Peer-Based Pasifika Pedagogies: Gift of knowledge

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Introduction

With so many disparities between Māori and Pasifika student academic achievements in comparison to other ethnic groups in New Zealand, this paper aligns with Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999, 2004) premise to reclaim, revalue and revive indigenous methodologies. In this context, this project acknowledges the value of Pasifika peer tutoring in conjunction with the sustained high pass rates based on Pasifika values, beliefs, cultural practices and worldview. In attempts to support this premise, this project aims to document two Samoan, a Cook Island Māori and a Fijian Indian students’ voices on what peer-based pedagogies facilitated their success within the Physiotherapy programme. The students identified five culturally appropriate strategies that enhanced their learning and peer-based tutoring, while aided 90% of their retention rates. An interesting finding in this process was that, while supporting Smith’s view to decolonise and draw out indigenous pedagogies, the students also embraced western methods of teaching and learning as well as information technological tools to bring out the best of their peer-tutoring model. Before proceeding, it is imperative to begin on what it means to be a Pasifika student so as to shed light on the success of these students within the Faculty of Health and Environmental Studies (FHES) of the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) to warrant the rigour, credibility and robust of the peer based pedagogies.
Conceptualising links between ‘Pasifika’ and Pedagogy

Pasifika students’ academic performances have been overtly discussed, examined, investigated and challenged (Airini, Anae, Mila-Schaaf, Coxon, Mara, & Sanga, 2010a; Coxon, Anae, Mara, Wendt-Samu, & Finau, 2002; Pacific Island Students Academic Achievement Collective (PISAAC), 1993) but only a few significant body of literatures have presented successful models to improve them (Ross, 2010; Wilson, Hunt, Richardson, Phillips, Richardson, & Challies, 2011; Nanai, Smith, Hogg, Rasheed, Ahio, & Samuela, 2013). The common factor about the latter works is three important viewpoints. First, that indigenous models affirms minority student success, such as the Āwhina programme within the Victoria University of Wellington and the Pasifika Learning Village model employed by FHES within AUT (Wilson et al., 2011; Nanai et al., 2013). Parallel to this, University of Auckland also conducts a tuākana-teina programme for some years which has proven successful (Chauvel & Rean, 2010). Second, that culturally appropriate and ethically competent strategies should be implemented in tertiary institutions in order for Māori and Pasifika students to realize their potential (Anae, 2007; Airini et al., 2010b; Amituanaʻi-Toloa, 2007). This was well noted through a culturally relevant peer support programme survey reported from the Open Polytechnic (Ross, 2010). Third, that teaching and learning environments should be taught by, with, and for indigenous people as Aleni, Taleni, and Robertson succinctly puts it, ‘in order to teach you, I must know you’ (2009). Therefore, these models can inform best practice on an international, national and institutional basis to uplift academic disparities.

Within the last two decades, education policy and related researches have heightened the drive to seek culturally competent and appropriate teaching and learning practices to improve Pasifika student success from bilingual early childhood domains to the secondary and higher education sectors, where the inclusion of cultural elements are highly valued and
recommended. In the Pasifika sense, this calls for integrating Pasifika student voice to capture pedagogical ways of their worldview to inform teaching and learning practices within tertiary or higher education. This direction has not been well developed both in curriculum development as well as establishing appropriate learning support initiatives.

Pedagogy is the science of teaching and learning (Freire, 1993, p.36). In the Foucauldian sense, ‘science’ means knowledge (Foucault, 1990 as cited in Manu’atu, 2009, p.7). From a Pasifika sense, Manu’atu (2009) further noted that these knowledge are created in meaningful relationships in places that we seek to understand. She stated that on these philosophies, the teaching and learning relationship requires establishing innovative and creative ideas and activities so Pasifika people can make sense of the ‘world’ they construct. In this context, pedagogy is not about teaching and learning styles nor techniques or set of methods for teaching practice. With reference to western scholars, Paulo Freire’s notion, that pedagogy of the oppressed is concerned with relationships between the “words and the world” (Freire, 1993, p.62). This then raises questions of: who is teaching whom, what, how and why? Koloto, Katoanga, and Tatila (2006) argued that there is a Pasifika pedagogy that is defined as “an integration of teaching and learning methods informed by and validates Pacific values, world views, knowledge and experiences” (p.4). It is imperative to rethink these pedagogy of relationships in relation to how knowledge of culture, social, political, economic, spiritual and education are connected and valued to understand the conceptualization of pedagogy in the phenomenological context of the Pasifika students’ lived experiences and culture. Culture is ‘the learned, shared understandings among a group of people about how to behave and what everything means (Omohundro, 2008, p.46 as cited in SPC, 2010, p.16). This paper now outlines a Pasifika peer culture, where they share what they learn and teach, as well as the relationships they have constructed to make sense of Physiotherapy within the School of
Rehabilitation and Occupational Studies of the Faculty of Health and Environmental Studies at AUT.

