Introduction

Samoan students are included in the “Pacific” or “Pasifika” category of students at university in New Zealand and consequently have been categorized as poor achievers in terms of academic educational outcomes. The issue of Pasifika students' educational achievements has been profound over the last two decades and many educators have tried various interventions to resolve it.

This paper argues that most learning environments for minority groups are not conducive to Pasifika students' needs. Throughout their education, there are poor learning support systems in place within tertiary institutions and these institutions promote a learning environment that suits the dominant groups. Samoan students’ experiences discourage them and limit their capacity to become motivated and engaged. In this paper, an evidence-based approach, supported by participant observation methods, is employed to examine the nature of learning communities that have been set up to address this issue, and describes the Pasifika Learning Village model as a good example to follow.

Background

Over the past decade, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) has reported steady progress for Maori student success and retention rates, but has reported the converse for Pasifika students, who are mainly Tongan, Samoan and Fijian. Schwarz and Crothers
(2011) noted that compared to Europeans, Asians and Maori students, “Pacific Island students are remaining in school longer than average” (2011, p. 7) to complete the same level of education as other students. At the Auckland University of Technology (AUT), Pasifika students have the lowest completion rates to date, according to the university’s 2010 Annual Report. Mirroring the national trend, AUT Health Science Maori students’ “successful completion” rates have increased while the Pasifika students’ rate has either remained constant or decreased. Table 1 shows the academic gap between Pasifika and Maori. Successful completion rates lagged behind the overall (all) percentage, which was about 18 percent in 2005 while Maori was at a narrow margin of 4 percent. Although the table shows a gradual increase in 2010 (Pasifika 72 percent versus 86 percent overall), the gap of 11 percent needs to be reduced.

Table 1: 2005-2010 Pass rates for Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences, Undergraduates Pasifika students compared to all students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pasifika</th>
<th>Maori</th>
<th>All(a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Head Count</td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Head Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009(b)</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010(c)</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>526</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Prepared by AUT Equity Office, Planning Directorate.

Notes:
(a) Formula used by TEC for calculating Successful Completion (CR) Rates, for example: SC Rate = Pass/Pass + Fail + DNC + W
(b) Data retrieved on September 9, 2010 for 2005-2009 from ARION (AUT’s database)
(c) Data for 2010 was retrieved February 15, 2011 from ARION (AUT’s database); based on EFTS and distinct head counts.

Pasifika Learning Village Model

At the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences (FHES) at AUT, the dilemma for the faculty’s Equity Team was how to best support an improvement in the “successful completion” rate of Pasifika students studying at AUT University. This dilemma prompted faculty and student services staff associated with the FHES to pilot an intervention scheme, the “Pasifika Learning Village” (PLV) model, to resolve it.
The PLV was designed based on Tinto’s (1993) doctorate work on learning communities. Tinto and others suggest some of the factors that must be fostered for student success: student abilities and skills, high expectation of students’ performances, support academically and socially, and student involvement (Butler, 2001; Tinto, 2007; Tinto, Engstrom and Riemer, 2001; MacGregor, Leigh Smith, Matthews, & Gabelnick, 2002). He argues, however, that if minority students encounter an unfortunate experience in their educational learning, they will utterly fail. Research in American tertiary institutions has shown that targeted and structured learning communities can enhance student achievement and foster student engagement, leading to high completion rates (Butler, 2001; Price, 2005). Little research of this nature has been conducted in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

An essential aspect of the PLV model is to monitor the completion and retention rates of Maori and Pasifika students of all paper enrolments within the faculty. Since the PLV model was piloted in 2007 and officially made part of the learning support system in Semester 2 of 2008, there has been a positive shift in the progression rates of Pacific students’ completion, which was averaging 67 percent before the PLV model was implemented but in 2010 was averaging 72 percent (AUT, 2010). Figure 1 illustrates the changes in the key performance indicators for all student groups at AUT.
There are many factors involved in bringing about improved student completion rates and grades. First, a commitment from the institution’s management is imperative. “An institution’s mission is what makes the education valuable” (Tinto, as cited in Butler, 2001), otherwise any attempts to source resources to improve educational success for Pasifika students will be worthless. Second, interventions to access relevant academic, cultural and pastoral student support services require a collaborative effort by all parties involved. This will create an interface between the faculty and the students so they can create a learning environment that enables their success and assists them in bridging the gap between Pasifika students and others.

