



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
TE TĀHUHU O TE MĀTAURANGA

**Creatives in Schools Programme**

# **Case study 1**

**Showcasing Pacific Performing Arts in  
Marlborough – a community response**

## Case Information

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Prepared by	Kellie Spee, Kellie Spee Consulting Limited Judy Oakden, Pragmatica Limited
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- support and participation from the Ministry project management team who provided access to the Creatives in Schools administrative databases and Milestone reporting
- photographs used in this report come from screenshots of videos or other Milestone reporting material provided to the Ministry of Education

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## Research team

Kellie Spee of Kellie Spee Consulting Limited lead in the development of the case studies. Judy Oakden of Pragmatica Limited held the contract for this project.

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## Disclaimer

We developed this report in good faith using the information available to us at the time. We provide it on the basis that the authors of the report are not liable to any person or organisation for any damage or loss which may occur from acting or not acting with respect to any information or advice within this report.



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## Background

The Creative in Schools Pacific Performing Arts Project responded to the creative needs of a growing Pacific community in Marlborough. It provided Pacific students with opportunities to acknowledge their identity, language and culture. In 2019 the Pacific Performing Arts pilot programme was implemented across five schools by Pacific creative practitioner TeVita Vaka<sup>1</sup>. The acceptance into the Creative in Schools programme was timely, providing an opportunity to extend and strengthen that pilot's early, encouraging outcomes and offer a positive, creative platform for more Pacific students and aiga.

## Objectives of the Pacific Performing Arts Project

The overall purposes of the project were to:

- enhance the mental wellbeing of students, providing a space where they could express themselves creatively and proudly as Pacific learners within their schools
- strengthen school practices to enhance Pacific connections within schools, and with parents, aiga, and community
- expand collaboration across the participating schools to support positive student connections
- develop an understanding of effective pedagogies for Pacific learners and to elevate and be more responsive to Pacific culture
- encourage parents, aiga, and whānau to participate, sharing cultural knowledge and expertise.

*I was hoping that [the students] would get a sense of confidence and be unashamed of their Pacific culture ... When I came here, I went through a process in that year or two – being confident with who I am here in Marlborough, because the Pacific community they are a minority. So, I felt like I was a minority. So, [this was a chance] for me to do something that goes against the grain. (Pacific Creative practitioner).*

## Research method

This case draws on interviews with, the lead teacher and Principal, the creative practitioner TeVita Vaka, and one parent between August and September 2020. It also incorporates feedback from the joint proposal, the Milestone One and Two reports and the video produced about the project, from where the images were obtained.

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<sup>1</sup> Referred to as the creative practitioner throughout the rest of the case study.

## The Project

The creative practitioner worked with eight schools in Marlborough, including Springlands Primary School, Blenheim Primary, Mayfield Primary, Redwoodtown School, St Marys School, Bohally Intermediate, Whitney Street School, and Renwick School. Students learned Pacific dance choreography and songs during the programme. Originally students planned to work towards performing in the Marlborough Polyfest. When this was cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the creative practitioner and the schools organised an event where students could share their learning. The schools invited parents, aiga and whānau to celebrate student success. Performances took place in each school and the wider community.

## From planning to implementation

Collaboration and partnership were at the heart of the project, from planning through to delivery. The first response to the Creative in Schools application came from a Pacific parent at Springlands School, who is also a kaiāwhina (teacher-aide), employed to support engagement with the school's Pacific community. The Pacific Community and the schools believe it is essential to improve students' opportunities to engage in Pacific identity, language and culture. In 2019, at Springlands School's parent consultation meetings, senior management heard children asking for more opportunities to take part in activities that reflected them as Pacific, their language, culture, and identity. The creative practitioner, a highly skilled and experienced Pacific performer, began working with Springlands School to action the learners' requests. At the time, he was also working with other primary and secondary schools in Marlborough teaching Pacific performing arts.