‘Pasifika’ students within AUT

Pasifika refers to Pacific island peoples in Aotearoa/New Zealand (NZ), their languages, cultural, values, beliefs, practices/activities and perspectives (Tuafuti, 2010). In an education institutional setting, NZ people have labelled Pasifika students from Tonga, Samoa, Cook Islands, Tokelau, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Fiji and Vanuatu out of convenience “to distinguish Polynesians and Melanesians of the South Pacific from other cultural groups” (Manu’atu, 2009, p.3). Pasifika implies ‘sameness’, however, there are complexities as each group have epistemologies, ontologies and axiology elements that are diverse. This means that each Pasifika ethnic group possess languages, slightly different beliefs, values and cultural ways of knowing and being.

At AUT, Pasifika student population has grown over time by 12.7% (AUT, 2013). AUT is obligated to be the University for the Pasifika students by ‘strengthening their contribution to the advancement of Pacific people through education and research’ as integrated within the Annual Strategic Plan 2012-2016 (AUT, 2012, p.29). These key strategic objectives have directed funding into a support academic model known as the Pasifika Learning Village which employs about 30 Pasifika student leaders (PSLs). Annual pass rate have increased by 11% (AUT, 2012, p.29). Although this educational performance indicator is the lowest rate of about 70% compared to other ethnic groups, in this latest annual report, the gap has minimized from the initial 50% pass rate reported in 2001 (Nanai et al., 2013). The current overall AUT pass rates is over 80%, there is still exiting disparities that is mirrored by the national status of Pasifika student academic achievement. The purpose of this paper is not to dwell on these deficit
accounts of Pasifika students but rather to examine and document successes, as one Pasifika Professor puts it, “we do not celebrate enough our excellence and successes as Pasifika people” (Prof. Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop, personal communication, AUT, 2014). To document this success, a funding proposal was submitted to the Centre for Learning and Teaching and through their Learning and Teaching Development Fund (LTDF), $4000 was successfully obtained to complete this project. The project employed both talanoa and video qualitative methods and more important many anecdotal narrative and ethnographic accounts of the Pasifika Physiotherapy students. The four PSLs were selected because they were the champion students who have maintained an A grade (3 out of the 4), and one a B+ pass average over the last three year period. This means that these students managed to obtain 95% pass rates and 90% progression and retention rates of the peers they have mentored over the last two years (Equity Reports, 2013). Within the last five years, Physiotherapy (within the Rehabilitation and Occupational Therapy School) maintained the highest pass rates compared to the other five Schools with an average of 90% as portrayed in Figure 1 (AUT, 2009-2013). This is higher than the AUT overall annual pass rate of a little over 80%. It is important to provide these students’ stories on how they have sustained high pass rates in such a programme to warrant recognition of their success.


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Peer-based Pedagogies

Peer-based, in this context, refers to those PSLs who utilize the Pasifika Learning Village (PLV) to engage with peer Pasifika students enrolled within Physiotherapy. The four student leaders are successful role models who themselves were inspired by prior PSLs in this Physiotherapy learning village. Peer teaching and learning has been proven successful in many studies, (Black & McKenzie, 2007; Zepke, Leach, Prebble, 2003). In this context, they are referred to as a strength-based model, to counter the deficit model that AUT and all other New Zealand (NZ) tertiary institutions have utilized to describe Pasifika students as ‘high risk failure’ students (Nanai et al., 2013). This is important, as many Pasifika students do not do well in the sciences, and in particular the gender gap in educational performance indicators are always low among male students (PISAAC, 1993). Five peer-based strategies were identified, underpinned by a ‘polymerisation’ scientific concept created to unite the Pasifika worldview to align with the changing times in an academic learning environment that is western and scientifically worldview driven, but where these students draw the relationships to make sense of Physiotherapy knowledge.

