Valuing, growing and retaining Pacific leaders and teachers

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ABSTRACT

The Ministry of Education document *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030* is a government commitment to transform outcomes for Pacific learners and their families. Key Shift 5 of this Action Plan focuses on valuing, growing, and retaining "teachers, leaders, and educational professionals with diverse Pacific heritages" (Ministry of Education, 2020a, p. 38). This professional inquiry explored what Key Shift 5 looks like within the Resource Teaching service. A literature review examined ethnic minority leadership in education, specifically looking at the enablers and barriers. The Pacific research method, talanoa, was used to give voice to the lived experiences of four ex-Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB). Findings from this inquiry acknowledge the misrepresentation of Pacific at decision making spaces and highlight benefits and advantages Pacific RTLB bring to their roles. The importance of support from senior management was indicated by all participants as a key factor in valuing, growing, and retaining "teachers, leaders, and educational professionals with diverse Pacific heritages".

KEYWORDS
Pacific education, Pacific educational leadership, RTLB

Introduction

Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) are itinerant specialist teachers who work collaboratively with school staff and other agencies to support students and their families/caregivers who may have extra learning and behaviour needs (Ministry of Education, 2020b). RTLB work on individual, group, school, and groups of school cases as well as projects (e.g. Incredible Years Teacher Training programmes). There are approximately 1,000 RTLB working across 40 clusters. Out of that number, only 30 of those RTLB are of Pacific heritage.

As a Pacific RTLB working in Nga Manu Aroha Cluster 9, I am passionate about supporting Pacific Education. I belong to various Pacific focused professional groups and led the Cultural Diversity Community of Practice team for our Cluster in 2021. One of my responsibilities, as team leader, was

to facilitate professional development for our cluster around the relatively new Ministry of Education document, *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030*. Key Shift 5 of the Action Plan focuses on developing Pacific educational leaders and teachers.

Cluster 9 consists of thirty schools in the Mangere and Otahuhu suburbs of South Auckland. In the July 2021 school roll returns, it indicated that Mangere and Otahuhu schools had 9,384 Pacific students, 2,853 Māori students, 1,870 Asian students and 1,013 European/Pākehā students. Although Mangere and Otahuhu suburbs have a high proportion of Pacific students, this does not seem to be reflected in the number of Pacific teachers and leaders in the area.

Being a New Zealand-born Samoan strongly influences my position as a researcher. It is only since becoming a Resource Teacher, that I have had the opportunity to look back on cultural values and beliefs of my upbringing and reflect on how they impact my point-of-view and the way I work as a RTLB. In my time as RTLB, I have observed capable Pacific colleagues getting passed over for leadership positions. I have seen Pacific colleagues leave the resource teaching service to move to other roles where they reported feeling better supported and valued. There was no apparent literature on the RTLB service and Pacific educational leadership.

This inquiry has given me opportunity to explore how Pacific RTLB are being valued, grown, and retained. My specific and answerable research question that has met the overall aims of my inquiry is: What are the perceived enablers and barriers experienced by Pacific resource teachers moving into leadership roles?

Literature review

Pacific education in Aotearoa New Zealand is a contentious issue and faces many challenges (Chu, 2018). Although Pacific peoples are one of the larger ethnic groups in New Zealand, representation is not reflected in the leadership of our schools or Learning Support more broadly. This literature review explored misrepresentation as well as the benefits and advantages that educators and leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds bring to their role and enablers and barriers for Pacific educational leadership.

Less representation and less satisfaction

In Aotearoa New Zealand and other overseas countries, there is a disproportionately small number of teachers and leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds to the number of students in the communities they serve (Cardno & Auva'a, 2010; Harris et al., 2003; Hattori, 2016; Sanchez et al., 2008; Van Vooren, 2022). Research from the United States showed that the greatest leadership representation gap is experienced by Black and Hispanic learners. Students in this study were less likely to encounter a principal from their own ethnic background, compared to their white peers (Grissom et al., 2021, as cited in Van Vooren, 2022) and this is likely the case in Aotearoa New Zealand as well.

