fluency and confidence in both language/s and culture/s.

#### **Success in culture:**

Possessing a sound and ever-growing knowledge of their Pasifika heritage culture/s was a highly desirable trait of success for a Pasifika person in Aotearoa New Zealand. Knowing about and actively living out culture was considered to be a way in which one could pass on this culture to future generations. It was also believed to enable one to appreciate one's past, be "grounded", and be able to think more critically about the world around one. As mentioned before, it was also felt that a successful Pasifika person would have some knowledge of the basic protocols of Pasifika cultures other than their own heritage Pasifika culture/s and, similarly, a strong knowledge of mainstream non-Pasifika culture/s within Aotearoa New Zealand.

*"Being grounded in who we are, where we came from, how we relate to others in the Pacific and to the wider world. I want my children and grand children to know their identity so they know where they fit and can be proud of their Pacific heritage and pass it onto their children. I want my children to know their culture and respect its purpose as opposed to not knowing and therefore shunning it because it appears harsh and/or money orientated when it is defined by westernised definitions. Most of all I want my children to see the beauty and richness of their*

*culture, which is part of their make-up and will enable them to hold their heads up high anywhere they go in the world."*

*"Being literate as Pasifika is a gift and being able to communicate and practice cultural activities that identify a particular culture leads to success and fulfillment."*

*"I think Pasifika understand literacy in the wider sense as us being literate in our cultures, languages, identities ... but it has to be each Pasifika individual not just fall onto one person in a family but every single person in a Pasifika aiga, fanau, anau to be successful as Pasifika in education, health, home, work, community, etc and all knowing, understanding what success is and how each of us can achieve it, individually and as a family."*

*"Appreciating our heritage, acknowledging the work done by our forefathers."*

*"Literate in a language provides opportunity for the written word and preservation of stories, experience and knowledges."*

*"I do believe that being highly literate as Pasifika people in our own cultures and the dominant culture leads to prosperity – but if we are courageous to learn about other cultures, particularly Māori – we will be far more enriched."*

*"Traditional knowledge allows one to compare western doctrines/schools of thought."*

**"Success in literacy for me is passing on the culture through to our younger generations and keeping it alive; success is bringing and giving and understanding culture differences and being more respectful to others."**

#### **Success in personal qualities/values:**

The importance of possessing and living out certain personal qualities and values was also clearly a core theme amongst Pasifika participants. Participants referred to a mixture of values and qualities consistent with traditional Pasifika heritage culture/s (e.g. humility, respect, love, and service to family and community) and also several aspects often seen to be more consistent with a Western upbringing (e.g. competitive drive, resilience). Possessing and being guided by these positive personal qualities and values was

felt to be vital to: personal confidence; being “balanced”; having physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing; living respectfully; helping others; realising one’s potential; teaching future generations; building resilience and toughness; and bringing about a change in mindset from viewing being Pasifika as being ‘less than’ to viewing being Pasifika as a source of richness.

*“Pasifika success is to live your life in a way that honours your ancestors, and to treat all people with humility, love and respect.”*

*“To me, a successful person is someone who is honest, trustworthy, reliable, respectful and consistent in what they do.”*

*“Success means to have the confidence to do anything.”*

*“Success means being happy, content, confident.”*

*“Success would mean one would be the driver of her or his journey. Part of the decision-making process to the future.”*

*“Having a balanced lifestyle of body, spirit, mind and whānau.”*

*“It means that you are happy and having joy and peace in life and being proud of your Pasifika ethnicity and able to speak and communicate in your own and other languages. Being able to live a healthy lifestyle, physically, mentally and spiritually.”*

*“You will become your own self as an original person, using your own language, own thinking, without suppressing your ownself. The additional knowledge always comes second. Success in my opinion is making the most of what you already have and with the support of other knowledge as a second option. It is all to do with the right spirit.”*

*“Success to me means that I have done all I could do in life physically, emotionally, spiritually, socially, financially, to include being mindful of others less fortunate than us and the environment we leave our children and our grandchildren once it is time for us to go. It means doing everything you do on earth to the best of your ability without hurting anyone along the way.”*

*“When we accept ourselves as capable, successful holistic beings that encompasses the physical, social, intellectual, emotional and spiritual, we*

*can be successful in anything we do. It is owning the perspective that we are privileged despite the statistics. It is changing our poverty mindset and comparing us to other parts of the world that really are poor. NZ PACIFIC IS RICH. Change the mindset, change a people group.”*

*“Knowledge alone may provide a wider scoop of choices’ but I think that Pasifika people as a whole – particularly young people – MUST learn to compete. To compete for that promotion, for that position, for better health, for access to services, etc. Education offers Pasifika tools for practical necessities of life, but what I feel we as a people need is more access to environments that can impart mental toughness.... I believe success is being consistent, focused and using the God-given gifts and talents that we have been given.”*

*“Success has many faces, but one aspect I would specify is the ability of resilience. To succeed and overcome challenges, however small or big, along the journey and not merely reaching a rather significant ‘milestone’ like a graduation – but the moments of strength, courage, and utmost commitment along the way to persist towards the desired end. These successes cannot be achieved without the collective support of others.”*

**“Pasifika success is seeing ... that the children are taught not only in secular education but also in the spiritual and religious education. Success is living a satisfied life.”**

#### **Success in families:**

It was clear that a Pasifika definition of ‘success’ is closely tied to family. For the participants, success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand involved success in families. This encompassed a diverse range of aspects of family life including: strong and healthy relationships; stable family life built on cultural and/or spiritual/religious principles; improved family-wide education and conventional literacy outcomes; passing on skills/knowledge; wise child rearing; good health and wellbeing; and financial stability.

*“We need to ensure families do have a healthy relationship with each other, though this is not a perfect world we live in it is important to ensure our upbringing is of a high and healthy standard,*

from here building a strong family unity will just keep getting better and better, sadly only a minority will achieve this.”

“Success is to lead by example and to teach our children that it is important to gain knowledge and to provide for our families and serve others. Success is honouring your spouse and creating a home where love and peace abounds. Success is understanding and appreciating that there is a higher power that guides our lives and that all we have is for us to share and to seek greedily to build for ourselves. Success is family with God.”

“A Pasifika person carries his or her family throughout their life.”

“Being confident in different worlds and being able to support the whānau in any way needed, being able to pass your skills, knowledge to whānau.”

“Reading and writing can improve in families if they could be emphasised inside every Pasifika family. Having a family programme to improve reading and writing.”

“As parents, we can help our children, teach them what we have been taught as young children and then they are able to link that to what is being taught in schools. This will help them succeed as they are able to speak more than one language, and find connections that will help them understand more and grasp ideas more quickly, which they can also use in university and the work force, and when they succeed, they make their families proud and help their families out and this mentality and knowledge can be passed on from generation to generation and we will see a long line of success stories.”

“Can I impart my Tongan knowledge to my children in English?”

“An awareness of what our children are into, where they are and who they’re with, as savvy parents.”

“Being role models for our children and passing on our stories of the struggle my parents went through to seek education for me and my siblings to better ourselves but never forgetting our culture or language.”

“Success is having good health to live a full life for yourself and your family.”

“Putting me and my family on the race starting line, instead of starting behind everyone else – it’s about equity.”

“Success means being able to earn a living to support your family and being wealthy enough to have multiple choices in your lifestyle and within your family.”

“Success is not struggling financially, positively contributing to family life, the community and New Zealand society.”

“Success for Pasifika is happy, healthy, prosperous families. [Being] prosperous is not necessarily about enormous wealth but having a roof over our heads and food on the table such that we are not just surviving but enjoying life to the full our way, doing the things that make us who we are. Success for us is being proud of who we are and living a life that empowers and enables us to relate to each other as the amazing, miraculous, awesome human beings our Father in Heaven created us to be.”

**“I think success these days is measured in material things. I think success can be seen in the relationships of families, successful parenting and support, children going to school and taking advantage of opportunities that are out there. My measure of success is the happiness of families and success of their children no matter what career they pursue.”**

#### Success in work:

Pasifika participants also shared an understanding of success that related to a person’s occupation and workplace. Success as Pasifika will involve: doing a job that you love; achieving a “decent quality of life, income, health”; and being confident and articulate in the workplace. Furthermore, participants expressed that ‘success’ for Pasifika in the future will involve having genuine access to wider career options.