POLYMERISATION

We have labelled this partnership ‘polymerisation’. As you may have noticed there is also a play on words, ‘poly’ from Polynesia. Scientifically, this term means the fusion of many monomers to create a polymer. We have used it to describe the fusion of western methods of teaching and learning and the tertiary student culture, with Fa’a Pasifika (Manuel & Zaveri, 2014). This chemistry concept meaning fusion and transformation is applied to this project. The similarities are that the stem ‘poly’ of polymerization is a pun in connections to Polynesia. It depicts the merging of the western and the Polynesian cultures, with the emphasis on fusion or a combination of both to enable optimal engagement and success of Pasifika students. As NZ has a high proportion of Pasifika population, there is a need to learn how to interact with the
Pasifika cultures to achieve higher retention and success in tertiary education. Pasifika people are culturally orientated and uphold a strong heritage. However, the tertiary education environment and the style of learning and teaching in the classroom may not match the Pasifika culture.

The five strategies that are listed below describe a method to apply this polymerization concept. These strategies enable peer-based teaching and learning to bridge the gap for Pasifika students. This is utilized concurrently/cohesively as a complete model.

- Making the Pasifika connection
- Gift of knowledge
- Adapting teaching techniques
- Adapting technologies
- Working together as aiga
- Making the Pasifika connection

Making connections to establish relationships is important for optimal student engagement, hence, (and) success (Airini et al., 2010). This relationship should be initiated by a Pasifika staff or student, between and for amongst them. In this way, student engagement, retention and sustainability of participation within education environment are maintained. There are three reasons for this.

First, it reduces the alienated ‘space’ between the PSL and the student (Airini et al., 2010). Second, it reinforces interpersonal relationships known as the vā (loosely translated as the spatial way of conceiving the secular and spiritual dimensions of relationships and relational order, Airini et al., 2010, p.10). This concept Mila-Schaaf points out which ‘traverses many Pasifika languages’ (2006; p.8) but in which Ka’ili (2005) notes to have four dimensions: physical, social, intellectual, and symbolic concept that facilitate both personal and collective well-being emphasizing valuing, nurturing and looking after of these relationships to achieve
optimal outcomes (Airini et al., 2010; Anae, 2007). Tuagalu (2008) affirms this when he explains that there are heuristic elements of the va, manifested in the Samoan distinction between the social and spiritual dimensions of the va as in va fealoaloa’i and va tapua’i (p.2). The third instance is making connections as a reference point for collaborative and reciprocal relationships as well as a measure of cultural competency (Tiatia, 2008). This requires shared responsibility and partnerships across the institutions as a systematic and sustainable approach to appropriately increase Pasifika student success. It is a framework for addressing ethnic disparities and socio-cultural barriers to learning.

In this particular Physiotherapy learning village community, the form of greeting will make an impression on the first engagement. It captures the cultural nuances that is meaningful and warrants value so that the engagement will sustain. This can take place in many forms, processes or as Manu’atu (2009) argues, the relationships, and protocols in various Pasifika ethnicities, which may have similarities.

In the initial engagement with a new Pasifika student, it can be a simple social engagement of not only introducing ones name, but also understanding that there is a common ground of that person that is of significance. For example,

   Hi my name is Wesley Lagolago. Oh... are you named after the Wesley Methodist mission church in Samoa? OR
   Hi, I’m Nafi, you Samoan? My family is from Vaitoomuli, Palauli, you know the big island of Savaii.

In other situations, if the student has a Samoan name that carries political affiliations with certain matai names that you will kindly acknowledge (that is, Nanai... oh! Is your family from Falelatai? are you related to Juliet Nanai…).