It must be noted that the PLV model required some time to develop before results were seen. The Equity Team had been established for five years before improvements in successful completion rates for Pasifika students were reported. Nevertheless, it is argued here that the PLV model is one that can be employed as a way forward to alleviate academic disparities.
**Political commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi**

Commitment to resolve the challenges faced by our Pacific students is linked to the political and good governance of the New Zealand government. In honour of the Treaty of Waitangi, AUT commits itself to being the “university of choice” (AUT, 2007) for Maori people who are the *tangata whenua* (people of the land). One of the two core principles underpinning the Treaty is partnership. Partnership includes the obligation between parties, the *tangata whenua* and the visitors (initially Europeans or *palagi*) to “act reasonably, honourably and in good faith” for the betterment of Aotearoa, New Zealand. Although this partnership is viewed as an obligation, it does not necessarily describe “a relationship where the partners share national resources equally … rather … an aspect of the obligation to act in good faith is a duty to make informed decisions through consultation” (State Services Commission, 2005, p. 14). The State Services Commission further emphasizes that the value and utility of undergoing a consultation process is in itself a means to upholding and strengthening this Treaty partnership principle. The Treaty is a blueprint that directs programmes, including equity ones (Ministry of Education, 2006). In good faith, AUT’s commitment to Maori communities was extended to its Pacific counterparts to provide excellent education that will inspire all students to reach their full potential (Theme 1) and actively engage with the communities it serves and contribute to social and economic development (Theme 3) (AUT Strategic Plan, 2007, p. 18).

**Equity structure**

In 2001, the New Zealand government funded additional support services (NZ $18 million) to increase academic success for Maori and Pasifika students within tertiary institutions. Initially, a traditional or deficit model was developed, but was short lived because it had limited success. Instead in 2002, an integrated team model optimising student success or ITMOSS was introduced by a Maori academic staff committed to equity principles in education. The model was driven by the Equity Office which was supported by the TEC and
financed through the Special Supplementary Grants (SSG) funds. According to Nakhid (2007), in 2003, AUT received $257,000 of the SSG funds while the university contributed $297,000 to support the ITMOSS programme to bridge the gap of Maori and Pasifika student academic success. Although the Equity Office was dissolved in 2005, the equity structure remained, providing the impetus to position the model within the AUT faculties. The ITMOSS became the mandate of the equity staff, which now comprises of the Equity Portfolio Holder and Academic Leader(s) for Maori and Pasifika who were supported by an Equity Facilitator at the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences (FHES). This initial group grew organically to include student leaders, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: FHES equity roles, gender and ethnicity, AUT 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FHES Equity Team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Equity Portfolio Holder</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>European</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Equity Academic Leader (Māori)/Equity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team leader (Māori)/Equity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pasifika (Samoan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Equity Academic Leader (Pasifika)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pasifika (Tongan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Equity Facilitator</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Māori Pasifika (Samoan/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team (2x Pastoral Student Support Staff)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tongan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate support:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Maori students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Māori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pasifika students</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Pasifika (Samoan/Tongan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate support:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hāpai – Office of Māori Advancement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Māori (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PAEP- Pasifika Academic Equity Programme</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pasifika (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: FHES Equity Team, 2011

The structure of the FHES (Figure 2) shows the faculty’s commitment to the strategic plan. It internalised the principles by allocating equity roles as part and parcel of their academic responsibilities, as identified in Table 1. The Equity Portfolio Holder is also Head of School Health Care Practice (Nursing, Midwifery, Paramedicine, Oral Health). The Equity Academic staff initially consisted of two Maori staff members each working 0.4 (2 days) alongside their 0.6 academic commitments.
Figure 2: Equity structure within FHES and the roles and responsibilities of the equity team members involved, 2008-2011