“Being able to survive within the New Zealand society at all levels from lawyer to cleaner with an efficient grasp of the English language, culture and ways of being that allows them to be an integral community member whose voice is respected and called upon to govern the country. I would like all Pasifika people to have adequate language comprehension and understanding of

*all communicating methods in this country and to still maintain their own rich cultural heritage and language."*

*"Success should be having a decent quality of life, income, health, etc. Feeling good about work, helping fellow Pasifika and anyone, supporting their children's education, feeling good about themselves is key."*

*"Being successful to me means having opportunities and options to choose a career path and most importantly to question and share your ideas in a confident manner."*

*"It means we have the key to open any door we want. Being Pasifika literate, means our opportunities will be widened. ... Success is being able to come home knowing that you have accomplished what you needed to on that day, to be able to provide for your family and to say that you love what you do as a job."*

*"Do well in education, succeed in higher qualified and paid jobs e.g. doctor, CEO, lawyer, professor, etc."*

*"Being innovative in their careers, and expanding and strengthening the business enterprise of Aotearoa. No longer will we be known only for our good looks and sports abilities, but we will be known for our creative and scientific intellect, where sustainability is led by Pasifika people in all areas of humanity to be able to sustain themselves on this earth."*

#### **Success in a multi-cultural Aotearoa New Zealand:**

The desire to participate in a genuinely multi-cultural Aotearoa New Zealand is part of what constituted 'success' in the eyes of Pasifika participants. This type of success as Pasifika would involve: informed, respectful and tolerant interactions between cultures; utilising language and literacy as tools and bridges between cultures; actively fostering strength of identity amongst people of increasingly diverse cultural heritages; respectful interactions from a place of confidence within each person's own identity; actively building an understanding of multiple viewpoints and perspectives whilst maintaining and shaping one's own; working to actively create a place in which all can belong.

**"Success is being able to access and use resources, tools, information, knowledge etc that is going to effectively benefit and enhance the holistic wellbeing of the family/community/individual. Also not only learning but also teaching others who want to learn about their culture and language to bridge gaps of communication between peoples."**

*"Our understanding in Pasifika literacy will bring tolerance, desire to press on regardless of pressures, understand how other cultures succeed using their values to meet and cultivate our own characters to acquire what we struggle to achieve."*

*"We are united due to understanding and respecting each other's cultures and identities."*

*"Relating to and understanding all different cultures. We can also encourage other Pacific islanders by being proud of our culture as well as in our work/life."*

*"Integrating and sharing my knowledge and culture for those of non-Pasifika or non-Fijian backgrounds can understand who I am and what being Fijian is all about. We are different every one of us who come from moana-nui-a-kiwa. Living successfully in New Zealand is means that we can enjoy and have a purpose to extending and strengthening this island nation into a rich vibrant place with Pasifika people."*

*"Provide us with the opportunities to improve ourselves and our families so that living in New Zealand society with its advantages and our own cultural advantages can be nurtured and ultimately improve Pasifika people's wellbeing, life and worth."*

*"Pasifika people are literate and confident in their own language/culture. The difficulty is identifying and understanding the commonalities with mainstream in Aotearoa and working with that to achieve success as Pasifika people."*

*"Giving Pacific people power and identity in Aotearoa; building equality; being able to acknowledge their own culture whilst living successfully in another. Success is what they need so they can achieve their goals and be what they want to be in Aotearoa."*

*"Being literate may help in our understanding of the norms of the society we are living in, the*



ability to identify our needs and how to address those needs. Enable us to ask the right questions. Enable us to stand firm in our own culture, values, and context but at the same time be successful citizens of New Zealand/Aotearoa. Success means enjoying the same or better level of health as all other New Zealanders, be financially independent, contribute to the economic success of the country, and have the ability to contribute financially, time wise and intellectually to my cultural and family obligations."

"A Pasifika understanding of literacy is about a broad and deep understanding of the world from multiple perspectives and value points."

**"It creates the space that is healthy, comfortable and inviting for everyone. Not only Pacific Islanders. It is a utopia that is possible. We just need the right group to champion it."**

#### Success in service (to family/community):

Just as a 'literate' Pasifika person is known by the way in which they serve their families and communities, the Pasifika participants also spoke of how 'success as Pasifika' involves a person's desire and ability to serve their family, church, village, and wider community.

**"Success of one is the success of the whole family, village, country."**

"Success to me means to be helpful to everybody."

"...giving me confidence to work with my community either directly or as an advisor to organisations that target Pacific communities. My Pacific communities' voices can be heard and any service will meet their needs. Therefore, improvement in education, employment and health can be witnessed."

"Being a literate and successful Pasifika in New Zealand is being a positive role model serving your family, village or community; succeeding in your education/work/church/family and community."

"Success in their chosen career path; family and church and community sectors would only enrich their lives with a sense of giving back to their communities."

"The limits are lifted in education or in health or

in the community – any area – when we have a broader range of literacy skills. We are better able to encourage these skills among family, friends and community when we enjoy them ourselves."

"Getting involved, understanding, educating, practicing humility, love, joy and peace. Success means achieving/accomplishing good positive results, helping, surviving and caring."

"Having the self-confidence and self-belief to further our cause; making a decent contribution to the community at large; helping Aotearoa New Zealand become the greatest Pasifika nation in the world."

"Allowing better opportunities for communication, creativity, and achievement at both grass-roots level and at higher professional levels through ways of leadership and service (based on the Pacific values instilled in us)."

**"To me 'success' means 'happiness', and happiness is the outcome of hard work, determination, whole-hearted support, collective actions, caring for others, and so forth. All these are elements of being literate ... it is not just about being able to read and write in English, but it is more than that. It is about the spirit of taking and giving – taking what is best to succeed (or to be happy) and giving it back to the community, organisation, and whoever needs the happiness."**

#### Success in New Zealand society/civic life:

Inherent in this project's discussion is the need to establish what 'success' looks like for Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand, and there were many insights offered by Pasifika participants about how this is achieved and what it entails. The following is a selection of what participants shared regarding success for Pasifika as Pasifika in daily civic life and New Zealand society, grouped by sub-theme:

Confident, articulate Pasifika people who actively participate in decision-making:

"We will be more likely to have the confidence to voice our concerns and express our ambitions at private and public forums, access technology for more efficiency."

"Enabling us to be part of the leadership and decision making of the country bearing



*in mind and having empathy for Pasifika. This means that Pasifika will always be present and well heard /represented in Aotearoa New Zealand."*

*"Representation of Pasifika in all facets of life as a Pasifika, in word and action and not just to be seen and not heard but to be seen and heard and understood as a humble voice of reason for Pasifika!"*

*"Being literate means we will not be takers all the time, but we will be able to assert ourselves in making decisions."*

*"To engage with social structures that have been a barrier to Pasifika success in the past such as the education system."*

*"Just being able to build up confident individuals who can talk the talk and walk the walk. Thus allowing them to make independent choices because they understand the systems that come into play especially in this country."*

*"Being able to participate in the community and have a voice. It means economic and social prosperity. It means knowing how to use the resources available to them and to be able to navigate their way through systems, etc. Success for Pacific people means being educated and getting a good job ... Being educated should be inclusive of being literate. It can make a real difference to Pacific children and how they will live their lives, which often includes being able to financially support their families."*

*"We will not shy away from activities that expose our illiteracy. We will be empowered to participate in society such that we can take care of our families better because we know and understand what is available to us, and this gives us the courage to speak out for what we know we are entitled to, and we don't end up taking out loans that have small print that has us paying back for the rest of our lives or losing our homes because of the inability to make payments in the future. I believe literacy enables us to think more clearly and make better decisions about our life."*

Informed, knowledgeable Pasifika people who can draw on multiple knowledge bases and maximise all opportunities presented to them:

*"Understanding the business and political drivers that determine the policies and opportunities."*

*"Again knowledge is power. Being literate helps you to understand everything with reading documents and discussions at all levels. Success is understanding that there are more options to choose from in life and passing this knowledge onto our families."*

*"Understanding what is going on around us whether it be newspaper, TV, radio or just by having a discussion with other people about things."*

*"Pasifika cultural literacy is by definition multilingual and multicultural. Research has proven that bilingualism and multilingualism are indicators of advanced intelligence; and employers today are increasingly valuing the contributions of employees with the sorts of advanced social skills that true multiculturalism produces. Pasifika people need to value and enhance their multilingual and multicultural skills and work from the premise that these can empower them in a wider world."*

*"Helping me to understand what entitlements and services are available and what programmes can help assist me and my family in everyday life and situations. To know that I am able to access all information in regards to needs, comprehend and utilise the information to ensure success."*