With others, it may be that they have connections with a Pasifika sports person, an academic, or simply a classmate known to the PSLs.
Making connections is a way of building relationships of trust that usually occurs in the form of talanoa. Vaioleti (2003) unfolds talanoa into symbolic meanings by referring to tala literally to “inform, tell related command, ask and apply”, while noa literally as “any kind, ordinary, nothing-in-particular, purely imaginary” (Otsuka, 2006, p.3). Talanoa, therefore, occurs informally before any content knowledge is exchanged, shared, or taught. Manu’atu (2000) alluded to this ‘making connection’ notion as a relationship building process with Pasifika people within a research context, that, for them to fully engage as research subjects to provide credible responses to research enquiry, participants have to feel warm or mafana, before they can talanoa with ease in a humorous way or malie. Vaioleti (2006) notes that talanoa may not have a time factor consideration until consensus has reached that the communal knowledge construction process is established. However, it resonates within this teaching and learning context in that the teaching and learning process begins at making connections so this communal knowledge of connection is constructed and validated so that optimal social engagement is obtained, sustained and maintained throughout the teaching and learning process. Notably, PSLs may increasingly use vernacular or peer slang metaphorical language, for example, Samoan “sole!”, “uso!” not to satisfy and claim the cultural nuances of meaning and value to this relational space with new peer students, but also give way to understanding the motivations embedded on the new students’ intricate system of cultural beliefs that impact every facet of their daily life. This promotes the acknowledgement of their worldview. In this sense, Manuatu’s (2000) use of the Tongan terms mafana and malie to describe the tingling feelings of warmth which come from the heart when everything has been done in the culturally right way is a prime example why making Pasifika connections is fundamental in the first step of engagement when teaching Pasifika students. In this way, their spatial relation of vā in building trust relationships is developed and sustained all throughout their journey within the
Physiotherapy programme. Furthermore, the new Pasifika student is not afraid to lose their Pasifika identity while learning western teaching in a tertiary institution.

In addition to this informal greeting between the student and the PSL, a more structured introduction is applied in the wider classroom setting to facilitate this connection between classmates. The set of questions below is often used; the PSL answers the complete set of questions first, followed by each student.

- What is your name?
- Where you from?
- What is your ethnicity?
- What high school did you go to?
- What are you studying?
- Why did you pick that course of study?
- What do you want to do when you graduate?

In an article by Tevita O. Ka’ili, he describes an interaction with a woman named Seini at the ‘Ohana Farmers and Crafters Market on the island of Maui (Ka’ili, esline, & vita, 2005). This story illustrates the power of connection through language, genealogy, sharing information and food. This chosen set of questions mirror the concepts of making connections developed in Ka’ili’s interaction with Seini.

It begins with a greeting: Kia orana, my name is Theo …

Moving into genealogy: On my father’s side: my grandfather is from Manihiki, a northern island in the Cook Islands. I was born in Christchurch, and went to Burnside high school …

And finishing with sharing of information relative to why they are here: I am studying Physiotherapy. I am currently completing my fourth and final year of this undergraduate
degree. I chose Physiotherapy because I am interested in how the body works and helping people. When I graduate I want to work in a private practice musculoskeletal clinic and get involved with sports teams. (Manuel, 2014).

It begins with a greeting: Talofa lava, my name is Wesley

Moving into genealogy: I was born in Samoa. My father is from Vaitoomuli, Palauli in Savaii and my mother is from Vailoa, Palauli also in Savaii.

And finishing with sharing of information relative to why they are here: I am studying Physiotherapy and am currently in my final year of my undergraduate degree. I chose Physiotherapy because of my personal experience with various injuries, which sparked my interest in how the body operates. When I graduate I want to work with Pacific communities around preventing diseases.

This set of questions has a two-fold benefit. First, it gives the tutor and other students some genealogy and academic information that can be followed up later to help create and build a connection. Secondly, it also provides information regarding what motivates the student and can aid in helping the student to achieve specific goals as opposed to teaching the same way to every student. The connection created through food discussed by Ka’ili et al. (2005) is not explored in this section, but is the focus of the next pedagogy.

Gift of food, gift of knowledge

Food has both a cultural and a spiritual importance within the Pasifika way of life. Food is used in situations to break or be free of tapu (spiritual/formality), to return to a state of noa (unrestriction/ordinary). In this respect, it usually begins with a prayer and gifting as it is noted in
the Fijian case (Nabobo-Baba, 2008). Food in this instance can facilitate a more informal or casual environment for the students. Furthermore, the use of food as a pedagogy enables this, allowing no restrictions between the PSL and the students. Food removes the hierarchy between the PSL and student, and it also reduces the formality of the tutorial, to facilitate a peer-based environment. This process follows a less traditional format in that a PSL would normally provide all the food as the host, however as it is a peer-based environment, both parties equally contribute to the food.