Research indicated that there are issues around encouraging and retaining teachers and emerging leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds (Van Vooren, 2022). Such teachers and leaders were not as satisfied as their white counterparts and were more likely to leave the profession within five years. Assistant and deputy principals from ethnic minority background in the United Kingdom reported that they were required to work harder with no allowance for making mistakes (Ross et al., 2003, as cited in Harris et al., 2003).

Benefits and advantages

Leadership has been linked to school effectiveness and improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998, as cited in Harris et al., 2003). In addition to their experience and disposition, leaders understand the many contexts of their school students, families, and communities (Van Vooren, 2022). Other research shows that teachers and leaders from the same ethnic background as their students can positively impact the achievement of their students (Demie, 2019; Sanchez et al., 2008; Singer et al., 1998, as cited in Harris et al., 2003).

For Pacific communities in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is important to have "teachers and leaders who can easily relate to and empathise with diverse Pacific learners" (Ministry of Education, 2020a, p. 38). This is similar to teachers and leaders from English black and minority ethnic groups overseas, who show "far more empathy for minority groups than their white counterparts" (Bush et al., 2004, as cited in Cardno & Auva'a, p. 88).

Teachers and leaders from ethnic minority groups bring their rich cultural heritage to their working context. They act as role models and display a wider range of career and educational choices (Airini, 2010; McKenley & Gordon, 2002, as cited in Cardno & Auva'a, 2010). Aotearoa New Zealand research reports that Pacific young people are more motivated to succeed when they see people from their culture in leadership (Maiava-Zajkowski, 2021).

Enablers to valuing, growing and retaining Pacific educators

There are significant factors that can encourage, support, and retain teachers and leaders from minority ethnic group backgrounds. These factors include tailored professional development (Cardno & Auva'a, 2010; Hattori, 2016; Maiava-Zajkowski, 2021), succession planning and leadership training (Brown, 2019; Cardno & Auva'a, 2010; Faletutulu, 2017; Harris et al., 2003), role models (Airini, 2010; Brown, 2019; Faletutulu, 2017; Maiava-Zajkowski, 2021; Sanchez et al., 2008; Van Vooren, 2022), nurturing leadership attributes (Airini, 2010), opportunities to network and having supportive networks (Brown, 2019; Ruru et al., 2013; Van Vooren, 2022), and mentorship (Brown, 2019; Chu, 2018; Faletutulu, 2017; Van Vooren, 2022).

Succession planning or providing a pathway to leadership is the intentional effort of an organisation to "identify, develop and retain individuals" (Cardno & Auva'a, 2010, p. 89). A study in Australian Catholic schools showed that "organised, targeted succession planning" significantly prepares aspiring leaders for their roles (Pyke, 2002, as cited in Cardno & Auva'a, 2010, p. 90). Effective professional and leadership development training for ethnic minority groups needs to be tailored to suit the specific needs and approaches for that group (Cardno & Auva'a, 2010; Harris et al., 2003; Van

Vooren, 2022). It is essential that leadership training programmes promote the values and customs of both the dominant group as well as the minority groups represented (Hattori, 2016). Hattori (2016) goes on to say that it is important for a Pacific person to develop competence as a 'authentic' leader by "identifying, articulating and practicing" their culture (p. 1) and aligning values with actions.

Airini (2010) reports that certain personal attributes can contribute to effective leadership. These include, "stamina not to give up, preference to be in leadership roles, recognised desire, and skill to motivate others, confidence and ability to attempt something new, a sense of peace and assurance" (p. 11). Cardno & Auva'a (2010) found that self-confidence was important to apply for leadership positions, do further study and develop leadership skills and believe in their own ability to perform in the role.

Support networks and systems are important for Pacific teachers and aspiring leaders. These include Christian faith, the church community, wider community, and family and friends (Brown, 2019; Cardno & Auva'a, 2010).