*"Taking advantage of opportunities that apply to everyone, and not feel like we're being marginalised because we're Pacific. Success means being confident to grab the opportunities and strive to get ahead in life, working hard, being humble, and competing at the mainstream level."*

People who have equitable access to facilities, institutions, opportunities, etc:

*"Have equitable access to educational, health, business, sporting and recreational opportunities and any others that they may choose. Equitable doesn't mean equal, which is hard for the "haves" to understand."*

*"It will help/enable our Pasifika family access more government services/organisations if they need help; get a good qualification and good paid jobs. This is what a successful Pasifika community in New Zealand would be like."*

*"Knowing how to play the game, knowing how to navigate in New Zealand society with a game plan and pathway, knowing what's out there and*

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*what we can access....if not, we'll be playing in 2nd tier competition with left-over resources."*

*"Allowing me to complete basic tasks i.e filling in forms, communicating problems and issues with necessary people, increasing understanding of issues concerning me. Allowing me to move into higher education if I chose to. Allowing my kids to have more doors open for them in whatever they choose to do. Keep the doors of knowledge open for me in order to succeed in my personal goals. Success to me is being content with my achievements, whether it's learning a new basic skill i.e baking a cake, to the greater achievements, owning my own house."*

Pasifika people who are valued and respected by their fellow non-Pasifika Aotearoa New Zealanders:

*"The New Zealand mainstream media needs to stop demonising Pacific; Pacific people need to understand the value and power of their vote; Pacific aspiring politicians and those in positions of power, influence and authority need to practice what they learnt at Sunday school."*

Reversing/reducing/eliminating negative statistics concerning Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand:

*"...making significant improvements in all the areas mentioned e.g. reduced rates of diabetes, more school leavers going into higher education in order to get higher paid employment, etc."*

*"The real result should be reflected in the decrease in negative statistics of Pasifika."*

*"Success cannot be measured because it's subjective. However, an increase in quality of life could be said to be achieved if there are less Pasifika people on welfare and in prison and more in employment and higher education."*



## 5. Understanding the Findings

**The project's three-part design involved investigating and drawing together:**

1. a review of relevant literature, online documentation, and research
2. focused and facilitated group consultations in the North and South Islands of Aotearoa New Zealand
3. wider discussions and gathering of Pasifika people's insights and aspirations for literacy and success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand via an online survey.

The project's three forms of data collection have built for us a foundational understanding of the way in which the Pasifika participants and respondents conceptualised literacy for success as Pasifika. It has also provided us with an overview of how literacy has been variously conceptualised by literacy sponsors, practitioners, and researchers over the past 50 years internationally and currently here in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as providing a basic understanding of the growing knowledge base worldwide regarding literacy from an indigenous perspective.

### 5.1 Understanding the Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

**This section seeks to draw together the threads from the three forms of data collected in this study and make overall sense of the study in relation to the research questions in the online survey.**

#### 5.1.1 How Do Pasifika Conceptualise 'Literacy' for Success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand?

The review of relevant literature revealed that conceptualisations of 'literacy' have evolved over time in mainstream theory and that these conceptualisations have variously excluded or included understandings of literacy other than the conventional literacy (as reading and writing, and occasionally numeracy, listening and speaking). Theoretical conceptualisations of literacy have evolved from viewing 'literacy' as a discrete set of technical universal skills, to 'literacy' as human resource skills for economic

growth, to 'literacy' as capabilities for socio-cultural and political change, and various permutations in between.

Conceptualisations of 'literacy' in literature by UNESCO and the OECD demonstrated a largely functional, skills-based, and predominantly economically-driven perspective. It was apparent that this was strongly echoed in Aotearoa New Zealand, along with considerable variability in the conceptualisations of literacy across educational levels and formal and informal contexts.

A review of literature relating to indigenous peoples' conceptualisations of 'literacy' revealed a growing body of work in cultures spanning Canada, USA and Alaska, Africa, Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand. This body of knowledge strongly asserts the value and validity of: multiple literacies; holistic conceptualisations of literacy (as concerning the whole person – mental, physical, emotional, spiritual); literacy as a tool for self-determination and revitalisation of language/culture/identity; literacy as encompassing knowledge, skills, and values and spirituality; and literacy as the ability to 'read' diverse 'texts' (a complex range of symbol systems, as well as environmental cues, and cultural artefacts). Ultimately, literacy from an indigenous perspective has been conceptualised as "both a diverse set of skills and a pathway to self-determination and empowerment of the spirit" (Smylie, et. al., 2006:525), and was seen to embody "factors of culture, tradition, language, and ways of knowing and being" (Paulsen, 2003:24).

These indigenous understandings of literacy sit alongside a wider Western theory that firmly positions 'literacy' as a sociocultural practice – inextricably bound to the ways of speaking, living, thinking, doing, and being of the people who practice it. Gee's (n.d.) concept of literacy being fluency in multiple discourses ('discourses' being 'identity kits' for using language, thinking and acting in a given social network) provided a conceptual understanding of 'literacy' as inherently tied to language, culture and identity.

The project's three forms of data collection have built for us a foundational understanding of the way in which the Pasifika participants and respondents conceptualised Literacy for Success as Pasifika.

A culturally sensitive view of literacy has emerged that firmly acknowledges that literacy and its practices vary from one context to another, and that literacy is “rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being” (Street, 1984:7). In this, it is acknowledged that “learning literacy’ is as much about ‘learning identity’ as it is about ‘learning skills’...” (Falk, 2001:314). Gardner’s (1983) work in breaking open the construct of ‘intelligence’ into ‘multiple intelligences’ also paved the way for the breaking open of hitherto tightly-bound concepts such as ‘literacy’.

These understandings from literature make it possible to better understand, more fully appreciate, and more deeply interpret the responses of Pasifika participants in the consultation groups and online survey. Furthermore, certain strong parallels are apparent between the articulations of literacy in literature on indigenous literacy and the articulated conceptualisations of literacy by our Pasifika participants in Aotearoa New Zealand. These common elements within the conceptualisation of literacy include (among other things):

- the vital role of conventional literacy (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) in strengthening and preserving indigenous and heritage language/s
- the high perceived value of fluency in a range of multi-modal literacies (linguistic, audio, visual, gestural, spatial) as expressed in one’s heritage culture/s and the cultures to which one has allegiance
- the importance of strength in knowledge of one’s heritage culture/s (including knowledge such as genealogy, history) and personal and collective identity
- the value placed on fluency in the discourses (“ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking” (Gee, 1990:xix)) to which one has allegiance, as well as an awareness, respect, and certain degree of fluency in the discourses of others in the nation
- the importance of fluency in and harnessing of digital and information literacy to facilitate success in the multiple cultural ‘worlds’ the person occupies

However, it was clear that the Pasifika in Aotearoa who participated in this study did not only desire to reconnect to a static past. Participants expressed a clear desire to re-claim, and re-assign value and honour to the texts and literacy practices of their Pacific heritage cultures, but to do so in ways meaningful to their new context in Aotearoa New Zealand. Thus, while the Pasifika participants did not want to lose valued aspects of traditional indigenous literacy from their heritage Pasifika culture/s, at the same time, there was a desire to possess the creative ability to forge something new – new literacies – where and whenever necessary in the new context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

This echoes Gamlin’s (2003:17) observation that at the heart of aboriginal literacy is creativity: “Creativity is an intrinsic aspect of survival”, and gives rise to transformational attitudes where fundamental elements from traditional cultures can be “re expressed and presented as fresh inspiration for a renewed action”. There is strong support amongst indigenous scholars for the view that the education of indigenous peoples will be “transformed” when positive traditional values are brought forward into the modern context, and attitudes are transformed (Gamlin, 2003:17; Koya, 2009; Fasi, 2009).

### *5.1.2 What Does It Mean to be ‘Literate’ as Pasifika, and How Does It Facilitate ‘Success’ as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand?*

The Pasifika participants shared their forward-looking aspirations and insights into what it means to them to be ‘literate’ as a Pasifika person in Aotearoa New Zealand in a way that brings about ‘success as Pasifika’. Their contributions provide valuable insights into Pasifika conceptualisations of ‘success’, ‘being literate’, and how being literate contributes to success.

#### *5.1.2.1 Being Successful, as Pasifika, in Aotearoa New Zealand*

Although the direct focus of this study was ‘literacy’, as the research series title “Pasifika Success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand” indicates, we have sought an understanding of literacy in the context of how it contributes



to success as Pasifika. Hence, participants also articulated their understandings of the concept of 'success' whilst answering the survey questions.