Similarly, knowledge is the gift in this situation. A gift (mealofa) is commonly given from the host to the visitor as a sign of gratitude and respect. Again, due to our learning and teaching environment being peer-based, the mealofa of knowledge is both given and received in reciprocity. It is important to note that knowledge in this context refers not only to content, but to experiences and greater understanding that the PSL or student has to offer.

As mentioned above, food is an important part of Pasifika culture and Fa’a Samoa. The university culture however is very different to Fa’a Samoa and literature has linked this foreign, university culture and its alienating effect as a limiting factor for indigenous and minority groups (Sonn, Bishop, & Humphries, 2000). As Ka’ili et al. (2005) noted food is a part of the Pasifika way of establishing a social connection. Hence, the inclusion of food integrates the Pasifika culture into the university culture. This may help to reduce this alienating effect for Pasifika students, by allowing the student to hold onto another part of Fa’a Samoa within the university culture. In addition to food’s place in Fa’a Samoa, food also can be used to facilitate the va. Due to the contact made during tutorials, the PSL and student are automatically in a va relationship, however food also brings people together, and through this the va can be nurtured (Taugalu, 2008). In parallel to this the exchange of knowledge as a mealofa further strengthens the links between the PSL and the student; again the va can be nurtured.
The sharing of food has both cultural and spiritual importance for Pasifika students. We have noted the use of food to create an environment for the sharing of knowledge between PSLs and students. We have also shown that food can be used to create an environment for building relationships; including relationships with faculty staff members and alumni that was discussed in greater detail above. In addition, the contribution of both food and knowledge by the PSL and students, and the coming together facilitated through food align with the pedagogy ‘together as aiga’ which will be elaborated last in this section.

**Adapting teaching techniques**

One application of the ‘polymerisation’ concept, is adapting teaching techniques and making them relevant for Pasifika students. The first example of how we applied this was the use of a mnemonic device. Mnemonic devices are an effective learning tool for recalling new information as it associates past knowledge and experience to the new information (Pressley, Levin, & Delaney, 1982). The cultural beliefs, values and experience of Pasifika students will dictate what they associate knowledge to (Allen et al., 2009). Therefore, it could be inferred that a mnemonic device is likely to be more effective if it is relevant to the student’s cultural beliefs, values and experience. Furthermore, the mnemonic may be most effective if it is created by the student themselves. The added benefit of the student creating the mnemonic is that it also empowers the student to develop autonomy and responsibility for their own learning. This concept of developing students’ autonomy and responsibility has been widely studied within the student-centred learning model (McCabe & O’Connor, 2013; Sadler, 2011). In this model, the teacher facilitates the student to make strategic choices regarding their learning to promote effective learning, which we attempted to replicate with this teaching tool. For example:

The students developed a mnemonic device as a tool for learning the ligaments of the thoracic spine. They were split into small groups and given five minutes to create a mnemonic for the list of spinal ligaments. The students came up with:
This mnemonic device was effective for our students, as they took responsibility of their learning by creating a statement that was relevant to them. They justified the use of scream as a Pasifika pronunciation of cream, infusing humour with the mnemonic device to promote more effective learning.

The second example of adapting a teaching technique was the use of movement or a dance. A kinaesthetic approach to teaching is often an unorthodox method of teaching, but it has been used with success in teaching including poetry and mathematics (Touval & Westreich, 2003; Zimmerman, 2002). Traditional dance is embedded within Pasifika culture, however dance is not explicitly a teaching technique used within tertiary education. Therefore, the use of a dance or movement within the tertiary setting attempts to link a Pasifika tradition to new knowledge, again facilitating effective learning. In this case, the creation of a dance linking the areas of the cervical spine levels with the movements of the myotomes. The dance for the dermatomes involved brushing or pointing the area of the skin to test for each dermatome from C5 to T1. The dance for the myotomes involved creating the arm movement to test for each myotome from C5.

When planning these lessons and choosing how best to deliver content, the skill of creativity is imperative to connect with this particular teaching method to enable the students to construct
analogies in how they perceive to understand these concepts in their worldview which maybe
different to how they are taught during lectures or tutorials, while the goal is to optimise the
students' learning through association to their Pasifika cultural beliefs, values and experience,
with the purpose of empowering the students to replicate these techniques and ultimately
become responsible and autonomous for their own learning.