Source: FHES Equity Team, 2011
In 2010 one of the Maori academic staff resigned and the Equity Portfolio Holder took the opportunity to appoint a Pasifika equity academic who began at 0.5 (two and a half days), later moving to 0.8 (four days mid 2011). The Equity Facilitator, being an allied staff member, is employed 0.8 (4 days) for equity and 0.2 (1 day) by the faculty as academic support for first year students. As a coordinator, this person supports the academic staff by sending out communication sheets to every paper leader (lecturer) including the names of Maori and Pasifika students enrolled in their papers (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Communication sheet shared between equity academic and faculty staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper Code and Name: e.g. Psychology and Lifespan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper Co-ordinator:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Leader:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity Academic [Pasifika]:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student ID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: FHES Equity Team, 2011

The coordinator also serves as a tutor in one of the core papers – Human Anatomy and Physiology (HAP) and Human Structure and Function (HSF) papers for the Certificate in Healthcare Support Programme. As of 2011, the coordinator is completing her Master of Science qualification to support her career goal to become an academic lecturer as there are few Pasifika academic staff within the faculty.

The coordinator or allied staff member follows up with student contact as required by the academic staff members of the team. This is a role the Academic Pasifika also plays with regard to three other core papers – Psychology and Lifespan, Health and Environment, and
Knowledge, Enquiry and Communication for first year students, and even postgraduates. Faculty equity academic staff work in collaboration with Student Services, who support student success by attending to pastoral care aspects of students and are part of the Faculty Equity Team, but do not directly answer to the Faculty Dean (Figure 2).

With a clear, succinct structure, it was imperative to tailor best practices to retain and engage Pasifika students to capture and detect, as early as possible, any “at risk” and “retention risk” individuals, then to nurture them to succeed. The structure encompasses a holistic approach, which centres on the student as the main concern of all sectors within AUT, such as the pastoral, financial, academic, and cultural as well as the faculty services, along with its affiliated academic board and bodies as shown in Figure 4. This was the mandate to support the learning communities’ concept, which was adapted as learning villages for Pasifika students’ initiative.

Figure 4: Location of the equity team within the AUT FHES and overall student support system, 2010-2011
This paper will now demonstrate how an evidence-based process was applied to an educational dilemma to produce a best practice method, the PLV.

Evidence-based approach

The evidence-based approach can be defined as follows:

Evidence-based practice is a problem-solving approach to making clinical, educational, and administrative decisions that combines the best available scientific evidence with the best available practical evidence (Newhouse, 2006, p. 338).

The evidence-based approach has four steps. The first step examines a particular focus question and, to answer it, applies evidence from the success rates of problematic papers where success rates for Pasifika students were low. This is followed by a literature search that involves a force field analysis framework to formulate a practice development plan. The final two steps involve the application and evaluation of the selected strategy. A focusing question is imperative to guide it, however.

Evidence-based process (EDP)

Step 1: Focus question

What interventions will increase the successful completion rates for Pasifika students at AUT University?

At AUT, statistics of “successful completion” and retention rates are recorded each semester on all students’ outcomes, with Maori and Pasifika student outcomes being recorded separately as a percentage of “all” student results. In some papers, particularly at the certificate level, such as the Certificate in Health Science (NCEA level 5 – equivalent of University Entrance), Pasifika students’ “successful completion” rate was under 50 percent. This certificate programme had large numbers of Pasifika students enrolled. In semester 1 2006, Pasifika students numbered
33 of the 139 total enrolled (24 percent), while in semester 2 Pasifika students numbered 31 out of 72 (43 percent) students enrolled.

The 2007 New Zealand Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) expresses the “need to address the disparities that exist for three particular populations such as Maori; Pasifika peoples; people with disabilities” (2006, p. 8). With specific reference to Pasifika students, the TES developed a Pasifika education plan to ensure these students achieved “greater engagement and success in all levels of tertiary education”. The specific stated goals were as follows:

- To increase Pasifika students’ participation and improve retention in tertiary education.
- To increase Pasifika students’ achievement and progression in tertiary education at all levels, particularly at degree level and above.
- To ensure that the needs and aspirations of Pasifika communities are identified and addressed (TES, 2006, p. 13).