The project's findings show that Pasifika participants' conceptualisations of 'success' were clearly holistic, with family-oriented and values-oriented understandings of success being expressed as often and with as much emphasis as success from a conventionally economic perspective.

Pasifika participants spoke of 'success as Pasifika' encompassing the following areas: identity; language; culture; personal qualities / values; families; workplace; multi-cultural New Zealand; service to family and community; and civic life. The figure below summarises the multiple domains of success and wellbeing that Pasifika participants believe literacy (in its fullest sense) can contribute to in the lives of Pasifika in Aotearoa.



Figure 13: Domains of 'Success as Pasifika' that 'Literacy as Pasifika' contributes to

### 5.1.2.2 Being Literate, as Pasifika, in Aotearoa New Zealand

The literature review revealed multiple theoretical conceptualisations of what it means to be 'literate'. Those conceptualisations which were based on a sociocultural understanding of literacy, provided the most useful basis for interpreting the Pasifika participants' articulated insights and aspirations relating to being 'literate' as Pasifika. Such conceptualisations – like that illustrated in the figure on page 82 based on Falk (2001) and Gee's (1990) 'fluency in discourses' definition – describe being literate as comprising not only certain skill sets but also certain bodies of culturally valued knowledge and values, and the possession of personal identity characteristics, which are rewarded by the communities one has allegiance to.

## Being Literate

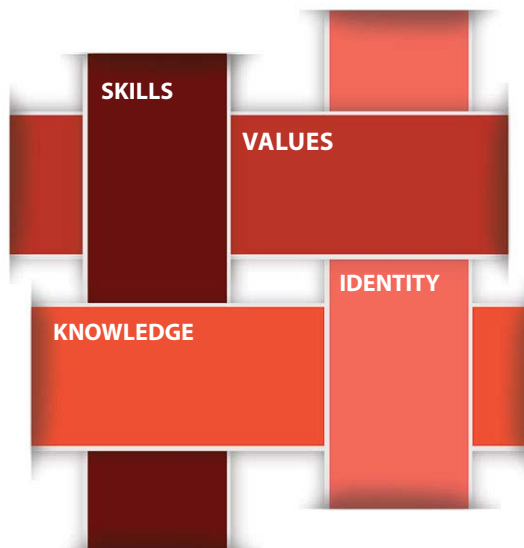


Figure 14: Necessary elements in being 'literate' (based on FALK 2001)

In a similar vein, Pasifika participants expressed a holistic conceptualisation of being 'literate'. In this conceptualisation, 'literate' Pasifika people are able to: translate and move with ease between languages and cultural worlds; use the written word to preserve Pasifika cultural and linguistic heritages; participate in ongoing, lifelong education; speak on behalf of, communicate with, advocate for, and lead their people; participate actively – as Pasifika – in their local mainstream community; serve others; access services and information; and actively build strong multiculturalism.

**In order to accomplish these things, a 'literate' Pasifika person is one who can:**

- effectively draw on multiple skills bases, knowledge bases, and values bases, from the multiple cultures to which they hold allegiance
- effectively engage in communication involving the whole person, in a range of modalities, within culturally defined societal structures, whilst embodying the core values and personal qualities that are valued by their culture/s of allegiance.

While this project stops short of providing a 'model' of literacy for success as Pasifika, it

has brought to light various fundamental concepts (expressed above) that lie within the Pasifika conceptualisation of literacy. From the collective wisdom of Pasifika and the relevant theory in the literature reviewed, the following fundamental cultural knowledge, skills and values bases emerge as core contributors to being 'literate' in the way that is believed to lead to 'success as Pasifika'.

### Elements of the whole person

- Pasifika indigenous conceptions of the whole person within context:
  - Sino (physical)
  - 'Atamai (mental)
  - Laumalie (spiritual)
  - Kainga (collective/community – relational)
  - 'Atakai (environment – both built and natural) ((Tongan) Tu'itahi, 2009).
- All of the above is conceived of as involved in life-long stages and cycles of learning and teaching.

### Levels of society through which literacy as Pasifika operates

- Traditional conceptualisations of societal structure:
  - Taautaha (the individual)
  - Kainga (the family)
  - Kolo (the village)
  - Fonua (the nation)
  - Mamani (the global) ((Tongan) Tu'itahi, 2009).
- Inter-cultural and intra-cultural relations in the New Zealand context.

### Core values

- Respect; generosity; being culturally versed; knowing what to do and how to do it well in a variety of contexts; possessing appropriate compassion; mutual love and caring; reciprocity, cooperation, consensus, and fulfilment of mutual obligations; loyalty and commitment; humility; spirituality; honesty and integrity (adapted from Taufe'ulungaki, 2009:129-130)
- Teu le va (the nurturing, maintenance, and reconciliation of right relationships) ((Sāmoan) adapted from Anae, 2010)
- Spiritual values (from religious/spiritual practices and church affiliation). Multiple knowledge bases from Pacific heritage cultures

- Tala-‘o-tokanga (farming, horticulture)
- Tala-‘o-ngatai/toutai (marine, navigation)
- Tufunga (architecture, construction, and state craft)
- Faito‘o (health care and healing systems)
- Faiva (arts, sports) ((Tongan) Tu‘itahi, 2009)
- Talamua (oral traditions, stories, legends, histories) (Sāmoan).

#### Multiple modalities of literacy

- Linguistic
- Audio
- Visual (including artefact/symbol)
- Gestural (including dance, body language)
- Spiritual
- Spatial (including environmental/ecological) (adapted from NLG, 2000).

#### Multiple cultural bases

Pasifika participants in this study shared insights into the skills, knowledge, and values bases from the multiple cultures they perceived as contributing to literacy as Pasifika:

- Pasifika heritage culture/s
- Other Pasifika culture/s
- Māori culture
- Other cultural bases of Aotearoa New Zealand
- Any/all other cultural bases to which the individual has allegiance.

A summary of themes and specific exemplars from participants of these multiple skills, knowledge, and values bases that contribute to literacy for success as Pasifika can be found in Appendix 1. Whether, and to what extent, the Pasifika heritages mentioned above are understood or drawn upon by a Pasifika individual in Aotearoa New Zealand will vary greatly from person to person. However, whether accessed or not, they are nonetheless part and parcel of each Pasifika individual’s cultural heritage, and are therefore a birthright.

#### 5.1.2.3 How Being Literate as Pasifika Contributes to Success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand

The review of literature revealed that common conceptualisations of the role of literacy in

‘success’ were largely economically oriented. The relationship between conventional literacy (reading and writing) and a wide range of positive indicators has long been assumed to be direct and causative (i.e. that the ability to read and write alphabetic script leads directly to improved economic and social life outcomes as demonstrated by a wide range of indicators).

There is concern, however, about these assumptions and the lack of clarity and direct evidence surrounding them (Falk, 2001; Blaug, 1985; Wagner, 2010; Lankshear, et al, 1997; Bialostok & Whitman, 2006; Lee, 2011; Lawton, et al., 2012). Despite this lack of clarity about the nature of the relationship, it is evident that systems of education, international interventions, and government policies in both developed and developing nations continue to be founded on the belief that imparting the skills for reading and writing (usually in a dominant language) is a sufficient guarantor of a ‘better future’ for the possessor of these skills. This underlying ideology then begins to resemble Street’s (1984) description of literacy as ‘autonomous’ (literacy as a decontextualised, culturally neutral, apolitical, universal skill set, which is ‘inherently good’).

Alternative conceptualisations of the link between (conventional) ‘literacy’ and ‘development’ and ‘liberation’ stem from critical literacy theory, which situates literacy firmly within its social and cultural, historical, and political and economic contexts. Rather than viewing literacy as primarily a tool for getting better paid jobs and so forth, critical and emancipatory literacy is primarily concerned with the ability of conventional literacy to be a tool for ‘success’ via the development of critical thinking habits, which enable and empower the learner to play a role in re-shaping their world for the better.

