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## Re-examining the ‘culture of silence’ through peer-based Pasifika pedagogies in a New Zealand tertiary environment

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### ABSTRACT

This paper draws on a study that examined the experiences of four high-achieving Pasifika physiotherapy degree level students to identify factors contributing to their success. As peer students, they identified five approaches that assisted them to become high achievers within the tertiary environment. This paper refers specifically to these approaches as peer-based Pasifika pedagogies (PbPP) and broadly as culturally responsive practices. The aim of this paper is to examine how Pasifika pedagogies, such as PbPP provide culturally responsive practices that can address the ‘culture of silence’ while promoting the vā relationality, the cultural nuances and norms of their worldview as well as aligning it with modern pedagogies or tools to enhance success among Pasifika students in the New Zealand tertiary education context.

### KEYWORDS

Culture of silence; New Zealand tertiary education; peer-based Pasifika pedagogies; vā relationality

## Introduction

Indigenous researchers in the twenty-first century have argued that acknowledging what non-traditional students have to say about what works best for them is more important than ever (Boon-Nanai, Ponton, Haxell, & Rasheed, 2017; Manuel et al., 2014; Siopé, 2011). For many centuries, tertiary institutions have perpetuated what Freire (1993) argues the ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’ by adopting Eurocentric traditions structured in Western-oriented way of learning and teaching. The New Zealand university environments are no exception. Consequently, students who are a minority in these educational landscapes have received challenging achievement outcomes (Boon-Nanai et al., 2017; Nabobo-Baba, 2008). Often, Pasifika students’ way of learning and silent behaviours have been misconstrued, misunderstood, and socially constructed as passive learners, therefore, stigmatised as marginal, low achievers, or underachievers (Airini, Brown et al., 2010; Benseman, Coxon, Anderson, & Anae, 2006). The aim of this paper is to examine how Pasifika pedagogies, such as PbPP provide culturally responsive practices that can address this ‘culture of silence’. This paper draws on a study that examined the experiences of four high-achieving Pasifika physiotherapy degree level students to identify factors

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contributing to their success. As peer students, they identified approaches that assisted them to become high achievers within the tertiary environment. Before proceeding, it is important to clarify Pasifika and Pacific as these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, depending on its context and purpose of usage.

## Pasifika vs Pacific

Re-examining the culture of silence requires this study to orient and position itself from a Pasifika paradigm. It disrupts the Western notion that our Pasifika students are silent and passive learners. The Ministry of Education (2019) claims that more evidence of best practices by Pasifika, for Pasifika, and with Pasifika students and scholars needs documentation to inform institutions that these are strength-based models that can be promoted and resourced to promote Pasifika success. Pasifika is a collective term representing those of Pacific heritages and ancestry from Tonga, Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue, Tuvalu, Tokelau, and recently Fiji who have migrated and been born in Aotearoa New Zealand. The term Pasifika embraced in this study has been acknowledged in previous research undertaken by Pasifika scholars like Airini, Brown et al. (2010), Penn (2010), Siopoe (2011), Burnett (2012), Ponton (2017), and Boon-Nanai et al. (2017) who are people with world views who possess diverse cultural identities, languages, knowledge, skills, and values who may be monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual as noted in the Pasifika Education Plan 2008–2012 (Ministry of Education, 2017). Such ministry documents stipulate that such a view is pivotal to use in our research to realise our vision for Pasifika learners (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Pasifika people are the fourth largest group residing in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2018). Their worldview, culture, and language are still thriving, and attention has shifted to include their knowledge, as well as their way of thinking, learning, even appreciating their relational values in curriculum development and pedagogies to interrupt traditional educational practices that have been predominantly Eurocentric. In this sense, the government's new Pasifika Education Plan 2020–2030 for tertiary education not only focuses on participation and achievement but also best practices that can enhance retention and completion of university Pasifika students (Ministry of Education, 2019). To make a difference, tertiary institutions must tailor pedagogies to promote Pasifika learning and teaching while improving success and achievement rates. Hence, the need to continue the conversations in identifying evidence-based procedures that Pasifika students deemed strength-based. This paper employs the term 'Pasifika' as opposed to Pacific. Pacific implies a label of convenience of the 'cultural groups of the South Pacific from the prevailing New Zealand European perspective' (Manu'atu, 2009, p. 174).

## Culture of silence from the Pasifika relational context

Peer-based Pasifika pedagogies (PbPP) are described here as strategies of academic survival. While staff have noted that most Pasifika students within the clinical courses were quiet, if not silent, it becomes important to consider such silence and silencing inside a socio-political and cultural perspective. Silence is a political and socio-cultural construct. An old Latin adage *qui tacet consentire videtur* has a legal translation 'silence

equals consent' (Boles, 2008). Within the higher education context of the courses these students were enrolled in, consideration is given to silence as not being consent. Nor is this silence an absence of voice. A form of respect functions that disallow young Pasifika people particularly from questioning those perceived as having authority, within academia this is enacted as limiting progression as critical questioning remains unpractised. This paper argues that such spiral of silence philosophy needs to be critically re-examined from a socio-cultural lens within an educational context for minority students, particularly Pasifika ones.

Being silent has cultural implications. Silence in an educational setting has epistemological constructions and ontological realities that can only be explained from an intercultural viewpoint of the *vā* relationality (Lee Hang, 2011; Ratubulewa, 2012; Tuafuti, 2010). '*Vā* is the space between, the between-ness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All' (Wendt, 1999, p. 402).