Barriers to valuing, growing and retaining Pacific educators

Research shows that there are significant barriers for teachers and leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds (Cardno & Auva'a, 2010; McKenley and Gordon, 2002, as cited in Cardno & Auva'a, 2010). Ethnicity, itself, can be a barrier (Cardno & Auva'a, 2010). Racism is an ongoing issue (Cardno & Auva'a, 2010; Maiava-Zajkowski, 2021; Sanchez et al., 2008; Van Vooren, 2022) and may contribute to the low recruitment rates, limited support, networking and available mentorship in workplaces (Cardno & Auva'a, 2010; Harris et al., 2003; Maiava-Zajkowski, 2021; Sanchez et al., 2008; Van Vooren, 2022).

Certain ethnic customs and ways of doing things can act as a barrier in a society dominated by Western ways of knowing and doing (Cardno & Auva'a, 2010). Pacific ways, for example, do not support ambition and self-promotion; Pacific people value humility and service to others, and find it difficult to 'boast' about their achievements and successes. They can be reluctant to speak out about their concerns and things that are not working well, which has been termed the 'silent voice' by Auva'a (2008) and McKenley and Gordon (2002, as cited in Cardno & Auva'a, 2010).

Aotearoa New Zealand evidence shows that Pacific people are significantly disadvantaged when it comes to career opportunities, recognition and renumeration. At the recruitment stage, employers will hire those "in their own image" (Rivera, 2012, as cited in Maiava-Zajkowski, 2021, p. 8). Pacific people find it difficult to progress into higher roles and as a result, their voices are not represented or heard at decision making levels (Tupou, 2011, as cited in Maiava-Zajkowski, 2021). Occupational discrimination in the education sector not only exists in New Zealand but in other countries. Overseas literature reports 'ghettoization' of job opportunities where educational leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds are only able to attain jobs from areas of high dense ethnic minority student population (Quicho & Rios, 2000, as cited in Harris et al., 2003).

Limited support from senior management is a barrier for ethnic minority leaders. McKenley and Gordon (2002) found the achievements of aspiring ethnic minority leaders "were not recognised by

colleagues and authorities" and in some cases, "professionally abused and attached" (as cited in Cardno & Auva'a, 2010, p. 88). On the flip side, teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to stay in the profession if they are supported by senior management (Harris et al., 2003). Candidates for leadership positions are more confident if senior leadership support the process and show belief in their skills (Van Vooren, 2022, pp. 9-10).

This literature review provided an overview of the different factors that impacted ethnic minority educational leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas. There is limited research on Pacific leadership and no research around ethnic minority leadership in the specialist teaching service. My inquiry proposed to discover what supports leadership for Pacific resource teachers.

Methodology

The methodology used for this inquiry includes a description of the research design and data gathering methods, participants, data analysis and ethical considerations.

Research design and data gathering methods

The focus for my inquiry was on Pacific educators and leaders. For Pacific people, the preferred way to gather information is face-to-face (Anae, 2010). I selected the qualitative Pacific research methodologies *talanoa* (Vaioleti, 2003, 2006) and *teu le va* (Airini et al., 2010).

Talanoa consists of open, informal discussion whereby participants share their stories and experiences. It is widely supported by Pacific people as a trustworthy and appropriate way to do research (Vaioleti, 2006). Pacific people feel like they are more meaningfully engaged in the research process, and they feel safe to share their stories (Otuhuku & Apo, 2011, as cited in Faletutulu, 2017). This method of data gathering provides a culturally appropriate setting where the researcher and participants can converse about whatever is pertinent to them.

Teu le va is a Samoan expression which refers to the cherishing and nurturing of the relationship space between the researcher and the participant (Wendt, 1999, as cited in Faletutulu, 2017). Time was taken at the beginning of the session to set up an environment of respect and trust. The researcher also intentionally made time to establish a mutual understanding of the importance of the research topic to the researcher as a Pacific person, to the participants as Pacific educators, and to the future education of Pacific students and their families. The researcher entered each talanoa session with a deep sense of gratitude and respect for the participant and his/her shared stories and imparted wisdom.

Both methodologies are appropriate for researching Pacific issues and acknowledged the significance of building and maintaining positive relationships between the researchers and the participants.