TES concerns regarding the existing educational disparities validated the need for AUT to have a developmental plan to address the above goals. AUT’s policy for academic literacy and cultural issues (ALIC) has been described as follows:

AUT recognises and values the diversity of social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds among its students and staff. It also recognises the importance of developing high level academic literacies as an outcome of tertiary education. AUT is therefore committed to the development of academic literacies and intercultural capabilities throughout the university: in its faculties and divisions and within each programme (Parker and Kirkness, 2006, p. 39).

Although this policy statement supports structures for the successful completion of papers by Pasifika students, structures were not being translated into successful academic completion rates at AUT University. Other measures were therefore worth exploring.
Step 2: Literature search

A quantitative retrospective study of two cohorts of minority and disadvantaged students carried out by Grumbach and Chen (2006), demonstrated that students from these groupings who chose to enrol in and complete a University of California post-baccalaureate premedical programme greatly increased their success in Medical School.

This study was a response to the need for:

A racially and ethnically diverse physician workforce as important for increasing access to care for underserved populations, improving the cultural competence of the workforce and enhancing the educational experiences of all medical students (Grumbach and Chen, 2006, p. 1079).

The study shows how a university used an intervention by way of a premedical programme to support successful entry of minority and disadvantaged student into medical school. Of the 265 participants, 218 (82 percent) are known to have applied to medical school, with 179 (82 percent) being successful. In comparison to the control group (who did not choose to complete a premedical programme), only 65 percent applied to medical school and only 35 percent of those students were successful in their applications.

In a study with disadvantaged African American and Hispanic students, Tinto (1993) highlighted that an important confounding variable within learning communities was that the motivation of the students to succeed was just as important a factor in their success as participating in the programme itself. Brumm and Mickelson (2002) confirmed how specific targeted communities can maintain minority students’ engagement.

These studies have relevance to AUT’s education dilemma, the Pacific cohorts being a disadvantaged minority grouping, inclusive of Samoan students. Sentiments about Samoan,
Tongan, Niue, Tuvalu, Kiribati and Fijian students’ academic achievements have been discouraging and the Pacific student association has attributed these factors not to academic shortcomings, but more to peripheral aspects such as cultural, family and community obligations (PISAAC, 1993). This issue has elevated into a major national concern, as described in Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa’afoi, Taleni, and O’Regan (2009); Benseman, Coxon, Anderson, & Anae (2006); and Nakhid (2003, 2007).

Clearly, resolving this issue requires a collaborative approach, not only from the relevant government ministries, but also between the various institutions, educators and Pacific people. Such an approach would also support TES’s second goal: to increase Pasifika students’ achievement and progression in tertiary education, particularly at degree level and above.

Nakhid (2003) used an interpretive paradigm to find an accurate explanation for the failure of schools to address the lack of academic achievement of Pasifika students in New Zealand education. She argues that a necessary condition of Pasifika students’ academic success is for them to be able to carry out their own identifying processes and to have these processes valued by the school. She clarified this as follows:

*The differences students bring to the classroom in terms of culture, language, religion, and socioeconomic status are said to affect learning but this empirical investigation confirms that it is more a matter of how these differences are perceived and represented by society, schools, and teachers that determine the way in which they influence learning rather than the differences themselves* (Nakhid, 2003, p. 312).

This “identifying process” resonates with the force field analysis framework discussed in this paper during the practice stage of the EBP process (Iowa State University Extension (2001). Silipa (2004) likewise explained that when Samoan students come to school, they bring with them baskets of values, knowledge and skills that are embedded within their culture. She argued that instead of viewing these as a hindrance to their learning, educators should find
positive aspects within these cultural factors and nurture them to enhance motivation and employ them to create a sense of belonging, thus improving both teaching and student learning. These studies emphasize the conflict between the various perspectives in the teaching and learning process, and the issue of the Western-oriented educational institutions, which limit Pacific students’ potential to fully engage.

These findings are relevant to AUT guiding principles and its emphasis on “valuing and being committed to Pasifika development and success” (AUT, 2006, p. 8). From the equity team's viewpoint, “distributional social justice” implies that Pasifika students should be proportionally represented in the academic success of the school and that they must fully participate in an open process of teaching and learning.