Knowing one's place in this *vā* relational space is common throughout many Polynesian settings. To understand this notion is to reflect on the epistemological underpinning and ontological standpoint of how Pasifika students are brought up within the home environments or those of their parents within a diasporic community. Jane and Ritchie (1983) attributed this behaviour to child rearing practices of Pacific societies. Samoan youth are expected to listen when elders or those with seniority are present. With such an oratory tradition, knowledge is not something that everyone has an automatic right to; it is restricted because it is associated with authority and privilege (Ochs, 1988). As a young person, knowing your place physically in a spatial context shows respect, manifested in where you sit, how you lower yourself when talking to elders and those with seniority. In Tongan society, one must *tauhi vā*, that is, maintain the relational sacred spaces. You reply when you are spoken to, and you talk with formality to your seniors. There is a Samoan saying that *e iloa le Samoa i lana tu, amio, ma ana aga* – *you can tell Samoan by how they carry themselves, their behaviour, mannerisms, how they talk*. This is a decorum of appropriate, demure, and polite behaviour that influences the culture of silence.

Although Pasifika peoples have their own identity, language, and practices, they share a relational commonality in the conceptualisation of the word *vā*. Similarly, in Hawaii, Māori, and Fiji, the *vā* is referred to as *wā* (Boon-Nanai et al., 2017). Dialogic analysis of this concept by Tuagalu (2008) identified three social relationships pertinent to this discussion: the notion of *vā tapuia* (sacred relations), *vā fa'aaloalo* (respectful relations), and the *vā fealoaloa'i* (respectful neighbouring space) (p. 108). Bringing forward a more culturally respectful lens, this points to silence as a relational way of being, respectful of sacred boundaries, and that holding such boundaries is integral to nurturing and maintaining harmonious connections. According to Tuafuti (2010) this relational experience is also manifested within the decision-making process when elderly people are present in a meeting house. It is 'knowing when to speak and when not to' and young people are acting respectfully – to maintain the *vā fealoaloa'i* – within their social, political, and environmental contexts. This is a way of being that is evident across Polynesian, Melanesian, and Micronesian cultures (Tuafuti, 2010, p. 1).

Harmonising social relations through being silent can be understood through examining the Pacific worldview (Fairbairn-Dunlop, Nanai, & Ahio, 2014). Relational social spaces arise from the epistemological and metaphysical foundations of the spiritual, cultural, physical, social and environmental elements that are the basis of Pasifika knowledge, values, and beliefs guiding certain behaviour and practices (Boon-Nanai et al., 2017). The harmonious links between these elements are encapsulated within the Pasifika worldview (Ponton, 2017). This worldview posits that the cosmos, land, and people are sacred and genealogically related through the relational connections including the *vā fa'aaloalo* (respectful relations) between these domains (Tupua, 2007). This is determined by sacred understandings that balance power within *vā tapuia* (sacred relations). Therefore, one must nurture (*tauhi vā*) and maintain (*teu-le-vā*) through *vā fealofani*, harmonious relations when this knowledge is distributed. For example, when elders share their knowledge, younger adults must maintain the integrity of the process by being silent and listening. It is the time when knowledge is transferred. This interaction involves the exchange and sharing of two cultural paradigms where the elders empower the young ones with the gift of knowledge.

Reiterating the Pasifika students' perspective, harmonising the relational *vā* social spaces context within the western education system will remain a challenge for most Pasifika students. For instance, from the perspective of a Samoan who has a lived experience in a New Zealand tertiary setting, a normalised silent behaviour is observed from the way the missionaries through Western religion teaching and learning were imposed on them, between their parents and many generations beforehand. For example:

The fact that we were told from growing up that our learning starts from our homes, and this will always contribute to the way our mind absorbs knowledge. Listening was very much the way we operated. This practice is reinforced when we gather in evening prayers (*faigalotu o le afiafi*). It is either the father or the mother who will always conduct the *faigalotu*. Children are expected only to participate through responding by hymns and reciting bible phrases. These bible phrases are memorised, or rote learnt, the same way as church hymns is memorised. What is important is the learning and how the information is received context used in these villages and families gathering settings. (SS, Aug. 2021)

Within the *Fale o matai* or the Chief's house, young men's guilds are accustomed to learning in such a way to infiltrate wisdom from a top-down approach which from the village point of view, the *fa'alupega* (or village salutation) draws the road map of whom to speak to and when to speak. Most of those attending '*will just confirm (yes) or just listen passively. It is always a norm. If men gather in village settings, they are not allowed to bring a pen and paper to learn what the chiefs discuss*'. (S. Seleni, *Personal communication*, Aug. 2021). Knowledge is handed down in an oratory manner. Those attending are privileged that they have been chosen in the residences of the chiefs/elderly. Therefore, such knowledge transference must be respected. This is the *vā fa'aaloalo* or respectful way. This is the manner some of our Pasifika students learn and obtain knowledge in the Western education setting.

Such a notion has been the accepted norm and stereotype placed among Pasifika students in general. As educators, how do we unlock these silent practices or stigma and stereotypes without jeopardising the integrity of the cultural nuances that Pasifika

students are familiar with? This paper now explores the voices of Pasifika students navigating these cultural relations, not only to break down stigmas but also the culture of silence as problematically perceived.

## Aim of this study

Participants of this study were identified from a bigger research project in 2017 which began as an online survey, followed by a *talanoa* of which, eleven self-nominated Pasifika students consented to share their lived experiences of the challenges and successes while being a student in a tertiary institution. The main focusing question was: *What are the experiences and challenges Pasifika students encountered while studying health related courses at AUT?* In part of this *talanoa*, the students were specifically asked to identify what were the best practices they perceived important to their success.

This study was informed by an indigenous research framework, *talanoa*, which is now a cross-cultural Pan-Pacific methodology initially articulated by a Tongan scholar (Vaiote, 2006). *Talanoa* involves in-depth conversations. It is both a methodological framework and a method.