**Adapting Technologies**

There is a new interaction in the PLV to utilising modern technologies and social media to
facilitate Pasifika learning. Before the missionaries arrived with written communication to the
South Pacific in the 18th century, Pasifika peoples predominantly passed on knowledge to the
next generation through oral traditions that included a combination of storytelling and being
hands-on (Latu & Young, 2004). This approach to teaching and learning maintained our strong
Pasifika link and meant traditional values and customs were continued. In recent times,
although the principles of learning and teaching Pasifika relatively remained unchanged, it is the
way we interact that is changing. Vaai (2011) noted that these are instances of ‘cultural
hybridity’ (p.11) where the colonized co-exists with the colonizing culture rather than dualism
which implies assimilation and where the dominant colonized culture overtakes the colonizing
one, in this case the use of modern technologies adapted to suit the needs of the PSL and their
peers.

Social media and modern technologies have provided a multitude of resources available to
students and mentors alike. Roben, Franklin and Gordon (2012) suggested that utilising social
media enhances teaching and learning by providing an interactive space for students and
allows constant accessibility to information. In our Pasifika Student Leader (PSL) tutorials, we
utilised social media and modern technologies in a variety of ways. Firstly, on Facebook we
have set up a Group page for Pasifika students, PSLs and Alumni. This forum allowed the
PSLs to plan tutorials driven by the feedback comments or students enquiries. Relatively, our Pasifika Alumni utilise these enquiries to provide a “real-world” perspective of our learning.

The ultimate aim of the Facebook Group page is to simulate a culturally supportive Pasifika village for all who participate within it (Hynds, & McDonald, 2010). Secondly, during tutorials we encourage students to utilise laptops, iPads and smartphones towards constructive learning, such as researching, visually capturing information and note taking. This encourages Pasifika students to engage and integrate a Pasifika learning style with current interactive platforms of communications. Finally, PSLs utilise multi-media applications such as Youtube, Dynamic Spine and Dynatomy as a teaching tool to explain difficult concepts to learn. These applications assist the PSL to break down course content into small digestible packets of information to demonstrate abstract concepts in a simulative hands-on experience to make their learning concrete and more meaningful. In this section, I have attempted to convey how our traditional Pasifika teaching and learning principles are integrated with modern day technologies. This will ensure that all Pasifika students maintain links to their cultural values and at the same time, the flow of knowledge to the next generation is augmented.

The role of social media as a tool for global learning is also adapted to the needs of our Pasifika students. The unprecedented growth of social media and subsequent availability provides an easier platform for sharing and learning like never before. Social media presents a huge source of information outlet that result from the wealth of user-generated content. According to Tang (2010), social media also has rich user interaction that promotes free flowing communications among users and is multi-dimensional, multi-modal, and highly dynamic. For example, Blogs enable authors to publish/post their work and invite comments on them that could increase the depth of their publications (Taylor et al., 2012). Taylor and colleagues also noted that as technology has become a major part of students’ everyday lives, the use of social media can enable the breakdown of boundaries between communities, regions and countries, thus
promoting a global citizen worldview. In this context, breakdown shyness barriers for Pasifika students but rather empowers them to make a voice while not hindering but improving their opportunity to learn and be successful.

**Together as aiga**

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). Kainga in the Tongan language (Marcus, 1974). In the Maori context, “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 whanaugatanga is intrinsic to a sense of belonging in the tertiary education environment” (TEC, 2013, p. 59). One of the most important aspects as to why we have seen an increase in student success in the School of Rehabilitation and Occupational studies is that Pasifika students have increased their level of engagement. This has been through developing study groups within their peers, attending PSL 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 a tertiary environment, while at the same time promote Pasifika student success. This teaching strategy has been labelled as “working together as a family”.