Benseman et al. (2006) draws on a large-scale study of the factors that influence successful completion of tertiary qualifications for Pasifika students, as well as those that impede retention and positive ones that conversely increases it. While investigating the causes of Pasifika withdrawal, they found that motivation and attitudes, family pressure and demands, peer-group pressures, financial pressures, lack of support services, and languages were the main determinants. To increase retention, they identified access to Pasifika staff, Pasifika presence in institutions, role models, pedagogical components and information as being most important.

The study influenced the goals of the Pasifika Education Plan (2001), which aims to significantly increase Pacific students’ participation in tertiary education at all levels and improve Pacific students’ achievements in tertiary education to close the gaps with non-Pacific students completely in 20 years (Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 147).

Given that these studies directly reflect the issues faced at AUT, it was decided to utilise some of these ideas and put them into practice. The Equity Team therefore created a “community of
learning" which ensured community participation in bringing about change. As Tinto noted, retention is a "community thing" (Butler, 2001).

**STEP 3: From theory to practice**

Commitment to resolving the issue and information from studies of the subject provided the impetus to pilot an intervention scheme in Semester 1 of 2007. The scheme included a pilot study within the existing Health Studies Certificate (HSC).

As shown in Table 3, the pilot project yielded positive outcomes. Pasifika students were offered the option of attending a separate tutorial lead by a Pasifika staff lecturer and supported by the Equity Team in place of their regular tutorial taught by a European (palangi) lecturer. In 2006, prior to the intervention, only 18 percent of Pasifika students passed all four papers, three students withdrew and 11 received “did not complete” (DNCs) or D grades prior to academic tutorial input. Nineteen Pasifika students accessed the Pasifika-led academic assistance option, which required attending a weekly tutorial for 10 weeks. That year 42 percent of the Pasifika students (eight students) passed all four papers, which was higher than the overall rate (30 percent) of those with all papers passed. Furthermore, no students withdrew and only four had DNCs or D grades or no papers achieved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total students</th>
<th>Students achieving papers (pp)</th>
<th>DNC/ D grade/ NO papers achieved</th>
<th>Withdrawn</th>
<th>% Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006 Sem 1</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>• 6/4pp</td>
<td>11 (32%)</td>
<td>5 (15%)</td>
<td>• 18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 5/3pp, 3/2 pp</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 4/1pp</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 Sem 2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>• 4/4pp</td>
<td>3 (10%)</td>
<td>3 (10%)</td>
<td>• 13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 3/3pp, 8/2pp/6/1pp</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007 Sem1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>• 4/4pp</td>
<td>3 (14%)</td>
<td>3 (14%)</td>
<td>• 19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 2/3pp, 4/2pp</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pasifika students who received academic input of 1 hour per week for 10 weeks from a Pasifika lecturer and ITMOSS facilitator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Sem1 19(a)</td>
<td>8/4 pp, 4/3pp, 1/2pp, 2/1pp</td>
<td>4 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12/4 pp, 7/3pp, 5/2pp, 2/1pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 (7.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Combined Semester 1, 2007 Pasifika student results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Sem 1</td>
<td>7/3pp, 5/2pp, 2/1pp</td>
<td>11 (27.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 (7.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Richard Hall (2007, April 11). Performance of Under 25 Years Olds (U25s) at AUT University. Results presented at the Equity Management Team Meeting. Statistics were provided with the permission of Equity Portfolio Holder for Faculty of Health & Environmental Sciences, 2011.

Notes: Pasifika students were given the option to attend 10 weekly tutorials. Their attendance frequency ranged from 1 week to 8 weeks.

The rationale for using the certificate programme for the pilot is that it was a pre-degree transition programme with a sizable group of Pasifika students enrolled each year. As equity members for FHES, a trusting relationship had already been established with the programme leader and some of the staff teaching within the certificate programme. Another factor is that a Pasifika lecturer taught the HAP tutorial, one of the more challenging papers for the Certificate Pasifika students, and this lecturer provided a successful Pasifika role model to inspire and motivate the students, enabling them to see that passing is possible. Also, regular network meetings had been established within the Faculty for Maori and Pasifika student liaison support staff, thus resulting in a unified group who were aware of the various roles each contributed to develop an efficient network system to improve services for Pasifika students and support them to succeed in their studies.