The *talanoa* process of investigation permits researchers to work with participants' enabling voices. This *talanoa* can be 'context specific' and can 'serve different purposes' (Chu, Abella, & Paurini, 2013, p. 3). The researchers and participants, being Pasifika, have the liberty to display cultural representations, nuances, or use words in their own vernacular to express feelings, behaviours, or attitudes while upholding the values and beliefs that empower people. In this context, the researchers, and the participants dialogue in a relaxed fashion with *mālie* (humour), *māfana* (warmth) and so build relationship, while engaging in truthful and authentic discussions (Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2014; Vaiote, 2006). Authenticity in this approach invites not only being heard but is about having the right to be present and grow in cultural spaces.

*Talanoa* adheres to cultural protocols, principles, expressions, and etiquettes of *tauhi vā* or maintaining respectful social relational spaces (Boon-Nanai et al., 2017).

## Ethics

Out of the eleven students who wanted to continue from the online survey to conduct group *talanoa*, four Pasifika physiotherapy consented to be co-authors. A gap between Pasifika pass rates of about 70% compared to 97% in the other student population demonstrates a continuing equity issue across the New Zealand universities. This study is their contribution to the dialogues of successful strategies that helped them navigate the challenges posed by Western structured curriculum statements, and the lecture and tutorial approaches of institutions such as the Auckland University of Technology.

The voices of these Pasifika students satisfied a component of the cultural sensitivity ethical criteria in ascertaining the 4Rs of being respectful, relational, responsibility, and reciprocity. Proceeding with this study required a rigorous and robust process which was approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEK 16/286\_28032017).

This study supports the relational ethic discourses for Pasifika people to conduct research by Pasifika, for Pasifika, with Pasifika students. A liberating experience in decolonising research processes. It supports the Treaty of Waitangi principles of participation, protection, and partnership. In this context, documenting our Pasifika young people's academics respect their ontological positioning which should be valued, authenticated, and more importantly, validated by voicing their own way of learning that benefits them – to be noted and heard through their participation and partnership in this publication. This process is to be facilitated by Pasifika academics. While western ethics may see this as coercive, from the Pasifika lens, trustful relationships have developed over time, so they feel protected and courageous to conduct this *talanoa* with Pasifika. In this way, the meaningful nuances and translations are not lost. The Pasifika physiotherapy young men feel that it is their duty of care and responsibility to inform educators and institutions that these are the approaches that enabled them to navigate the western landscapes, so they do not have to leave their culture, values, and knowledge at the university gates, or at home, but be embraced, respected, included as alternative pedagogies, and valued. This paper claims to legitimise PbPP in an institution that is predominantly Eurocentric in their teaching and learning. Their voices presented here purports the validity, credibility, reliability as well as the authenticity of this study.

Although the four Pasifika Physiotherapy students have graduated and moved on to the places they serve in Germany, Hungary, Wellington, and Auckland, we still *talanoa* through email to contribute to this research study and maintain the integrity of their way of learning and teaching. These students were part of the Pasifika learning village student leaders who inspired other new students (Boon-Nanai et al., 2017; Manuel et al., 2014; Nanai et al., 2013). They continued their support as alumni by offering after-hours tutorials.

It is the students' choice to make known their identity because, as Pasifika, whoever is the giver of knowledge must be respected through proper acknowledgement. This code of ethics may conflict with Western ethics. Scholars have published voices of people that may have sensitive issues whereas this is strength-based research, therefore their names are to be appraised and appreciated. In fact, most of the qualitative research in this nature have considered anonymity to be disrespectful. For example, Zeni (1998) notes that in action research, issues such as anonymous informants and disguised settings 'may defeat the action researcher's goal of open communication' (p. 10). Zeni believes that educators in their own settings are often recognisable. To address anonymity, it became clear that this was neither assured nor even desirable, especially if we were to practise what we believe with respect to power sharing and our belief that some or all participants would wish to publicly own the research as well. All agreed this *is* the Pasifika way.

Therefore, identifiers of this peer-based Pasifika pedagogies knowledge will be recognised through their initials as presented in Table 1. Their contribution and insights will be a valuable cultural capital and a composition to the cultural competency qualities that will make a difference for those working with Pasifika students, universally.

Peer-based Pasifika pedagogies (PbPP) are described as 'an integration of teaching and learning methods that are informed by and validate Pacific values, world views, knowledge and experience' (Koloto, Katoanga, & Tatila, 2006, p. 4). An emergence of various signature peer-based Pasifika pedagogies have surfaced within the last decade as portrayed in Table 2. A significant characteristic is that most of the initiatives are established by equity groups as manifested in some of



**Table 1.** Identifiers of Pasifika physiotherapy students contributing to PbPP.

Identified	PbPP themes
WL, TM, TL	Making Pasifika connections
WL, VZ	Adapting technology
TM, WL, TL	Narratives, analogies, mnemonics
VZ, TL	Gift of knowledge, with humour and food
TL	Food pedagogies

the major universities in New Zealand. Notably, these PbPP range from undergraduate programmes right up to postgraduate level. Numerous initiatives are situated within the medical, health, and environmental sciences and education. These range from cultural spaces to supplementary ones, learning villages, to potluck and retreat method of teaching and learning, faikava, or tanoa ava gatherings which are evident not only at the Auckland University of Technology but in other institutions as well as portrayed in Table 2 (Boon-Nanai et al., 2017; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2015; Fehoko, 2015, 2016; Manu'atu, 2000, 2003; Manu'atu & Kēpa, 2006; Manuel et al., 2014; Marat et al., 2009; Mayeda, Keil, Dutton, & Ofamo'Oni, 2014; Wilson et al., 2011).