What this study’s findings show is that the Pasifika participants’ conceptualisations of the role of literacy in success incorporates elements of both the economically-driven conceptualisations and the critical/emancipatory conceptualisations, in a broad and balanced conceptualisation of ‘success’ achievable through being ‘literate as Pasifika’. For the Pasifika participants, it is equally

important for there to be tangible social outcomes as well as economic and human capital and financial outcomes from literacy. The foundational understanding achieved in this study shows that from the perspective of the Pasifika participants, being literate (in its fullest sense) would enable the following broad experiences of 'success':

Success in participation and access	Success in culture	Success in service and advocacy	Success in economic terms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access and achievement in education.</li> <li>- Access to services and information from providers (e.g. health).</li> <li>- Civic participation.</li> <li>- Understanding of policy, laws, entitlements, 'the rules of the game'.</li> <li>- Ability to make informed decisions.</li> <li>- Ability to interact beneficially with service providers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Confidence in own culture/s and strength in identity.</li> <li>- Ability to move with ease between cultural worlds.</li> <li>- Ability to build inter-cultural understanding and contribute to multi-cultural society.</li> <li>- Ability to preserve own heritage culture/s and language/s.</li> <li>- Ability to build on commonalities and respect differences.</li> <li>- Ability to marry cultural perspectives and forge a 'new way' that works for Pasifika.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to serve family and community/ies.</li> <li>- Ability to speak on behalf of and advocate for Pasifika.</li> <li>- Ability to take on challenges.</li> <li>- Ability to make good informed decisions for self and collective.</li> <li>- Ability to help the needy.</li> <li>- Ability to promote social justice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial literacy.</li> <li>- Access to professions hitherto unattainable (through increased success in education and improved credentials).</li> <li>- Improved standards of living (through better decisions, increased access to assistance, services, better wages, etc.).</li> </ul>

These articulated understandings reveal that 'success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand' has to do with: access; participation; choice; social justice; restoration; service; advocacy; acceptance; respect; tolerance; unity; confidence.

The participants' responses also revealed conceptualisations of literacy in relation to core values and community, which are consistent with international theory and Pasifika scholarly works. The links between literacy and core values and literacy and collective community wellbeing are briefly expanded below.

#### Literacy and core values

In their shared insights, Pasifika participants re-asserted the core role of shared values and orientation to the collective good, thereby affirming what has been observed more widely as "the importance of relationship building in literacy" (Taylor, et al., 2011:56). Pasifika responses largely revealed an inherent understanding that:

*There can be no disinterested, objective, and value-free definition of literacy: The way literacy is viewed and taught is always and inevitably ideological (Auerbach, 1991:71).*

Pasifika participants also expressed a desire to find a way to reconcile the "values and viewpoints" of the various Discourses they represent (Gee, 1991; Heath, 1983; Cook-Gumperz, 1986), knowing that this is problematic when their own value systems (often religiously derived) may at times clash with those of the dominant institutional discourses (in schools, and so forth).

Pasifika participants in this study articulated an understanding of literacy and success as strongly values-based and relationally-based. Internationally it has been observed that *Oral tradition teaches us that when certain values, or laws, are upheld and observed, the people survive...* (Couture, 1987:6, cited in Gamlin, 2003:20). For literacy to be meaningful for Pasifika participants in this study, it must be transformative; and to be transformative, it must draw on and creatively apply core cultural values in a contemporary world.

#### Literacy and collective community wellbeing

The strong emphasis in Pasifika participants' responses on collective good, service to family and community, advocacy, and care of the needy should not be surprising. There is

evidence in both international theory and in indigenous Pacific cultural and linguistic knowledge bases to explain this strong focus. From a theoretical perspective, Paulsen (2003:27) observes that:

*Identity, culture, tradition, and world view are factors that for Aboriginal peoples permeate the use and form of language and literacy, contributing to harmonious living in a pluralistic society.*

The Pasifika conceptualisation of literacy echoes the understanding of literacy as a moral imperative – with ‘moral’ being viewed as *driven by an obligation to work for the common good, that is motivated by compassion and care for others and for the physical universe, that encompasses a commitment to equity, and that acknowledges the inherent value of all living things* (Powell, 1999:5).

An observer of Pacific cultures has commented that: *Furthermore, the traditional ways of knowing, unlike their Western counterparts, operate as a collective society where sharing and communal learning are emphasised excessively. This collectivism, as observed in the Pacific Islanders, posits the notion that personal accomplishment is not about the self, but concerns with the fulfillment of honour, respect, and pride for the community at large* (Phan, 2008:801).

Indigenous Pacific scholar Nabobo-Baba (2008) directs us to several indigenous Fijian language terms that reveal how interconnected the concepts of cultural wisdom and collective orientation are. The first is “yalomatua”(wisdom) *A person who is yalomatua applies his/her knowledge to bring about a good quality of life for herself/himself and for her/his community or people* (2008:75). Yalomatua is evidenced in adherence to one’s obligations in respect to (1) clan, (2) worship/spirituality, (3) customs, values, acceptable behaviour, ideals, (4) kinship relations. These four are central core knowledge, and part of any person’s life-long learning (within the cultural group studied), and are vitally connected. The second is “sautu” (good life/well-being) – having sautu is a sign of being well versed and “steeped” in important indigenous knowledge (2008:75).

Furthermore, for the Fijian community studied, wealth was not only measured in terms of material goods, but also in terms of having “...a wide and healthy network of relationships.”

In the Tongan language, the terms “ako” (to teach/learn), “ilo” (to find/ discover/ know/ experience), and “poto” (to be clever, skilled, having a good mind, understanding what to do and being able to do it) have received considerable attention, having been discussed in relation to education by Thaman (1995). In Thaman’s discussion of these concepts, poto is particularly important as it relates to the application or use of knowledge/learning for the good and welfare of others.

Similarly, the commitment to collective good often extends beyond the intra-cultural to the inter-cultural. Inter-cultural good relations were a clear theme in Pasifika participants’ articulations of success. In this respect, the Pasifika participants strongly echoed the sentiments expressed by founding theorist in critical pedagogy, Henry Giroux. Giroux (1993:369) stated that: *literacy as an emancipatory practice requires people to write, speak, and listen in the language of difference, a language in which meaning becomes multi-accental, dispersed, and resists permanent closure. This is a language in which one speaks with rather than for Others.*

Giroux (cited in Lankshear & McLaren, 1993:377) calls for a conceptualisation of literacy and a matching pedagogy of literacy in which *differences are recognised, exchanged and mixed in identities that break down but are not lost, that connect but remain diverse.* It is a literacy that both affirms and disrupts in the name of hope, committed to the radical responsibility of politics and ethics that informs the struggle for a better future.

Thus, it is evident that within the conceptualisations of ‘literacy’ and ‘success’ shared by Pasifika participants there is wisdom and understanding of considerable depth. It is this wisdom and these collective literacy knowledge, skill and values bases that remain yet to be tapped for the collective benefit of Aotearoa New Zealand.



## 5.2 Conventional Literacy - Valued and Necessary, but Not Sufficient

When attempting to (re)conceptualise something, it is necessary to consider how the new conceptualisations generated fit with the current/original/prevaling understandings ascribed to that entity. It is easy to see how concerns then arise that projects such as this one will 'throw the baby out with the bathwater' so to speak. However, that is not the intention of this project. Instead, the project seeks to collectively and constructively build upon, extend and enrich traditional narrow understandings of literacy, not to overturn and replace them – there would be no sense in that. It is important at this point to make clear the relationship between conventional literacy and the additional dimensions of literacy that Pasifika participants spoke of in their contributions to the project.

Overall, for the majority of the Pasifika participants in this study, conventional literacy (reading and writing) is an important contributor to, but is not sufficient in itself for, enabling Pasifika success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand. Western conceptions of literacy's promised benefits include reaching one's goals, developing one's potential, and participating fully in one's community. To this, we can now add the Pasifika perspectives gained from this study – that being 'literate' should also bring about: thriving communities; people strong in identity, able to respond confidently and competently in any given situation based upon a firm set of shared values; and people equipped to build up their immediate and extended families and local communities through service, advocacy, and the financial benefits of improved education and employment opportunities. In order to achieve these aspirations, being able to read and write alone is not enough.

The findings of this study point to the core importance of reading, writing, and speaking ability in Pasifika heritage languages in any conception of 'literacy' for Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand. Participants have also pointed to the role of conventional literacy abilities in preserving, valuing and passing on Pasifika languages by means such as intergenerational learning.

*Literacy has been perceived as being synonymous with culture, tradition, world view, languages, and ways of knowing. In the perspective of Aboriginal peoples, literacy is not restricted to the written word; the true meaning of literacy is not confined to the page (Paulsen, 2003:23).*

The above quote represents the sentiment of many indigenous scholars, and has also been strongly paralleled in this study's findings. While the storage, transmission and communication of knowledge through the printed word remains central to this project's conceptualisation of literacy from a Pasifika perspective, the study also firmly values and situates other culturally-defined forms of literacy at the core of 'literacy', alongside reading and writing.