Participants

The participants were required to satisfy three criteria: 1) Have Pacific heritage background, 2) Have worked as a Resource Teacher for three years or more, and 3) Have held a leadership position. To

recruit these participants, the snowball sampling technique was employed. Lead members of the Pacific RTLB group (*Tautai Toa*) were asked to send out an information sheet and researcher contact details to people they thought might qualify according to the criteria.

Four responses from ex-RTLB were received by the researcher. One participant had been an RTLB for twenty years and the other three participants had been RTLB for approximately 7 years. The participants represented the Pacific nations of Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Fiji and Niue. Three of the four participants were female. In addition to that, three were New Zealand born and the fourth participant was born in the islands and moved to New Zealand for schooling.

Data analysis

Because *talanoa* is essentially the sharing of one's stories and experiences, a narrative method of analysis was used. Menter et al. (2011) state that "writing up qualitative data is strongly influenced by narrative forms of writing" and that "there is every reason to make your writing enjoyable for the reader" (p. 222). The spoken words of participants were used when reporting the findings. The lived stories and experiences of the participants were meaningful and appropriate for the purposes of this inquiry (Silverman, 2013, as cited in Brown, 2019). These shared stories add to the gaps in literature on Pacific educational leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand, specifically in specialist teaching.

Each *talanoa* ranged from 50 to 80 minutes. A list of prompts was sent to the participants before the session to enable prior reflection. Although *talanoa* allows participants to take the lead, the researcher used the prompt questions to guide the *talanoa* and keep it aligned with the topic. The sessions were recorded (after permission was gained from the participants), transcribed and thematically analysed based on the research question and literature reviewed.

Ethical considerations

An ethics approval for this professional inquiry was obtained by successfully completing a Massey University low risk ethics application. Preserving anonymity of participants was carefully considered. Steps to mitigate this included removing any personal or identifying information from the transcripts.

Results

For this section, the findings of the inquiry, including the key themes that were identified (see Table 1), are examined in accordance with the research question:

- What are the perceived enablers and barriers experienced by Pacific RTLB moving into leadership roles?

Table 1. Overall summary of themes and sub-themes of the findings

Misrepresentation	
Strengths and advantages	
Enablers	Barriers and challenges
Appointment process support	Ethnicity
Support from senior management	Racism
Meeting with other Pacific RTLB for support	Lack of succession planning
Professional development	Lack of support from leadership

Theme 1: Misrepresentation

Participants in this inquiry agreed that there is limited representation of Pacific leaders in education. Pacific educators are being underrepresented at the leadership level and decision-making tables which limits opportunities for Pacific voice to be heard, especially pertaining to Pacific matters. Participants suggested that because of the lack of Pacific voice at these decision-making spaces, systemic changes to improve outcomes for Pacific learners are limited.

> There needs to be opportunities for Pacific RTLB to sit at decision making tables and to bring their perspective because if we really want change for our schools and our kids in schools, that must be part and parcel of it. (Participant B)

Theme 2: Strengths and advantages of Pacific educators

There was a consensus across the four participants that the rich Pacific heritage Pacific educators bring to their role, is a strength and advantage.

> We bring a certain lens that no one else can bring … a different flavour to that space … different perspective to things … the language, the protocols and etiquettes and stuff. (Participant A)

Participants identified that Pacific leaders are humble and passionate about the Pacific communities they serve. There is a commitment to serve their community over and beyond what is expected. Pacific leaders can interpret situations in a Pacific way. They can understand the culture and heritage of the families they work with, the importance of *talanoa* and relationship building with their Pacific communities. They use this knowledge to connect with them, act as advocate and support person at meetings where most of the other people at those meetings are non-Pacific. One participant gave an example of when she was able to use her Pacific knowledge and understanding of the culture to support a parent.

> I built relationships with a mum to find out why she was not wanting to go to school (to discuss her child), invited her for coffee and a scone … I promised her that I would sit

beside her, and she can nudge, kick me under the table when she is uncomfortable with any questions fired at her. (Participant D)

In addition to the above strengths and advantages, participants identified that Pacific educators provide role models for their students and communities.