These factors were a positive starting point between faculty and the relevant supporting staff, which considered the restraining and other driving forces set out in the force field framework. A major barrier to overcome was the negative attitudes of some non-Pasifika academic staff. But although lecturers put the blame on the students if those students fail, there was a sense that lecturers do not feel good about their lack of success when teaching Pasifika students, and lecturers are willing to support efforts to improve success rates among Pasifika students.
further barrier, however, was a negative attitude to acceptance of the requirements of AUT’s ALIC policy.

Baulcomb (2003) acknowledged Lewin’s (1951) force field analysis framework within the planning and implementation phases of a successful small scale change in clinical practice. The pilot study was a small-scale change to begin the process of working toward increasing the successful completion rates for Pasifika students.

The force field analysis method (Figure 5) assisted in identifying restraining forces that would resist change, as well as the driving forces that would support change. From this understanding, one can then develop strategies to overcome or reduce the impact of the restraining forces and harness the driving or supporting forces (Iowa State University Extension, 2001; Australian Continuous Improvement Group, 2000). When analysing the force field data, an organisation called 12manage (2006) writes of the need to investigate the “balance of power”, identify the stakeholders, opponents and allies, and work out how you can influence each target group.

Through the equity roles, the balance of power was established through the support of:

- Willing assistance from a Pasifika lecturer from the learning support team, who would teach the Pasifika students.
- AUT and government policy requiring lecturers to value diversity in order for Pasifika students to achieve.
- The certificate lecturers themselves.
- There was no major organisation change and no extra cost involved.

The stakeholders are the Pasifika students who want to succeed and the certificate lecturers want success in their teaching. The allies are the Pasifika student liaison team who know the students and encourage and support them with their studies. The Pasifika lecturer who teaches the Pasifika students not only understands their culture, but has also studied and gained a
Ph.D., thus also serving as a role model. Another ally is the Programme Leader, along with one of her team members who had expressed concern in relation to the high failure rates of the Pasifika students.

**Figure 5: Force Field Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restraining Forces</th>
<th>Driving Forces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students don’t attend lectures</td>
<td>Trust relationship with programme leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students don’t hand in their assignments</td>
<td>Willing Pasifika lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other students (pressure)</td>
<td>AUT policy and strategic plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers lack of cultural understanding</td>
<td>Government policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasifika students socialising in Fono room</td>
<td>Pasifika liaison pastoral support team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasifika students not asking for extensions</td>
<td>Fono room, with computers available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasifika students not seeing lectures as relevant</td>
<td>No extra work required from lecturers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students not asking for assistance</td>
<td>No extra costs involved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Iowa State University Extension (2001) and Australian Continuous Improvement Group (2000).

Baulcomb describes managing change “as being skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge to reflect new knowledge and insights” (2003, p. 275). The Certificate of Health Science team of lecturers would need to have trust in the change agent (the Equity Facilitator) in order for new knowledge to be accepted, for insights to begin to be gained, and to maintain the balance of power.

**STEP 4: Practice and evaluation**

The pilot intervention proved successful in improving completion rates of Pasifika students, so additional small learning communities were formed called Pasifika Learning Villages. In addition to an academic role model lecturer, four successful students with A and B grade averages were selected as Pasifika Student Leaders (PSL), whose role it was to peer mentor via academic advising on selected content papers.
The Pasifika Learning Village

The Pasifika Learning Village is the Pasifika adaptation of Tinto’s (1997) learning community, which was developed for minority students attending American institutions (Freeman, Alston, Winborne, 2008). Tinto (1993; 1997) regards classrooms as communities that are central to any student’s learning within any tertiary institution. Essentially, this environment should be stimulating and motivating to attract students’ interest so that they can engage effectively in their learning while successfully completing their course or programmes of study.

Tuigamala (2007) describes the learning villages as a “formation of small groups of mainly first-year students who become a community within the larger university community” (p. 3). Within the PLV, academic advising was conducted among the major papers with high failure rates from 2008, 2009 and 2010.

The official adoption of the small learning community in Semester 2 2008 integrated an Equity structure and allocated SSG funding to support a learning community into a Pasifika learning village and at the same time educate faculty staff regarding cultural differences and begin to raise awareness of the cultural differences and academic needs of Pasifika students.