As part of a project to identify best practices of teaching and learning, four Pasifika students of Physiotherapy identified the following: make Pasifika connections; adapt technology tools to teach each other; develop narratives, analogies or mnemonics or even a dance to learn and internalise concepts; *talanoa* over the sharing of food, because when you share food you are also sharing the gift of knowledge to others, *and* include humour because learning can be fun; and always work in a team or family-like environment. (See Figure 1)

### Making Pasifika connections

According to the four students, making connections can eliminate shyness and encourage *talanoa* or informal conversations. This establishes relationship which is important for optimal student engagement while relieving nervousness. It helps first year students feel at ease in a university environment and can lead to successful academic achievement. In their view, this takes place in many ways.

First, you find common ground. For those born in the Islands, this is either by noticing their family names or villages. Those who are New Zealand born, maybe of second and third generation migrants, it is through a family name or school, region, city locations or through friends. This is usually in the form of an informal introduction via *talanoa* or *talanoaga*. (WL Aug. 2017)

These *talanoa/talanoaga* (conversations) are usually prompted by the older group of second, third, or fourth-year students. When initiating introductions, the *talanoa* can break the ice.

Second, is sharing interests in coming to university. Various factors influence participation at university. For Pacific Island students, it is either a role model within the aiga, or because they were inspired by an event or incident. It is also the family obligation and commitment to the dream of utilising better opportunities to get a well-paid job. (TL Aug. 2017)



**Table 2.** Peer-based Pasifika signature pedagogical approaches that have been practised within some selected higher education institutions of Aotearoa, New Zealand within the last two decades.

Pedagogical approaches or models	Culturally based analogy	Relational ethos	Key Pasifika core values and concepts	Higher Education Institutions	Disciplines Practiced	Department initiative	Sources
Learning communities	Pasifika Learning Villages [PLV] Whāre Tūhono	Takes a village to raise a child	Collectivity/ communal Peer relationships	AUT	Health & Environmental Sciences	Equity	Boon-Nanai 2017 Nanai et al., 2013
<i>Tuakana-teina</i> model of the <i>āwhina</i> programme for Māori/Pasifika	Peer whanau	Cope with everyday colonialism Promoting Te Ao Māori whanau/ Pasifika worldview Caring, wrap around support	Communal Collectivity Peer relations Respect	UoA AUT	Medical & Health Sciences/ Law/ Culture & Arts/ Creative Arts/ Business/ Engineering Postgraduate	Equity/ Medical Sciences/ Postgraduate	Mayeda et al., 2014/ Wilson et al., 2011
<i>Whanau/ kainga/ aiga</i> or family pedagogy Parent pedagogy <i>Faikava</i>	Family Parental nurturing  Sharing kava Identity marker	Family/whanau, iwi, hapu ethos Leadership/ role model Uphold brotherhood Cultural classrooms	Collectivity/ communal Revering elderly Respect, honour traditions, nurture vā	UoA UNITEC Institute of Technology  AUT	Education  Criminology/ Social Sciences/ Education	Education  SoC	Marat et al., 2009 Matapo & Enari, 2021  Fehoko, 2015, 2016
<i>Talanoa Māle Māiana</i> OR <i>Talanoa Māile</i>	Humour to bring warmth and fun	Maintain vā Learning is mutual, shared, communal	Harmonising vā relations	AUT	Education	SoC	Manu'atu & Kēpa, 2006 Manu'atu, 2000, 2003

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

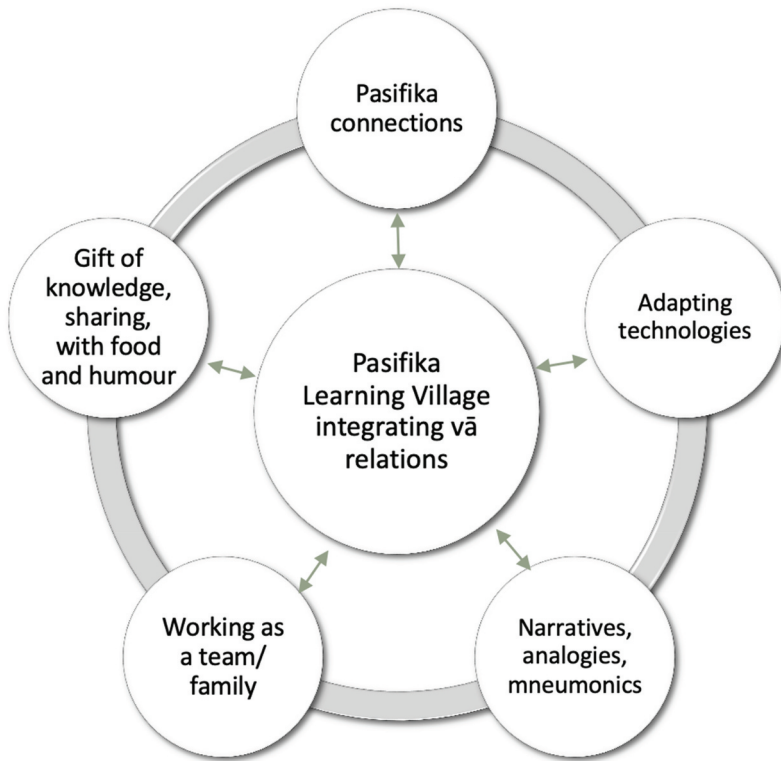
Pedagogical approaches or models	Culturally based analogy	Relational ethos	Key Pasifika core values and concepts	Higher Education Institutions	Disciplines Practiced	Department initiative	Sources
Pasifika PG Writing Retreat	Fa'afaletui, Talanoa mālie māfana soālaupule, tofā saili kakala, lalanga	Sharing knowledge, beliefs, skills, food Supplementary spaces Building Pasifika research culture	Communal/ Collectivity Peer relationships va relations Integrity to Pasifika knowledge and values	AUT	Multidisciplinary/ Cross Cultural/ Postgraduate	IPP/ SoC/ Equity	Emeritus Professor Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop with Boon-Nanai 2015
Potluck Dinners Professor Marilyn Waring	Sharing food, knowledge, beliefs, values	Food is embedded in the engagement Building research spaces and culture	Wrap around support/ collectively uphold values of diversity, equity, inclusivity	AUT	Multidisciplinary/ cross Cultural/ Postgraduate	IPP/ OPR	with Boon-Nanai
Oceanic Navigators & Connectors	Pasifika people are navigators connected by a 'sea of Islands'	Mentor-Mentee relationship culture	Peer relationships	AUT	Multidisciplinary/ Cross cultural/ Undergraduate	OPA	S. Seleni personal communication, 2021
Peer-based Pasifika pedagogies	Practiced within the PLV	Peer-to-peer	Respecting peer relations, talanoa malle mafana, aiga	AUT	Health & Environmental Sciences	Equity/ Physiotherapy	Boon-Nanai et al. 2017 Manuel et al., 2014