It's just so important that our kids see Pacific faces. … Leaders with Pacific values … knowledge that other people don't have … strengths, gifts. (Participant C)

Theme 3: Enablers

Support around the appointment process was an enabler for Pacific teachers to move into resource teaching positions. Participants shared experiences of school leaders, RTLB and other personnel encouraging and supporting them to apply for leadership positions.

Participants identified that supportive senior management was an important enabler for Pacific RTLB. Supportive senior management enabled their resource teachers to use their Pacific expertise and strengths in their role. There was a model of high trust and transparency. They provided opportunities to grow into other leadership roles.

They trusted me to do stuff … they asked for my opinion in team meetings. … They see us in our entirety, what we're good at and where we could add value … being proactive about growing us, you know into leaders … they saw our value. (Participant A)

Participants emphasised the importance for Pacific RTLB to meet and connect with other Pacific like-minded educators. Being part of such a support network enabled them to feel strengthened. One participant shared his experience of being part of the Pacific RTLB group called 'Tautai'.

I was the only PI (Pacific Island) RTLB in my cluster … there was a desire amongst a small number of PI RTLBs to connect in some way … that was the genesis of Tautai … the time to connect in terms of our relationship, to awhi and support. … We were allowed to be ourselves. … We come into those places and feel safe … feel valued and value each other. (Participant A)

Participants acknowledged the need for Pacific teachers and leaders to have access to professional development that would equip them with leadership knowledge and skills. Participant B suggested professional development around "behaviour, diverse learners, different learning styles, what works for Pacific and Māori students". She advised all teachers, Pacific and non-Pacific to "grab hold" of "any opportunities to learn" and be "self-reflective".

Theme 4: Barriers and challenges

Although not specifically stated as a barrier, participants referred to Pacific ways of doing things. It was as if their "quiet, behind-the scenes" working ethic (Participant A) was not putting them out there and promoting them for leadership roles.

A lot of us Pacific people sit at the back, we don't go to the front. For us to grow in leadership, somebody needs to see the service because you can't go into leadership, if you don't know how to serve, is my opinion. (Participant D)

Participants in this inquiry talked of their experiences of racism and racist assumptions. One participant spoke about being proud of doing work in the Pacific space but then finding it discouraging when non-Pacific colleagues subtly downplayed the work saying, "Oh, you're doing your Pacific thing".

Participants referred to Key Shift 2 of the *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030*, which calls for a commitment to "confront systemic racism and discrimination in education" (Ministry of Education, 2020a, p. 28). There were conflicting views around the effectiveness of this key shift in clusters. One participant saw the Action Plan as an effective way to "call it out, to stop racism" (Participant C), whereas Participant D saw Key Shift 2 as "holding people in government accountable but unfortunately, here in this cluster, it's not". She did not feel in a safe position in her cluster to dig deeply into Pacific documents. RTLB in her cluster were only touching the surface. Although the Action Plan was in its third year, they were still trying to create a safe relational space (*fofolo e fala*) and were not at the point where difficult conversations, such as racism, could be held.

As some of the participants recalled negative experiences as RTLB, they became quite emotional but were grateful for the opportunity to let off some steam.

Racism is real. It can be frustrating working in spaces where other people don't see the world as you see it or don't want to see it. (Participant A)

A perceived barrier for Pacific educators is lack of succession planning. One participant commented that Pacific teachers tended to get stuck in the classroom or middle management. There was not apparent pathway for them to move onto more leadership roles.

Participant D commented on the wording of Key Shift 5 of the Action Plan and recommended that it be changed from "Grow, retain and value" (Ministry of Education, 2020a, p. 38) to "Value, grow and retain". She went on to say that when you value and grow your Pacific teachers and leaders, you will retain them". Participants shared their experiences of observing Pacific RTLB not being valued by senior management and leaving the service feeling "disgruntled, disempowered and not having a say" (Participant A). One participant shared her feelings about not being supported by senior management.

I didn't feel valued as a Pacific expert within the cluster. I felt trapped, not being able to grow or to share my knowledge as a Pacific person and my knowledge of my community … a feeling of being suppressed. (Participant D)

Discussion

This inquiry has confirmed that there are factors which can support or act as barriers for valuing, growing and retaining Pacific RTLB. The findings aligned well with the four key themes that emerged from the research literature on ethnic minority leadership: misrepresentation, strengths and advantages, enablers, and barriers and challenges.