When Creative in Schools launched, it was a natural fit for Springlands to apply. The creative practitioner and the School saw an opportunity to build a stronger response to student need. The Springlands School principal, the creative practitioner and the parent kaiāwhina developed a draft plan. They then contacted other schools in the



Piritahi Kahui Ako/Community of Learning,<sup>2</sup> to gather their ideas. Many of them expressed interest in building the presence of Pacific language and culture in Marlborough.

*So we rang the other schools and said, “We’ve got an idea. This is what we want to do, what do you think?” and they all went, ‘Yeah that’s all good. You organise it.’ And then we got voice [their voice], as we’ve gone along... (Springlands School Principal).*

The creative practitioner worked across the schools, in collaboration with teachers, from Monday to Thursday, with 1.5 hours of contact time in each school. The schools selected both a timeslot, and the teachers and students to be part of the project. Each school decided to do something slightly different based on the number of Pacific learners and their needs. For example, in Springlands School the creative practitioner worked with one classroom of Pacific and non-Pacific learners. In contrast, in another school, he worked with just the Pacific learners. Also, the creative practitioner had 45 minutes of planning and liaison time with each school. This was time allocated to meet with the teachers involved, debrief and further develop workshops and performances. Each school had between one to three teachers or teacher aides learning alongside the students to strengthen the learning opportunities of students not directly involved in the project. These teachers were linked with classes who were not participating and would later do activities with their own students.

A critical success factor arose from the creative pivoting during the Covid-19 pandemic. When the creative practitioner could not meet with students face to face during lockdown, he produced some online videos. The schools shared these as a means to engage their students. This ensured the project met project timelines but importantly also meant a wider group had access to his teaching.



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<sup>2</sup> Piritahi Kahui Ako/Community of Learning is made up of 18 primary schools, 3 colleges, 6 kindergartens, 18 early childhood centres, and the Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLb service), and a tertiary provider NMIT (Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology); all working together to help children and young people achieve their full potential.

# Outcomes

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This next section describes ways the project met the intended outcomes of the Creatives in Schools programme.

## Students

Teachers, the creative practitioner and parents all observed that the project provided rich creative environments for learners (both Pacific and non-Pacific). Through this, it supported self-expression, creatively and culturally. The creative practitioner's leadership, Pacific knowledge and mana fostered a sense of cultural pride and belonging in the Pacific learners. One teacher noted when talking about one student, "It seems like he's been awakened to himself and who he is." Teachers saw Pacific students' confidence grow and that they embraced their Pacific identities as Samoan, Tonga, Fijian. The students began sharing their cultural knowledge and taking on leadership roles in the Pacific performing arts.

*He just loved it, it just really helped with his leadership skills, and he was just very proud... You know he's really stepped up and just wow, he's so proud, he's so proud as a Samoan as well. (Parent)*

Parents and aiga also expressed delight to see their children develop from shy and reserved to outgoing and assured during the project.

*I didn't even know that was in here; I would have never picked her to be a leader and lead that. I was shocked. (Parent)*



The project supported identity and belonging in the students. As reported in the final milestone report, Pacific children who had not previously been immersed in their Pacific culture learnt more about their history, culture and heritage. On the other hand, for Pacific children experiencing New Zealand schooling for the first time, the programme offered a culturally safe and familiar space to be themselves.

*This space makes me feel like I can be who I am. (Student)*

Students challenged themselves through learning new songs and dances, and through using different language, movement and cultural knowledge. For some students, this confidence as a learner extended into other classroom settings. Teachers noted some students were more positive and confident and that they engaged and contributed more in class.

*I think there's first of all shift for children. Like we have got one boy who you know had not, in our school, who had not made academic progress – [or] very, very limited [progress] and was... eight and was becoming difficult really. And now eighteen months on he's leading a Pasifika fono. And his academic has just shone hugely. And so you see the benefits not just because of the Creative [outcomes of the project], but because of the growth of the children. And then you can see that their raised status has a real influence on their learning. (Springlands School Principal)*



A Pacific parent noticed her son's enthusiasm for exploring his culture – incorporating Samoa into his work across all his subjects.