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Pedagogical approaches or models	Culturally based analogy	Relational ethos	Key Pasifika core values and concepts	Higher Education Institutions	Disciplines Practiced	Department initiative	Sources
Tanoa Ava 'Ava' is a root from a plant that is always found in Pacific soils. Ava is crushed and mixed with water in the 'tanoa' to drink	Drinking 'ava' is a cultural event that reminded Pacific students about their roots and provided a safe space to share the stories about the challenges they face in their academic journey. It is also a platform that provides therapeutic cultural strength to anyone attending 'soalaupule' 'tofa saili, tofa fesilafa'i'	Peer-to-peer	Collective, Peer relationship, talanoa, respect, honour, traditions, cultural trust, not gender based, Promote equality	AUT	Across all disciplines and faculties	OPA	S. Seleni personal communication, 2021

AUT – Auckland University of Technology  
UoA – University of Auckland  
SoC – Faculty of Society & Culture  
IPP – Institute of Public Policy  
OPR – Office of Postgraduate Research  
OPA – Office of Pacific Advancement



**Figure 1.** Peer-based Pasifika Pedagogies.

Note: Arrows show the mutual relational vā connections amongst these pedagogical tools.

The older students would usually share their story first, and then ask if their experiences are similar. These narratives are usually common, although each will have their own unique story.

Third, is to find the common interests in subject papers, or courses. This engagement takes place at the first point of initial contact. (TM Aug. 2017)

### Adapting technology

Making connections is imperative when building trust relationships. The challenge then is to maintain that relationship. At the time this project was conducted, the four students were not only Pasifika student leaders but were part of the millennials' generation where social media was already an accessible tool for connection and engagement. It was important to capitalise on this skill to work around the notion of silence and shyness. These students were also in their final years of the physiotherapy course. At the time, there were only 14 Pasifika students enrolled in the course so connecting was easily managed. Adapting the learning to the use of social media's technological innovations

promoted five important constructive aspects. First, it encouraged independent learning. According to one of the students, *self-directed learning took place in the social media space. Students were embarrassed to ask questions of the lecturers.* (WL Aug. 2017)

Second, the Facebook platform created a sense of identity among themselves on a micro-level. This brought out the shyness of others and developed a sense of inquiry.

Students started telling family members to enrol because of the wrap around support they had received from their Pasifika peers. It is important to note that there were not only young men but also some young women involved as part of this physiotherapy group. (WL Aug. 2017)

Adapting technological innovations to create this online learning community also brought out the teaching and learning creativity of these physiotherapy student leaders.

Peers were queried about assignment topics and course content topics. There were face-to-face discussions afterwards. The senior peers videoed one another, reflected on their explanations, and queried, clarified, or elaborated on certain terminologies and concept. They also developed short questions. (TM Aug. 2017)

Social media and modern technologies have provided a multitude of resources available to students and mentors alike (Taylor, King, & Nelson, 2012). Studies have shown that utilising social media enhances teaching and learning by providing an interactive space for students while allowing constant accessibility to information and socialisation, leading to improved academic outcomes in America within the psychology students, in Malaysia for the business and accounting peers as well as nationally for Māori and Pasifika students in other institutions within New Zealand (Hynds & McDonald, 2010; Jorgensen, Sullivan, & Grootenboer, 2013; Pempek, Yermolaveva, & Calvert, 2009). A significant aspect of how these students employed technological tools to promote participation is the collaborative and interactive nature of other Pasifika students which voids the argument that they are passive learners.

The students who were selected to be Pasifika Student Leaders (PSLs) monitored the Facebook page for any questions arising through lecturers, or explanations of diagrams, or even the function of certain muscles. These PSLs would develop either online tutorials or select one that was easily accessible online. Four of these boys would plan their tutorial lessons according to the weekly queries, questions or topics that arose from the conversations about their discussions. PSLs also used online learning tools to emphasise demonstrations or to clarify certain aspects. In this context, a fifth aspect of skilfully adapting technological tools is that it caters for diverse visual, kinesthetic, read and write learners (Boon-Nanai et al., 2017).

This Pasifika Physiotherapy Facebook group included Pasifika Alumni students. Knowledge through invitation of past students created a *talanoaga* online with role models who were credible sources as they have graduated. The page allowed for a rationale and focus of a tutorial plan and were directed by PSLs. Feedback comments or queries from the students as well as our Pasifika alumni provided a real-world perspective of our learning. Alumni members were those already serving the

community in well-known establishments such as the Physio Pasifika Group. The aim was to simulate a culturally supportive Pasifika village for all who participated within it.

To integrate a Pasifika learning style with current interactive platforms of communications, both the new students, as well as the PSLs and the Alumni, strategically utilised multi-media applications such as Youtube, Dynamic Spine and Dynatomy as teaching tools to explain difficult concepts. These applications were employed as a resource where PSLs would then break down content into small digestible snippets of information. Adapting technologies gave them the ability to query, clarify, discuss, and explore issues, topics, diagrams, as well as provoking critical and courageous conversations. They did this by filming each other when they present and then review, reflect, discuss, and improve the way they present and deliver their *talanoa* sessions.