Misrepresentation

All four participants of this inquiry worked as RTLB in school communities with a high concentration of Pacific people. Woven throughout the responses of the participants, was the theme of misrepresentation at decision making spaces. Because participants were passionate about serving their Pacific communities and giving their Pacific communities a voice, they were concerned that, when it came to Pacific matters, Pacific voices were not being included and heard at the decision-making levels of the RTLB service.

Strengths and advantages

Participants of this inquiry all agreed that Pacific educators bring strengths and advantages to their role as RTLB. These strengths and advantages include their rich cultural heritage, passion and commitment to serve their Pacific communities, and an understanding and empathy for the Pacific students and their families (Bush et al., 2004, as cited in Cardno & Auva'a, 2010).

One participant commented on the importance of Pacific educators being role models for the Pacific school communities they worked in. Supporting literature states that such role models display a wider range of career and educational choices for students (Airini, 2010; McKenley & Gordon, 2002, as cited in Cardno & Auva'a, 2010) and students are more motivated to achieve and succeed when they see role models from similar ethnic backgrounds (Maiava-Zajkowski, 2021).

Enablers

Harris et al. (2003) found that teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to stay in the profession if supported by senior management. Van Vooren (2022) reports that candidates for leadership positions display more confidence if the senior leadership support the process and show belief in their skills. Unsurprisingly, the participants from this inquiry identified 'support from senior management' as being the key enabler for Pacific educators feeling valued and happy in their role. Actions from senior management that were perceived as being supportive included:

1. Trusting Pacific RTLB to do 'their stuff' (Participants A, B, C, D).
2. Building strong collaborative and consultative relationships with Pacific RTLB around things Pacific (Participants A, B, C, D).
3. Considering strengths of Pacific RTLB when allocating cases, e.g. culture, language, identity, sports, music, art (Participants A, B, C, D).
4. Recognising and acknowledging Pacific cultural knowledge of RTLB and supporting them to share knowledge and build capability of non-Pacific colleagues and school communities (Participants B, C, D).

5. Acknowledging and valuing the strong connections and knowledge that Pacific RTLB have with Pacific communities (Participants A, C, D).
6. Checking in with Pacific RTLB to see if they felt validated, valued and supported as Pacific people (Participants A, D).
7. Giving Pacific RTLB opportunity to challenge policies and systems around Pacific learners and issues (Participant B).

To grow, retain and value Pacific educators, the *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030* recommends that they "explore the possibilities of supporting and engaging with" (Ministry of Education, 2020a, p. 40) other Pacific educators. Participants in this study agreed that being part of a national Pacific RTLB group (*named Tautai*) was an enabler. Attending *Tautai* fono (meetings) provided opportunity for Pacific RTLB to share and grow their cultural knowledge and expertise, connect with likeminded educators, express themselves freely in an accepting and safe space, value and support others and feel valued and supported. A study of aspiring New Zealand Pacific principals also spoke of the value of having a forum where Pacific people work and learn together and are treated "uniquely as Pacific Islanders" (Cardno & Auva'a, 2010, p. 95).

Professional development was perceived as an enabler to support Pacific RTLB moving into more leadership roles. As suggested in the literature review, professional and leadership development training for ethnic minority groups needs to be tailored to suit the specific needs and approaches for that group (Cardno & Auva'a, 2010; Harris et al., 2003; Van Vooren, 2022). Pacific teachers and leaders who have self-confidence, willingness to do further study and develop leadership skills (Cardno & Auva'a, 2010) are better equipped to step into leadership.

Barriers and challenges

Just as there were enablers, participants in this inquiry shared their lived experiences around barriers and challenges as Pacific RTLB.

Although not specifically stated as a barrier by the participants, they referred to Pacific ways of doing things and inadvertently spoke of quietly working in the background and not pushing their own agenda. Research carried out by Cardno and Auva'a (2010) states things more forthrightly and refers to "ethnicity itself" (p. 96) being a barrier. Pacific values of service and humility can work against such things as ambition and self-aggrandisement which are often necessary to step into leadership positions.

