

‘Lalaga Faatasi Aua Le Manuia Mo Taeao’ To Weave Together for the Success for Tomorrow

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ABSTRACT

Teacher educators have a very daunting task requiring currency in their discipline, curricular, policy and institutional imperatives as well as pedagogical and cultural issues. Tertiary institutions are facing increasing expectations to cater for and increase retention of underrepresented groups, whilst class sizes increase and face-to-face contact decreases. This paper outlines a case study of two lecturers (one European and one Pacific Island) who developed a successful partnership to raise student retention and achievement within a cohort of Pacific Islanders (an underrepresented group in all New Zealand universities). Key aspects which formed the foundation threads of this successful partnership are elaborated upon via the metaphor of weaving. Weaving is a very valuable and highly prized skill and art form amongst many indigenous groups including those of the Pacific Islands. Weaving in the Pacific Island context involves group work, with weavers supporting each other and sharing their expertise.

Keywords: Lecturer, Pacific Island, Partnership, Teacher Education, Technology Education, Tertiary Education

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper outlines an initiative to support under-represented learners in a tertiary institution. Widespread consensus is evident among educationalists in New Zealand, that culturally responsive pedagogies are important to support learning, but the focus of research in this area has been primarily on Māori (indigenous

people of New Zealand) rather than those from the neighbouring Pacific Islands (Chu, Glasgow, Rimoni, Hodis, & Meyer, 2013, p.2). This paper identifies strategies which were developed to support a cohort of Pacific Island tertiary students.

The title of this paper is derived from a joint experience of two Early Childhood Technology Education lecturers. Whilst at a conference in

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Samoa, they both watched the weaving of an *ie toga* (Samoan fine mat). Within most cultures of the Pacific these fine mats are considered delicate treasured items. Their creation is an art-form involving considerable skill particular to each culture (Schoeffel, 1999). There are many values and beliefs that are versed in the history of '*lalaga*'-weaving. As a carpenter is resourced with tools, it is in the crafting and use of traditional technologies, values and beliefs where the process begins. At the time of its creation often weavers do not know the intended use of the *ie tonga*, but rather they believe "there will come a time that the 'treasure' will be gifted to those in need".

The phrase *Lalaga faatasi aua le manuia mo taeao* (to weave together for the success for tomorrow) was selected as an appropriate metaphor for this paper. It acknowledges the joint effort of the two lecturers in their support of a cohort of student teachers. This process took time, space and effective content building; both lecturers brought different perspectives which were woven effectively to uphold the *mana* (respect) and integrity of learning and teaching.

Weaving in the Pacific Island context is the product of group work. Through conversation, each weaver supports the other, utilising their expertise and enriching each other (Gay, 2000; Shulman, 2005). At times, one weaver becomes the student, the other the teacher and later these roles are reversed. Learning is shared through the diverse cultural perspectives, similar to the concept of *ako* in Maori education ideology. Maori are the indigenous people of New Zealand (NZ) and comprise 15 percent of the population (approximately 600,000 people) (Statistics New Zealand 2014). The term *ako* means both to teach and to learn and was articulated in literature in 1983, after anthropologist Joan Metge carried out a three-year

research project on the teaching and learning processes preferred by Maori. Metge found that Western education theory and the English language make "clear-cut" distinctions between both teaching and learning and the teacher and learner roles. The Maori language uses the word *ako* to mean both to learn and to teach. Metge concluded that the notion of *ako* stresses "the unified co-operation of learner and teacher in a single enterprise" (Metge, 1983, p.2). The two lecturers in the case study adopted this approach in the teaching of a course in Early Childhood Technology Education.

2. BACKGROUND

The term 'Pasifika' is used throughout this paper when referring to people of Pacific Island origin. It is important to note that the term 'Pasifika communities' refers to such people born in New Zealand as well as those from Pacific nations including; Niue, Tonga, Samoa, Cook Islands, Fiji, Tokelau and Tuvalu (Dreaver, 2009; Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). Pasifika language and culture are different. However, there are some similarities in cultural protocols and ways of doing things. In the early 1960s many families from Pasifika nations emigrated from their homelands to Aotearoa New Zealand. In the 21st century language maintenance, cultural values and belief systems are still upheld especially within the home context (Tuafuti, 2010).

Between the 1991 and the 2006 censuses there was a 54% increase in Pacific Islanders living in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2001, 2007). Of the 265,974 Pacific Islanders who lived in New Zealand in 2006, nearly two-thirds (67%) lived in the largest city, Auckland (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). With only a little over 1000 children receiving early childhood education (ECE) in a Pacific Island language

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