### Narratives, analogies, mnemonics

Pasifika people, like many indigenous people, use narratives, stories, and a myriad of analogies in their language, culture, and social gatherings. Narratives are exchanged in either a formal or informal way. They are integrated in oratory speeches, even in everyday talk and formal speeches. The narratives are framed to co-construct knowledge in a way that a particular audience can understand through music, dance, poetry, comedy (*fale aiku*), theatre, and other performance modes. Regarding the male Pasifika physiotherapy students, they have used the term ‘polymerisation concept’ and adapted the teaching techniques to include narratives, analogies, and mnemonics to help them not only rote learn technical skeleton frameworks but also their functions. As TM explained, ‘there is great value in creating context or a meaningful association in learning’. He elaborated further:

A tool which is commonly used in the form of metaphors and stories to bind new information to past knowledge or experiences. Often these are created by the teacher, with the hope that metaphor or story holds the same value for the learner. (TM Aug. 2017)

As young peer teachers and learners, the four physiotherapy lads associated with the course content concepts in a meaningful way and utilised experiences in the context and language that Pasifika people would understand in a *talanoa mālie māfana* (humorous and warm) way:

For Pasifika students, these teacher-created stories may not always be relatable nor have enough meaningful context to consolidate the new information. As PSLs we encouraged student-created mnemonics to use stories or, in this case, humour that had context and meaning to the students. On a hot autumn day ‘All Pacific Islanders like Ice Scream’ was created as an alternative to rote learning the ligaments of the spine. The laughter from the students made it clear that this new information was now connected to their humour. Dance or movement is also for many Pasifika students an experience that gives value or context. As PSLs we were able to use dance-like movements, to create a connection to the upper limb dermatomes and myotomes. (TM and WL, Aug. 2017)

**Table 3.** Mnemonic developed for learning specific physiotherapy terminology while blending humour and analogy.

Mnemonic application	Content for ligaments of the thoracic spine
<b>All</b>	<b>Anterior</b> longitudinal
<b>Pacific</b>	<b>Posterior</b> longitudinal ligament
<b>Islanders</b>	<b>Inter</b> transverse ligament
<b>Like</b>	<b>Ligamentum</b> flavum
<b>Ice</b>	<b>Interspinous</b> ligament
<b>Scream</b>	<b>Supraspinous</b> ligament

Source: Manuel et al. (2014)

In this context, the peer group adapted the teaching techniques in three ways to make concepts relevant for their group. The first example shows how they applied the use of a mnemonic device.

Mnemonic devices are an effective learning tool for recalling new information as they associate past knowledge and experience with the new information (Pressley et al., 1982). The cultural beliefs, values and experiences of Pasifika students will dictate what they associate knowledge with, as Taleni and Robertson (2009) affirm, in order to teach you, I must know you’ (p. 47). The added benefit of the students creating the mnemonic is that it also empowers them to develop autonomy, ownership, and responsibility for their own learning. The students came up with what is portrayed in Table 3 above.

**Gift of knowledge, sharing, with food and humour**

While this is not a conventional learning tool from a western lens, the Pasifika students identified how the *talanoaga* (Samoan for conversation) was appreciated as a way in which knowledge is shared. PSLs believe knowledge is a gift and should not be claimed as a particular person’s knowledge. For example, all four Pasifika students argued that, as student leaders, they follow a servant leadership model which involves serving the community for the benefit of all.

Knowledge is a gift from their ancestors and God, the spiritual and religious beings. As PSLs we feel that this is not our knowledge but from the cosmos and those before us, so it should be shared for the betterment of our people and our peers we are here to serve. (ZV, Aug. 2017)

PSLs have noted that amongst themselves, they will have to communicate and transfer the knowledge to the next generation. The relationship between the cosmos, the people and the physical environment is ultimately important for people’s wellbeing, whether intellectually, physically, or mentally reflecting the Pacific worldview (Fairbairn-Dunlop et al., 2014).

**Food pedagogy**

Food is a social institution. Sharing food brings people and community together, whether it is a social function on a happy or sad occasion. Pacific Island cultures say it with food. As a matter of fact, there is minimal attention given to the embodied food knowledge as a lived experience among Pasifika cultures. Food pedagogy is not



well examined with the New Zealand educational literature. Arguably, an extensive body of interdisciplinary scholarship has explored food as a ‘medium through which power, privilege and identities are (re)produced, negotiated and/or resisted through relationships’ reported in Black diaspora populations (Naya, 2018). Such discourse and practice matter for Pasifika engagement, and involvement minimises the power relations between students and lecturers. According to the Pasifika physiotherapy student leaders, when sharing food with their peers in a cultural space, identities are negotiated and inscribed.

Food is a way of bringing people together to discuss ideas, concerns, projects . . . It’s a way of showing that we care. Regarding study, it was a way of nourishing our bodies after a long day of study. We would sit around, eat, laugh, and often talk about life. It was the fellowship we shared over breaking bread that we remember the most. We also invited lecturers over for food and it was a great way to converse and connect outside the classroom. (TL, Aug. 2017)

### *Humour in pedagogy as an art of learning and teaching*

Humour is used mainly by teachers to gain students’ attention and engage them with content material to enhance their learning (Tait, Lampert, Bahr, & Bennett, 2015). It is an art that, if one is skilful enough to demonstrate it, can be integrated as a form of learning and teaching method. Most of the literature documents how teachers use humour in their teaching but few accounts from student peers to student peers’ perspectives are noted. Researchers generally agree that humour is the ability to create amusement or provoke laughter (Berk, 2003). The western derivative of humour originates from the Latin language ‘humoren’ and Garner (2006) claimed that students appreciate humour in the learning process. It has increased retention, engagement, and participation rates. It is known that a humourist was considered a person who had an excess of these fluids and the cure for changing temperament caused by extreme humour was laughter.