As Dunn (2001:679) reminds us in the Australian Aboriginal context, "school literacy practices are only a selection from the broad range of community literacy practices", with many of these differences stemming from the understanding that "oral and literate cultures manage knowledge in differing ways". Thus, as well as alphabetic systems, the Pasifika conceptualisation of literacy incorporates and validates all the other symbol systems and technologies for shared meaning making and shared communication that are relevant to the particular Pasifika communities. In other words, literacy, ... *rather than only being about the development of particular kinds of print-based skills, can helpfully be conceived as participation in a range of valued meaning-making practices, and that these practices are themselves nested within particular activity structures that index desired purposes, roles, and identities* (Hull & Moje, n.d.:1).

Thus, the relationship between conventional literacy (reading and writing) and other forms of literacy, as expressed within the Pasifika participants' construction of literacy, is that these added dimensions serve to enrich and expand traditional understandings of literacy and its role and function. Within a sociocultural understanding of literacy it is understood that for an individual to become 'literate', 'literacy' must be conceived of as: *functional, relevant and meaningful for individuals and the society in which they live. It must be able to meet the needs*

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*of individuals for their own social purposes and goals.* (Schieffelin & Cochran-Smith, 1984:22, cited in Dunn, 2001:681).

In our own context in Aotearoa New Zealand, it involves situating Pasifika forms of literacy, knowledge, skills, and value bases in their rightful place at the heart of the understanding of 'literacy' as a tool for success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand. These additional and multiple cultural knowledge, skills, and values bases effectively stretch current conceptions of literacy, enabling it to be broader and more culturally inclusive than previously conceived – and therefore allowing it to be more meaningful, desirable, and useful to Pasifika in living their daily lives as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The Canadian Aboriginal Rainbow/Holistic model of literacy (George, 2003) specified the many interconnected literacies in existence within an indigenous aboriginal world view. Similarly, the collective contributions of Pasifika participants in this project have demonstrated the rich way in which multiple bodies of knowledge, values, skills, ways of being and doing, multiple modes of communication, and multiple layers of relationship and human interconnectedness are all woven together into the Pasifika conceptualisation of 'literacy'. Pasifika participants have also shared insights into how, when this holistic 'literacy' is applied in health, education, language, culture, identity, relationships, and the economic, political, and inter/intra-cultural realities of Pasifika peoples, 'success as Pasifika in Aotearoa' becomes possible.

The question that should then arise is: how can the full extent of these diverse forms of literacy be made accessible to and attainable by a Pasifika learner, throughout their lifetime, to draw on and to utilise to enrich their lives and bring about the kinds of holistic 'success' that they aspire to?



# 6. Concluding Thoughts

This final section presents concluding thoughts relating to the project’s contribution to its intended aims and a consideration of ways forward in research from this point.

## 6.1 Contribution of the Project to its Three Main Aims

The three aims of this project were to:  
 (1) contribute to the body of knowledge about Pasifika literacy, adult education, and success  
 (2) contribute to education policy development, agenda setting, and practice  
 (3) contribute to raising knowledge and awareness and building research capacity.

In terms of contributing to the body of knowledge about Pasifika literacy, this project provides a foundational contribution to the understanding of how literacy is conceptualised by Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand, and what their current thinking is regarding being ‘literate’ and achieving ‘success as Pasifika’.

By deliberately working at a conceptual level, the project aims to generate greater conceptual clarity regarding the underlying ideologies, understandings, and aspirations of Pasifika people concerning literacy. This is done on the premise that obtaining greater shared conceptual clarity is an important step towards ensuring that all stakeholders are understanding and interpreting terms and concepts in compatible ways. While fundamental ideological mismatches continue to exist, surface efforts towards ‘literacy’ are still likely go largely unrewarded; but where

conceptual clarity is actively sought, then effective cooperation and collective action will be further facilitated.

The project draws both on bodies of relevant literature and on the collective wisdom of Pasifika peoples in the attempt to provide a foundational understanding of the core issues at stake. By providing insights into the way in which Pasifika conceptualise the link between ‘literacy’ (in its fullest sense) and ‘success’ in both material and non-material dimensions, this study provides new understanding in an underrepresented area.

The review of ‘literacy’ definitions by current local and international bodies highlighted a clear “focus on skills rather than a broader definition of literacy” (Millar, 2005, cited in Taylor, et al., 2011:57), and illustrated the pervasiveness of the ‘literacy as commodity capable of carrying out economic reform’ ideology at work. While the link between literacy and opportunities for access to wider career options through education is certainly one well-supported route, this project contributes further understandings relating to the nature of ‘literacy’ and its ability (in its fullest form) to enrich the lives of Pasifika in ways that extend beyond the purely economic, and ways that the Pasifika participants clearly felt were of considerable importance.

In literature, the route from (conventional) ‘literacy’ to ‘success’ has traditionally been understood as:



By providing insights into the way in which Pasifika conceptualise the link between ‘literacy’ (in its fullest sense) and ‘success’ in both material and non-material dimensions, this study provides new understandings in an under-represented area.

However this study contributes a further/complementary possible conceptualisation of the relationship between 'literacy' and 'success' as Pasifika, based on the shared collective insights of Pasifika participants. This conceptualisation is that literacy as Pasifika (encompassing of all the multiple cultural domains, bases and modes discussed previously) can bring about the following core elements of success as Pasifika:



*Figure 15: PSAPiA project respondents' conceptualisation of the relationship between 'Literacy as Pasifika' and 'Success as Pasifika'*

The project has identified multiple cultural skills, knowledge and values bases that contribute to being 'literate' as Pasifika. If Pasifika are to be enabled to become 'literate' in this way, considerable thought must be given to how to make these bases readily accessible to Pasifika learners in Aotearoa New Zealand and to facilitate the provision of opportunities for lifelong learning and teaching of these valued literacies for success.

In terms of contribution to policy and agenda setting, the research team believe that it is the mandate of Pasifika peoples themselves to set the agenda and direction for their own development as 'literate' and 'successful' Pasifika

people in Aotearoa New Zealand, and accordingly, this project has sought to begin this process by seeking insights directly from a sample of Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is noted that "Indigenous conceptualisations of literacy need to build on Indigenous understandings and perspectives" (Smylie, et. al., 2006:S21), and this study has attempted to both illustrate and honour this for Pasifika in their chosen home – Aotearoa New Zealand.

The project's findings have revealed the complexity of 'literacy as Pasifika' as a construct that is evolving at the interface of multiple cultures, multiple traditional and modern



modalities, and technological innovations. Herrington (2004:16, cited in Taylor, et al., 2011:58) comments on the tendency for “policy-makers” to “want to work with very simple narratives about literacy” because “ideological models seem to them to be too complicated to underpin policy”. Like many concepts that involve real people in the real world, unpacking ‘literacy’ and ‘success’ is necessarily complicated at times. However, the situation is as it is, and the task at hand is to respond to it as it is – and herein lies the challenge.

In essence, the Pasifika construction of literacy in this project is one that places conventional literacy in multiple heritage and allegiance languages at its core and then simultaneously reaches back to re-claim the value of literacies long marginalised and excluded; reaches forward to embrace information and digital technology, virtual media, and social networking as texts and tools for success; and reaches out to the literacies of cultures other than its own, seeking inclusiveness and unity through respect for diversity.

This understanding of literacy *celebrates indigenous knowledge and builds on the linguistic and cultural strength of the community*, and places enormous value on “diverse ways of knowing that draw on community funds of knowledge” (van Broekhuizen, n.d.). Crowther and Tett (2011:136) observe that current mainstream understandings of ‘literacy’ tend to be *fixed by institutions of power (such as schools and universities) that come to represent a particular type of literacy as a standard to measure and assess what it means to be literate*. However, this project offers a collective conceptualisation of literacy formulated outside the constraints of such institutional dictates, and as such, provides an uncensored understanding of the voiced aspirations and insights of its Pasifika participants.

The project does not present definitive answers but is intended to encourage and stimulate dialogue and further research in the multitude of issues raised by the findings (both the

literature review findings and the Pasifika participants’ insights). Its contribution to awareness raising and research capacity building has been evident in: the heightened awareness of core issues reported by the project’s participants and research team; the collaborative approach to research design and implementation taken within the research team; the provision of a foundational body of knowledge for future research for Aotearoa New Zealand; and the planned dissemination of findings in multiple forms tailored to community and practitioners.

## 6.2 What Else Do We Still Need to Understand about Literacy for Success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand?