Institutional racism and discrimination are familiar barriers for ethnic minority groups (Cardno & Auva'a, 2010; Maiava-Zajkowski, 2021; Sanchez et al., 2008; Van Vooren, 2022). Participants shared personal negative experiences and perceptions of racism and were grateful for Key Shift 2 of the *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030* (Ministry of Education, 2020a) because now, systemic racism and discrimination in education can be confronted. "I am so glad that our Action Plan actually calls it out, to stop racism" (Participant C). As stated in the literature review for this research project, such systemic racism may be a contributing factor to other perceived barriers and challenges. One participant commented on Pacific teachers getting stuck in middle management roles. New Zealand literature suggests that *all* Pacific people are significantly disadvantaged when it comes to career

opportunities, recognition and renumeration. At the recruitment stage, employers will hire those "in their own image" (Rivera, 2012, as cited in Maiava-Zajkowski, 2021, p. 8). Pacific people find it difficult to progress into higher roles and as a result, their voices are not represented or heard at decision making levels (Tupou, 2011, as cited in Maiava-Zajkowski, 2021).

Just as support from senior management was perceived as an enabler, absence of support was also perceived as a barrier. All the participants had seen a change of senior management in their time as RTLB and shared their perceived differences in senior management that were supportive of Pacific RTLB and the work they do and senior management that were not supportive. Actions that were deemed unsupportive by the participants in this study included:

1. Marginalising Pacific issues and neglecting to consult Pacific RTLB around Pacific matters at the leadership table (Participants A, B).
2. Lack of trust for Pacific RTLB doing Pacific work in the cluster (Participants A, B, C, D).
3. Not utilising cultural expertise, strengths, identity, and languages of Pacific RTLB within the cluster (Participants A, B, C).
4. Resistance to systemic change around Pacific matters within the RTLB cluster (Participant B).
5. No succession plan to move Pacific RTLB into leadership roles (Participants B, C).

Conclusions and recommendations for future action

There is a small number of Pacific educators within the New Zealand RTLB service. The *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030* calls for a commitment to "grow, retain and value" competent Pacific teachers and leaders. What better way to explore what this key shift looks like within the RTLB service, than to listen to the lived experiences of Pacific ex-RTLB who have been in the service for more than three years and held leadership positions.

Findings from this inquiry acknowledge that there is concern about the lack of Pacific representation at decision making spaces of the RTLB service, especially in clusters with a high concentration of Pacific learners. Results from this inquiry acknowledge the strengths and advantages that Pacific RTLB bring to their role. Although there are barriers and challenges, the number one factor influencing Key Shift 5 in the RTLB service is support from senior management. Cluster managers and practice leaders are in the prime position to ensure that Pacific RTLB feel valued, grown and retained within the RTLB service. The participants of this inquiry have made recommendations:

1. Acknowledge the wealth of the cultural capability, capacity, and expertise that your Pacific RTLB bring to your cluster.
2. Provide opportunity for your Pacific RTLB to share their cultural capability, capacity, and expertise within the cluster and cluster schools.
3. Give opportunity for Pacific RTLB to input at decision making spaces around Pacific matters.
4. Encourage Pacific RTLB to attend 'safe cultural' forums where they meet, network, grow their Pacific capability and support one another (Tautai).

5.   Build leadership diversity in your cluster by encouraging, providing, and supporting opportunities for Pacific RTLB to be upskilled and to step up into leadership positions.

Future research could build on these ideas with more Pacific educators and from wider roles. To contribute to Pacific education in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is my hope that this article inspires educational leadership to "value, grow and retain" their Pacific educators.

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Violet is a New Zealand born Samoan Primary School teacher who grew up in Auckland and has taught in schools in New Zealand, Australia and the Solomon Islands. She has been an RTLB for 8 years and been based at Nga Manu Aroha, Cluster 9. Violet is passionate about Pacific Education and is an active member of the Pacific RTLB group named Tautai, which has been a great source of support, networking and growing cultural capability. She has just completed her Master of Specialist Teaching on a Pacific topic.

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