Mullany (2004) provides an insight to the fundamentals of humour in that they are

‘instances where participant(s) signal amusement to one another, based on the analyst’s assessment of paralinguistics, prosodic and discursal clues. These instances can be classified as either successful or unsuccessful according to addressees’ reactions. Humour can be a result of either intentional or unintentional humorous behaviour from participants.’ (p. 21)

Regarding the Pasifika physiotherapy student peers’ narrative:

Humour is a norm to our Pasifika cultures. The palagi says we ‘break the ice’ but we do that naturally for us. Integrating how we deliver content to our peer students always works. It builds rapport. Our students will find us more approachable. Even when we have our food, we invite some of the lecturers so the first-year students in Physio don’t feel uncomfortable. It is important that they realise lecturers are also human beings. So we crack up, make jokes, and we discuss the subject matter and give analogies to demonstrate examples, to make the understanding more relevant, concrete and not abstract. (TL, Aug. 2017)

Essentially, PSLs have used humour to simplify lecture content material when students query a certain aspect of the lecture notes. It eases tension between the students when the lecturers are in the whanau room or *fono* room. Usually, it is a tool to make learning enjoyable and fun. The PSLs physiotherapy boys have used humour for related concepts – analogies – and word play as demonstrated in other countries where they use humour in teaching communication techniques (Frymier, Wanswer, & Woitaszczyk, 2008). It creates a positive classroom experience. It is beneficial in the learning process, and it helps to maintain social order.

Humour must be appropriate, relevant, and (as the PSLs added) *respectful*. It enhances the teacher's credibility, and in this context, amongst the PSLs, it brings out a positive energy. Relevant humour is related to daily and real-life experiences in particular Pasifika situations, as reflected in Table 3 where learning a particular ligament structure was likened to a humour the class knew about Pasifika people. Such an analogy but also a funny aspect assisted students to restore and register the knowledge of the ligaments permanently.

### Working as a team/family

Studying in a collective manner was perceived as beneficial to the Pasifika students. Peer learning is student-centred. Rimoni (2016) notes that Pasifika identities are 'fluid, diverse, multi-dimensional and include a range of perspectives relating to social class, ethnicity, culture and gender. For one of the PSLs, working together as an *aiga* or family was the most effective method of learning and teaching for him. He resonates with it because in his view:

I was born into a big Samoan family that emigrated to New Zealand for a better opportunity at life. I was taught by my parents that for our family to succeed in New Zealand, we needed to work together. Applying this same value to my physiotherapy studies helped me to build a strong relationship with my fellow Pasifika students. Not only did we study together, but we supported each other outside of our university studies. When we started mentoring other Pasifika students, we taught them that helping each other, working together like an *aiga* will lead to greater success academically. This is how we increased the engagement of Pasifika students in the PLV (Pasifika Learning Villages). We created a welcoming and safe environment for students to learn, share and develop themselves. (WL, Aug. 2017).

*Aiga* is literally the basic unit of a family in the Samoan context (Mulitalo-Lauta, 2000). It has similarities with the concept of whanau in the Māori language (Moeke-Pickering, 1996) and *kainga* in the Tongan language (Marcus, 1974). In the Māori context, family is *whanau*.

There is a strong understanding that learners are more likely to engage and persist with their studies when they feel that they are a central part of the learning environment and that they belong. In this sense, the construct of *whanaungatanga* is intrinsic to a sense of belonging in the tertiary education environment (Tertiary Education Commission, 2013, p. 59).

One of the most important aspects of the increase in student success at the School of Rehabilitation and Occupational Studies is that Pasifika students have increased their level of engagement. This has been through developing study groups with their peers, attending Pasifika student leader tutorials and, by engaging more with academic staff and

Pasifika student services. These different levels of engagement have been crucial to establishing a Pasifika family environment that is working to sustain Pasifika culture in the tertiary environment, while at the same time promoting Pasifika student success. This teaching strategy has been labelled as ‘working together as a family’.

Central to all Pasifika people is family. As our background is in health, the importance of family is best illustrated in the Pulotu-Endemann (2009) *Fonofale* model of health. Family is considered the foundation to a person’s health and wellbeing. Furthermore, the *aiga* not only provides strength and support to a person’s physical, spiritual, and mental wellbeing, but also maintains strong links to their Pasifika culture, where culture is the overarching element sheltering the *aiga*. To provide a further underlying philosophy for the *aiga* approach, Tuagalu (2008) discusses a Samoan concept called the ‘*vā*’. The *vā* refers to the relational space between many different entities or groups. This can include the relational space between people, spiritual (*tapu*) or social interactions. The most relevant *vā* for our tertiary-based *aiga*, is that of the *vā tagata* (space between people) and *vā feagaiga* (brother and sisterly love shown to one another). The tertiary-based *aiga* that we have attempted to develop operate as a collective, with the success and maintenance built upon compromises and mutual understandings between each member of the *aiga*.

*Vā fealofani* is most evident at a more direct or ‘grass-roots’ level of engagement with Pasifika students. By allowing Pasifika students to work as an *aiga*, relationships of trust within their peer group and with PSL mentors are developed. Tertiary education can be an alienating experience for Pasifika students, especially in the Physiotherapy course, which requires gender mixing for the therapeutic touch components. However, the *aiga* approach is to provide a learning environment that students feel safe and comfortable with. For example, during the PSL tutorial, the role of the PSL is to provide a friendly Pasifika face that instantly wants to engage and build rapport with the student. Wilson et al. (2011) suggests that Pasifika students are more involved with learning if Pasifika people can be good role models, such as teaching or through mentoring. During tutorials, PSL incorporate humour, teaching content that uses analogies from Pasifika culture and sometimes even the sharing of food. Thus, the *vā fealofani* is shown by students through their support and loyalty to their peers through reciprocal learning, kindness, generosity and with the tertiary-based *aiga*.