Central to all Pasifika people is family or in the Samoan language the ‘aiga’. As our background is in health, the importance of family is best illustrated in Pulotu-Endemann’s (1995) Fonofale model of health. Family is considered the foundation to a person’s health and wellbeing. Furthermore, the aiga not only provide 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 ‘va’. The va refers to the relational space between many different entities or groups. This can include the relational space between people, spiritual (tapu vs sa) or social interactions. The most relevant va to our tertiary-based aiga, is that of the va tagata (space between people) and va fealofani (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. For instance, Pasifika Student Support Services (PSSS) promote pastoral care for our Pasifika students, which provides an avenue for students to seek guidance if they have issues to do with home life, finances or personal grievances. PSSS advise the Physiotherapy School (hereafter known as School) with issues that may impact on a Pasifika student’s academic learning. In addition, the School and PSL tutors may provide feedback to PSSS or directly to the student on how they are progressing with study. Wilson et al. (2011) suggest that involvement of Pasifika student mentors, student services along with Faculty in a culturally appropriate manner can translate into positive Pasifika student engagement in tertiary education. The overall aim of the wider aiga is to ensure that the welfare of Pasifika student is being met and that the student feels supported in their tertiary studies.

Va fealofani is most evident at a more direct or ‘grass-root’ 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 therapeutic touch components. However, the aiga approach is to provide a learning environment that students feel safe and comfortable with. For example, during PSL tutorial, the role of the PSL is to provide a friendly Pasifika face that instantly wants to engage and build a rapport with the student. Wilson et al. (2011) suggests that Pasifika students are more involved
with learning if Pasifika people are in position to be good role models, such as teaching or through mentoring. This is because students can identify culturally with them and often the style of teaching or mentoring is inclusive of the students’ perspective of learning. During tutorial, PSL incorporate into their tutorial humour, teaching content that uses analogies from Pasifika culture and sometimes even the sharing of food. Building of a Pasifika connection is spoken in more detail previously, but is highlighted here to emphasise how the tertiary-based aiga develops. In addition, the PSL fosters the working as an aiga teaching strategy, by encouraging Pasifika student to engage and form close friendships with their peers. Thus, the va fealofani is shown by students through their support and loyalty to their peers and to the tertiary-based aiga.

In utilising the aiga approach during tutorial the predominant role of the PSL becomes to be a facilitator of small group discussion and debate on content that students may have trouble understanding. Students can use the tutorial as a forum to voice their perspective and challenge other Pasifika student’s knowledge, including the PSL. Purcell (2007) suggests that providing Samoan students with a voice promotes active involvement in the learning environment. Furthermore, minimising the use of stand and deliver methods of teaching, such as lectures and utilising engaging teaching strategies may enhance the learning experience for students. The aiga teaching approach encourages PSLs to form stronger academic interests as well as inspire students to assist in teaching their peers. This is to not only to solidify their knowledge, but ensures that the knowledge of the group as a whole will holistically develop. The support from the tertiary-based aiga continues outside of dedicated tutorial times. PSL and students have various avenues of communication and are able to provide peer-support and mentoring through the Facebook group page, emails and sharing a common study space, called the ‘Fono’ room. This example illustrates that our tertiary-based aiga is not confined to the walls of the classroom, nor is it restricted by a set amount of tutoring time. As with all Pasifika aiga,
the availability of support is forever present and knowledge-base of the aiga is forever developing.

Limitations

Due to the method of the study and the lack of longitudinal, quantitative data produced from this project we are unable to deduce a direct correlation between the pedagogies discussed and the success of the Pasifika students. There is quantitative data that highlights this group as a strength-based model, but longitudinal data is needed to highlight the true effect of these pedagogies on retention and success. An appropriate study design and robust methods are needed to enable us to capture the true value of these pedagogies.

Also, all four of PSL’s in this project are males. This is a limitation as the pedagogies that are most effective for females may differ from the pedagogies that we have discussed. Also, at times it has been difficult for us as males to engage with female students when the content involves touch, which is integral to the physiotherapy programme.

Due to our participants and students coming from a range of Pasifika ethnicities the pedagogies are generalised for all Pasifika students. It is likely that individual ethnicities will respond differently to the proposed pedagogies and should to be tailored appropriately to the individual student.

CONCLUSION

This paper has highlighted five peer-based Pasifika pedagogies based on a strength-based model of teaching and learning from four Pasifika Physiotherapy students. These pedagogies aim to increase engagement of Pasifika students and improve their academic outcomes. This
paper offers an alternative approach to peer-based teaching and learning. These peer-based pedagogies incorporate the traditions, the beliefs, the values and the differing world views of Pasifika people. With this in mind, we hope this paper adds to the literature of tertiary Pasifika education and offers successful alternative method tailored to this population.

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