“Today, scholars wrestle with questions of what literacy is and who is literate...” (Jimenez & Smith, 2008:43). This project has by no means definitively answered what is meant by ‘literacy’ for Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand, but it has certainly opened the conversation. Intended to be the first in a series of research projects exploring Pasifika success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand, this project essentially lays the foundation upon which subsequent projects can build to ensure that relevant policy and practices that affect Pasifika in Aotearoa are properly guided by and responsive to Pasifika insights and aspirations. While this project has shed light on the breadth and inclusiveness of ‘literacy’ as conceptualised by Pasifika participants, much still remains to be known about literacy/ies in the lives of Pasifika in Aotearoa, and it is important to be mindful of the caution that in order to *have a realistic policy goal of increasing literacy, we need to have a clearer understanding of it as a sociocultural phenomenon* (Wagner 2010:170).

The project’s findings have revealed the complexity of ‘Literacy as Pasifika’ as a construct that is evolving at the interface of multiple cultures, multiple traditional and modern modalities, and technological innovations.

With the contribution of this project as a foundation towards this clearer understanding, important questions then arise regarding how such a conceptualisation of literacy and success can be operated? Gee (1991) argues that *literacy is mastered through acquisition, not learning, that is, it requires exposure to models in natural, meaningful, and functional settings...* With perspectives such as this in mind, how are the desired qualities of a 'literate' Pasifika person (equipped to experience success as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand) best developed? What are the barriers to the development of such knowledge, skills, and values? Initial observation of the Aotearoa New Zealand situation certainly suggests that there are several ideologies at work underpinning 'literacy' across various educational levels and sectors. How are these to be reconciled to ensure greater usefulness to the lifelong learner?

More needs to be known about the relationship between literacy, identity and success. Street (1993:1) reminds us that:

*Research into the role of literacies in the construction of ethnicity, gender, and religious identities makes us wary of accepting the uniform model of literacy that tends to be purveyed with the modern nation state: The relationship of literacy and nationalism is itself in need of research at a time when the dominant or standard model of literacy frequently subserves the interests of national politics. (cited in van Broekhuizen, n.d.).*

Taylor et al.'s (2011) review of 20th century literature on Canadian adult literacy revealed the need for greater dialogue across major stakeholders – literacy sponsors, literacy practitioners, and literacy researchers – in order to move forward in a constructive and cohesive manner. It also raises a question of how this is to be best achieved. Especially when it is currently observed (in the Canadian context) that the work of practitioners; only occasionally references the work of academics; the work of academics seldom references the work of practitioners, and the work of governmental

and other sponsors does acknowledge the work of both practitioners and researchers but is usually clearly dominated by a 'literacy as commodity' emphasis (Taylor et al., 2011). To what extent do we have a similar situation in Aotearoa New Zealand? Where there are some initiatives underway aimed at encouraging "cross-authorship and cross-dialogue" (between stakeholders), what is the impact of these initiatives? How will the emancipatory rhetoric (the promises of literacy as freedom) be carried across into actual acts of freedom (Taylor, et al., 2011) for Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand?

The insights from this project raise many more, interesting questions:

- What is 'text' and what are the literacy practices utilising these 'texts' in the daily lives of Pasifika in Aotearoa?
- How are Pasifika harnessing technology in innovative ways to bring about 'success'?
- Where confident, competent bilingual/multi-lingual and literate Pasifika are being nurtured, how is it happening? What literacies are utilised in their daily lives? What can we learn from this? How can we collectively contribute to setting up the conditions for this type of literacy and success to be achieved by greater numbers?
- Where Pasifika are achieving high levels of conventional literacy competence, how is this being achieved, what factors contribute to it, do they differ at varying levels of lifelong learning (or in formal and informal contexts) and what can we learn to apply in wider contexts?
- In practical terms, how can sound Pasifika knowledge bases, skills and values bases be made available and accessible and attainable to those who seek them? Where is this happening effectively, and what can we learn from it?
- Of the traditional Pasifika cultural knowledge, skills and values bases, which elements do Pasifika translate usefully into their daily lives in Aotearoa New Zealand?
- What is being done, or needs to be done, to ensure relevance and usefulness of these

traditional cultural knowledge/skills/ technologies in a modern society?

- How do Pasifika peoples' literacies and cultural capital contribute to or translate into economic and social capital?
- How do we foster strength in identity? What is its nature and relationship to literacy and success? Where it is being achieved, what can we learn to apply to wider contexts?
- How can learnings from success by Pasifika in sporting arenas (for example) be used to inform and improve success in literacy and other wider fields?
- What is the relationship between literacy and citizenship and civic participation for Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand?
- What is the nature/value of intergenerational learning for Pasifika literacy and success? How can it be harnessed?

Clearly, the foundational understandings gained from this research still require further unpacking to more fully understand what being 'literate' means for the various Pasifika ethnic communities in Aotearoa New Zealand and what their community aspirations of literacy are. A concerted effort in particular needs to be made to hear youth voice on this matter.

Once recognition and validation is gained for the existence and value of literacies other than reading and writing in the dominant culture language, questions usually arise relating to *which* literacies should be developed, how, and for what purposes? Lee (2011:262) contends that *to include multiple social practices in literacy education is not to romanticize and embrace them blindly, but to acknowledge that differences exist and should be examined critically. This is where critical literacy comes into play.*

Approaching these questions requires further efforts (firmly and jointly, led and informed by the peoples themselves) to fully understand these other literacies, their place, goals and uses in people's lives, and what options and approaches are, or could be, available for their development (Hornberger, 1996:6).

We need to know what unrecognised holistic

literacies already exist within our Pasifika communities, and how these multiple literacies might be identified, measured, harnessed, learned/taught (adapted from Smylie, et. al., 2006). It may also be useful to look into ways to observe and 'measure' the contribution of Pasifika literacies to individual, family, community, societal and national wellbeing. Furthermore, what is being done, and can be done, to enable non-Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand to come to know, understand, value, and participate in aspects of literacy as Pasifika alongside Pasifika, should they wish to? In particular, how can those working with Pasifika (such as in educational contexts) develop greater competency and confidence in literacy as Pasifika?

Clearly, we have much to learn, and many valuable opportunities to work towards making the 2028 aspirations for 'literate' Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand a reality. What is known, however, is that the issues at the focus of this research project are likely to remain of utmost importance for a considerable time to come, simply because:

*... a multiply variegated world of ethnolinguistic complexity seems to be our societal destiny. As a consequence, policy decisions about language and literacy will become ever more relevant and more complicated, even as our knowledge base about literacy continues to increase. To keep pace with changes in societies today, as well as with a global economy that requires ever more skills in a competitive market place, we will no doubt have to keep the study and promotion of literacy on the research front burner for years to come. (Wagner, 2010:171).*

Once recognition and validation is gained for the existence and value of literacies other than reading and writing in the dominant culture language, questions usually arise relating to *which* literacies should be developed, how, and for what purposes?

### 6.3 Final Words (of Caution and Encouragement)

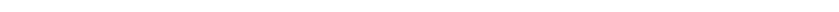
It is important that the findings of this research are not taken to represent 'the Pasifika viewpoint' or to assume that indeed there is one single, united understanding of literacy amongst Pasifika peoples. There is not. Diversity is inherent in who Pasifika are and what they will perceive as both 'literacy' and the role it has to play in their achieving what they perceive to be 'success as Pasifika' for themselves in Aotearoa New Zealand. There is no better reminder of this than the fact that 'Pasifika' itself is an umbrella term, tenuously asserted within New Zealand as a way of being able to collectively refer to the languages, cultures, and identities of people from richly diverse Oceanic backgrounds and heritages.

It is important to remember that the decisions that are made concerning literacy in a pluralistic society such as Aotearoa New Zealand are fundamentally moral ones, which serve either to continue to support inequitable outcomes or to transform outcomes for the better (Powell, 1999). It is the contention of this project that Pasifika are missing out, and Aotearoa New Zealand is missing out, if 'literacy' continues to be narrowly conceptualised as contributing only to primarily economic outcomes. It is important also that this project's findings do not, as the authors of *Te Kawai Ora*

point out, simply become "a new way to create a 'one size fits all; approach ... a normative new orthodoxy" (Māori Adult Literacy Reference Group 2001:16). The danger of this is real, as Cook-Gumperz points out (1986:7) *It is in the nature of literacy to have this dual character, prescriptive and instrumental, and research on the topic must always take this into account.* This project therefore attempts to sit between the 'prescriptive' and 'instrumental', taking strength from the voices of those participating, to hold this space open for constructive dialogue.