## Discussion

Pedagogy is the method adopted in teaching a subject or content that facilitates the learning process. PbPP possesses characteristics that uphold the connectivity as well as the constructive theory through the way it is conducted. According to the learning theories, Conole (2010) identified three taxonomical categories known as associative (learning through activity), cognitive (learning through understanding) and situative (learning as social practice) (p. 2). It can be argued that PbPP embraces all these elements and furthermore the values and ontological ways of learning and teaching for the Pasifika students.

Abella (2016) views these strategies, such as those posed by the PbPP, as pedagogical innovations that may be a new idea for higher education environments which still uphold the traditional lecturing method. PbPP is a development of a teaching and learning method that is applied in a specific context with the intention of creating added value with the potential to improve student learning. Supplementary spaces, are culturally safe

spaces that are imperative for Pasifika students to flourish as do cultural classrooms as in *faikava* contexts (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2015; Fehoko, 2016). It can be a mediatory form aligned with the traditional lecturing pedagogies. Appreciating this mediation for learning pertains to the positive and strength-based operations and/or actions, attitudes, behaviour, and outlook of teachers which result in student learning. The PSLs are not only teachers but also ponder upon self-reflection, positive disposition, and teaching initiatives by understanding their reasons for silence. They collaborate with students to enhance their learning. The use of mnemonics, analogies, humour and even connection identities are a combination of associative, cognitive and situative learning.

*Talanoa mālie māfana* is integrated in every aspect of the connection (Manu'atu, 2009). Cognitive learning is quite explicit through adapting the technological tools where the PSLs demonstrate via various means and modes of visual, literary, and oral supporting tools. Learning as a social practice or situative approach involves the integration of mnemonics that only Pasifika students understand.

In recent times, the principles of learning and teaching Pasifika have remained the same, but the ways we are interacting is changing within the tertiary environment. In fact, be it *talanoa* or *talanoaga*, either is an oral 'pedagogical tool filled with knowledge and values' collaboration which may incorporate stories, questioning, reflections, discussions and insight associations (Vaiotei, 2013/2014, p. 3). Fa'avae (2018, p. 131) also noted that reflexivity is a key aspect of *talanoa* which is like *talanoaga* in the Samoan context. In this context, PbPP is associative, cognitive, and situative.

Abella (2016) suggested that there are two aspects of pedagogical innovation used by teachers to improve student learning: tangible artefacts and intangible aspects (p. 228). Through the integration of mnemonics, analogies and narratives, the Pasifika students here have reconstructed knowledge with familiar intangible knowledges to make them tangible. Tangible artefacts here are: related genealogies; *whanau*; *whenua* (land) or through village; the school environment; family connection; common food; the practice, and traditions of welcoming through rituals of praying to give thanks for the food received that show spiritual connection. Recalling alumni as not only role models but as living resources to the learning process keeps it real for Pasifika students. These can equally be viewed as intangible properties. Intangible artefacts are manifested through their knowledge to work in a communal and collective setting. Such aspects are important for engagement, retention, and sustainable participation. For example, PbPP makes connections to build trust relationships. In this way, it reduces the alienated 'space' between the first year and the final year students (Airini et al., 2010). Therefore, making connections and sharing the gift of knowledges while having food and humour creates what Samoan traditions nurture and cements the *vā fealofani*, creating harmonious, friendly, neighbourly relations.

## Conclusion

Navigating university landscapes can be a daunting experience for many Pasifika students (Pisaac, 1993). Ensuring that university academics promote teaching and learning models relevant for Pasifika minority groups to enhance education for sustainable development goals is still being explored. This article has maintained that learning and teaching which is driven by Pasifika peers, with other student peers, facilitates exceptional achievement by

Pasifika learners at a university that is prominently western based. In addition, it also demonstrated that utilising culture-specific systems of knowledge, that is, Pasifika peer-based pedagogical practice, enhances learning and teaching spaces (Thomsen et al., 2021). In this sense, the Pasifika knowledge basis is valid, credible, and reliable in promoting Pacific student success in any higher education environment. Hence, conventional ways of learning using a western approach need to integrate such pedagogical praxis by reshaping and redesigning the curriculum and delivery within the teaching and learning spaces. Furthermore, minority students can traverse multiple worlds where the student becomes both the learner and the teacher/educator. It reimages peer-based learning by reviving, revaluing, and reclaiming epistemological and ontological Pasifika pedagogy to enable them to walk confidently in western-oriented tertiary environments. It reinforces the importance of creating safe cultural spaces where Pasifika students can collaborate and reconstruct peer-based pedagogies to tailor make teaching and learning while adding value to the education field. As a duty of care, this becomes a concern of institutional responsibility in nurturing and sustaining strategies that would ensure Pasifika pedagogies have a place in facilitating Pasifika student success. Therefore, faculties and institutions should include such blended learning peer-based initiatives to unlock the potential and the stigma of this culture of silence amongst Pasifika students. Also, they need to treat these learning communities and PbPP as part and parcel of their 'business as usual' strategic plans to enhance Pasifika student success models, and to direct financial resources to support them. Pasifika students do not have to lose their identity, their Pasifikaness, or remain passive silent learners to make a place and navigate predominantly western-influenced institutions. PbPP promotes cultural intelligence, a poly-cultural capital that upholds Pasifika values, knowledge, ways of learning and teaching and a contribution to pedagogical innovations for sustainable learning.

Making spaces in higher education for Pasifika would mean a disruption of western thoughts, a shifting of learning and teaching pedagogies to make way for connectivism principles.

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The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Disclosure statement

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