*...Like artwork and they have [the] technology he'd come home with like a pillowcase [and] his pillowcase was this armour plate on his pillowcase yeah. And when he does like, 'They do like 3D stuff', and it's you know Samoan everything. (Pacific Parent)*





The project celebrated diversity, often involving Pacific and non-Pacific learners, including Māori and Pākehā. This inclusive approach meant a greater range of students could learn about different ways of being and participating in their communities. The project's success was further enhanced when students and teachers not involved in the project asked to join.

*For us at our school we had one class come back, and the whole class learnt the songs from the videos. We had another class say, 'Can we all attend these sessions?' There were lots of things like that happened as a result, so it grew momentum really. (Springlands School Principal)*

## Creative practitioner

The creative practitioner said he gained much through the project, both personally and professionally. On a personal note, he felt encouraged that his role as a Pacific artist and the Pacific arts in general had an important and visible place in the community. Knowing that he had support throughout the project from schools, teachers, parents and learners was also reassuring.

*[As] an artist I do believe it's important, but I need that support. I need people who see that. I need people who will invest into it because that shows me that it is valuable, it is important you know so... I feel like I'm valuable, you know, like I feel like I am needed in this area and sector, in this field. (Pacific Creative practitioner)*

The creative practitioner reflected he also grew as a Pacific artist: "I love it, like it gave me an opportunity to express myself as a Pacific artist, you know, and a minority, you know." As his cultural understanding grew, he learnt new ways to engage with Pacific students. Through research and connecting with parents and the Pacific community, the creative practitioner, produced enjoyable and inclusive Pacific Arts workshops.

Throughout the Project, the creative practitioner increased his community profile as a Pacific artist. Through liaising with different stakeholders, including various schools and

the Ministry of Education, relationships developed and strengthened. As interest built in what the creative practitioner was delivering, other schools requested to be involved. Plans are underway to continue to develop the Pacific arts in schools throughout Marlborough.



## Teachers and kaiako

Teachers became more confident in designing and using Pacific culture, arts and heritage across the participating schools. Teachers started to ask more questions about Pacific culture and incorporate what they were learning into their classrooms. A particular example of this is where two teachers, through the online videos, learnt the Sasa dance, including its history and how it can tell stories. The teachers then asked the children to come up with movements to tell their story of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Learning alongside students, the teachers saw how learners responded positively to the creative environment. They began to use Pacific language and actions to support their classroom teaching. When trying to get students' attention, they would use the Samoan Sasa call, "Milimili, patia, lua pati and tulolo."

*So that's one huge thing that I saw was the staff really learning about it and then they're using it back in the classrooms. Some of these, to get the attention [of students] that they tried so many times, 'How do I get the attention of this class?' But it was just calling out the Sasa, or you know the dance beginning like pateā, clap, you know. So these [are] little things that they've taken into the classroom to help their learning. (Pacific Creative practitioner)*







## Parents, aiga and families

The project supported connections between school and parents by valuing and increasing Pacific culture profile in schools. As the relationship and understanding of one another grew, one Principal noted that Pacific parents were more confident to come in and see them.

An important part of the project was to show parents the value of arts and how their children can engage in creative arts and performing to succeed educationally. An important motivator for the creative practitioner was showing Pacific children and aiga that arts are a career pathway that is both possible and valuable. He considered it was critical for parents to get involved and sought their support and knowledge. As the project progressed, parents were proud and happy watching their children enjoy and embrace Pacific performing arts.

*No, just really happy that he got the opportunity to be part of it, because he's moving on so yeah. Just how great it is like I just can't say enough, praise it enough it's amazing. And the kids are just really, really lucky and blessed to have someone like Vita who's so passionate and very knowledgeable. (Pacific Parent)*



## Conclusions

The Pacific Performing Arts project has provided learners with a Pacific background and their families opportunities to contribute and take part in their communities as Pacific. Collaboration and partnership were the fundamental principles that supported successful outcomes for students, creatives, schools, and parents.







Ministry of Education  
PO Box 1666,  
Wellington 6140,  
New Zealand.  
[education.govt.nz](http://education.govt.nz)

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