The PSAPiA project team now invite you to respond to and build on these findings and contribute to the attainment of success by Pasifika peoples as Pasifika in Aotearoa New Zealand and leave you with the following quote from critical literacy and pedagogy theorist Henry Giroux:

**"... to be literate is not to be free, it is to be present and active in the struggle for reclaiming one's voice, history and future ..."**  
(Giroux, 1987:11)





# Appendix 1

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**Themes and specific exemplars discussed in Pasifika participant contributions**

<p><b>New Zealand mainstream skill bases</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reading and writing ability in English</li> <li>- Speaking, listening and appropriate spoken skill ability in English and Pacific heritage language/s in multiple cultural contexts</li> <li>- Thinking skills</li> <li>- Numeracy skills</li> <li>- Digital and information literacy</li> </ul>
<p><b>New Zealand mainstream knowledge bases</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Historical and socio-political heritage of nation/s and region</li> <li>- Knowledge of civic and governmental systems and processes</li> <li>- Participation in decision-making</li> <li>- Accessing services and information</li> <li>- Workplace knowledge</li> <li>- Economy, money, finances</li> <li>- Religion/spirituality</li> <li>- Western/New Zealand 'collective knowledge and experience'</li> <li>- Continuing formal and informal education</li> </ul>
<p><b>New Zealand mainstream values bases</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Societal moral and ethical value systems</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pasifika skills bases</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reading, writing ability in Pacific heritage language/s</li> <li>- Speaking, listening and appropriate spoken skill ability in English and Pacific heritage language/s in multiple cultural contexts</li> <li>- Ability to read, understand, and respond appropriately to both verbal and non-verbal communication in a variety of cultural contexts</li> <li>- Pacific linguistic heritage</li> <li>- Ability to exchange views, articulate, debate, consult, discuss (in mainstream consultation/discussion forums as well as cultural forums, such as the kava/ava ceremony)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pasifika knowledge bases</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pasifika cultural artefacts, symbols and ideographs (character/symbol representing an idea/thing)</li> <li>- Teaching and learning, intergenerational learning</li> <li>- Physical environment, food, health and wellbeing</li> <li>- Communal wealth distribution, entitlements</li> <li>- History and genealogy of nation/s and region, families and tribes/clans</li> <li>- Traditional culture and protocols</li> <li>- Self, family, community social relations</li> <li>- Conceptions of leadership</li> <li>- Pacific heritage 'collective knowledge and experience'</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pasifika values bases</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understanding and acting in accordance with family/society cultural values and belief systems</li> <li>- Strength in personal identity and ability to encourage this in others</li> <li>- Confidence/resilience, flexibility, ability to move competently between cultural worlds</li> <li>- Pasifika cultural values</li> <li>- Knowledge of appropriate ways of being and doing according to context/situation</li> <li>- Commitment to service and betterment of family and wider community/ies</li> </ul>
<p><b>Multiple culture skill bases</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Awareness of and respect for skill bases of other cultures</li> </ul>
<p><b>Multiple culture knowledge bases</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Awareness of and respect for knowledge bases of other cultures</li> </ul>
<p><b>Multiple culture values bases</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Awareness of and respect for the values and personal qualities/characteristics valued in other cultures</li> </ul>

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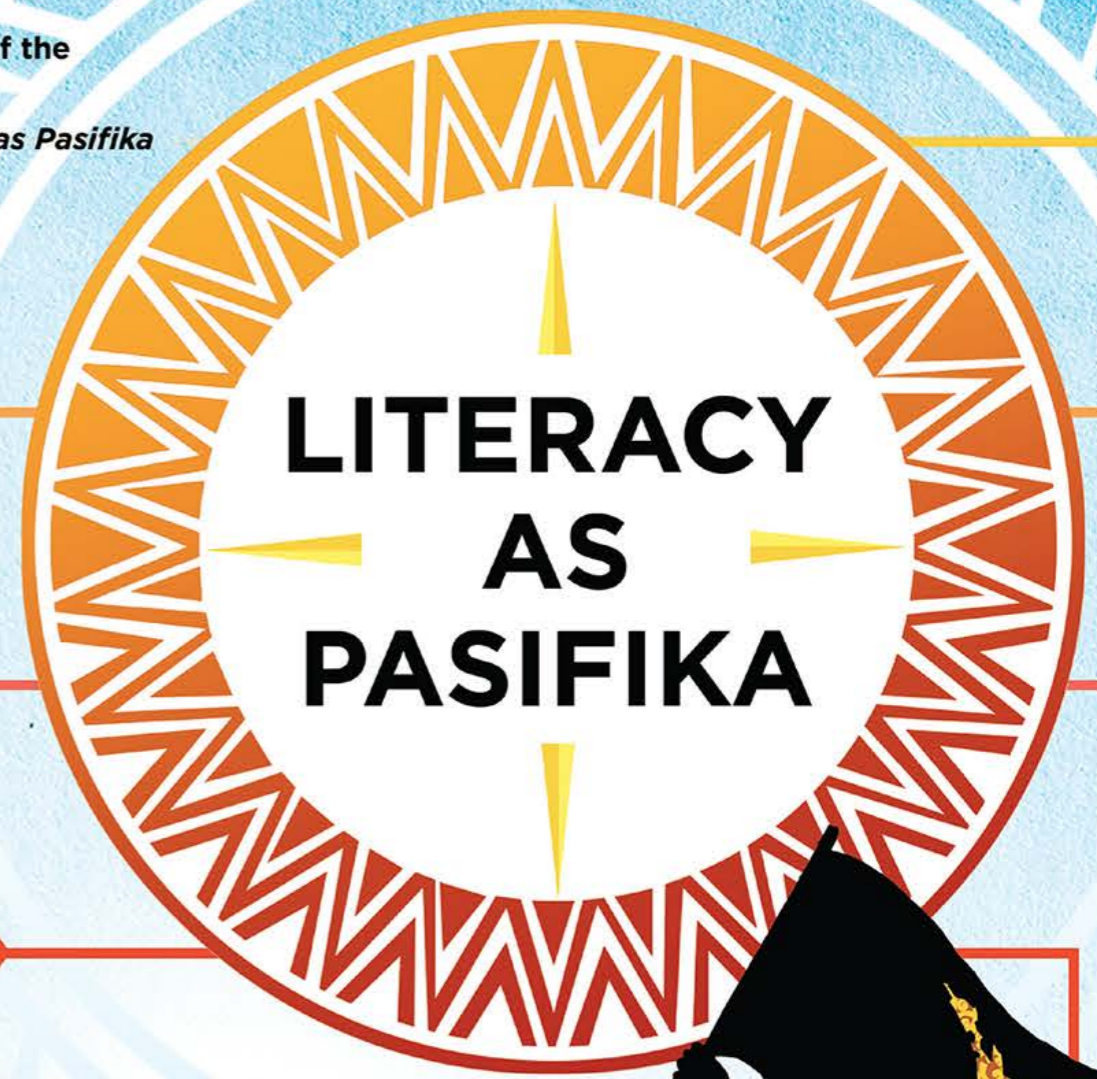
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This is a visual representation of the findings of the  
*Pasifika Success as Pasifika,*  
*Pasifika Conceptualisations of Literacy for Success as Pasifika*  
*in Aotearoa New Zealand* research.



**1. Reading and Writing**  
i.e. the skills to read and write in English, and, to speak, read and write one's own Pacific heritage language/s to a high level of proficiency

**2. Oral and Non-verbal Communication**  
i.e. skills in oration, and expressing one's self well; ability to read non-verbal communication, understand it, and respond appropriately

**3. Strength in Identity**  
i.e. knowledge of one's Pacific cultural heritage, knowing one's history and genealogy, and personal and collective identity; knowledge of and respect for other cultures within Aotearoa New Zealand

**4. Possessing and living out a shared Pasifika Values Base**  
i.e. possession of and understanding of Pasifika values, principles, and beliefs; possessing the knowledge of ways of doing and being appropriate to both one's Pacific heritage/s and the New Zealand context; understanding and fulfilling obligations and responsibilities to self and family

**5. The Arts**  
i.e. having the ability to produce and read cultural designs, patterns, and art forms, with understanding

**6. Digital and Information Technology**  
i.e. understanding the benefits of and utilising digital/information technology knowledge



Literacy is a socio-cultural practice - it is shaped by the cultures, languages, histories, societies and identities of the people who use it. Our understanding of literacy also develops over time, because people change (i.e. they migrate, they re-shape their language, knowledge, values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour as they interact with people from different cultures). Technology and the world around us changes too; new technology is developed, and our lives are affected by globalisation.



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