A Pasifika Senior lecturer of Te Tari Awhina, the Learning Development Centre, was allocated to teach Pasifika students academic skills such as essay writing, process and structure; critical thinking; literature reviews; and the American Psychological Association (APA) system of referencing; as basic skills of engaging in an assessment task for a paper.

The faculty allocated a “Fono” room learning space for Pasifika students, equipped with computers and a full kitchenette, enabling them to have a base for the learning communities. Close collaboration was established between the pastoral and academic support to follow-up on
students who were not attending classes and on those missing assessment deadlines. Feedback was sent to the faculty.

Initially, the four PSL students were financially supported for six hours per week. The PSL served to the boost number of Pasifika role models in the FHES as there were few Pasifika academic staff. As shown in Table 3, Pasifika academic staff consisted of only 9 (2 percent) of the total 442 FHES staff 2010. This disparity exists in all AUT departments. Championing students who had completed the core papers was imperative in transferring their knowledge to assist first-year Pasifika students in the learning process.

| Table 3: Proportion of Pasifika lecturers within AUT Faculties, 2010 |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Faculty                | 2006  | 2007  | 2008  | 2009  | 2010  | FHES Total |
| Applied Humanities     | 6     | 9     | 9     | 10    | 10    | 442        |
| Business & Law         | 3     | 3     | 3     | 2     | 2     | 442        |
| Corporate Services     | 1     | 1     | 1     |       |       | 442        |
| Design & Creative Technologies | 3     | 3     | 3     | 3     | 4     | 442        |
| Health & Environmental Science | 7     | 8     | 4     | 6     | 9     | 442        |
| PVC Learning & Teaching|       |       |       | 1     | 0     | 442        |
| University Relations & Advancement | 2     | 2     | 2     | 1     | 1     | 442        |
| Vice Chancellor's Group| 0     | 0     | 2     | 2     | 3     | 442        |
| **University Year Totals** | **22** | **26** | **24** | **25** | **29** | **442** |

Source: AUT Planning and Directorate Office, Auckland, New Zealand

Additional PSLs were hired but were not paid. Instead they were given Vodafone top ups and shuttle bus tickets as required, as the faculty was committed to funding only four Pasifika students. In 2011, four more PSLs were employed. The PLV model can be extended to include alumni students, who can help mentor final year health students by participating in third-year peer mentoring.

The PLV project today caters to the faculty’s four core-shared prerequisite papers for the Bachelor of Health Science in the selected areas of Nursing, Physiotherapy, Occupational
Therapy, Podiatry, Midwifery, Paramedicine, Oral Health, Psychology, Health Promotion, Sports and Recreation, and Applied Mental Health.

Following the introduction of the PLV, the FHES Pasifika completion rate was 72 percent compared to a 69 percent completion rate among all AUT Pasifika students. The strength of the PLV model lay with the employment of the Pasifika student leaders, the collaborative work, and the dedication and commitment of the faculty, academic and pastoral staff. The faculty provided the necessary resources and commitment. It promoted informal and peer learning that had proved advantageous in similar situations elsewhere (Smith, 2001 as cited in Zhao and Kuh, 2004, p. 115). The success of the PLV model was a result of the efforts of both Pasifika tutors and the Pasifika Student Leaders (PSL). It tapped on the skills and abilities of the students.

**Pasifika “label” for PLV**

Samu (2007) argues that “Pasifika” superficially encompasses a multiethnic minority group residing within New Zealand. She claimed that for three decades the Ministry of Education used it as a term of convenience. Although, the terminology poses a strong political twist (Smith, 1998), it supports the positivist approach by the late Ron Crocrombe, that it:

*Satisfies both psychological and political needs, in that it helps fulfil a growing demand for respected Pacific-wide identifying symbols and for Pacific unity. The phrase itself is not intended to imply homogeneneity – the diverse Pacific nations and peoples that fall under its banner are not all the same. The phrase is developed … in those instances and occasions when the common interest of all the islands peoples can be served by collaboration. Sometimes, the main advantage of a unifying concept is its usefulness in countering forces such as neo-colonialism … assimilation and social/economic/cultural marginalization* (1976, p. 1, as cited in Samu, 2007, p. 145).
The Pasifika label serves the common interests of people that are from seven Pacific nations: Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga, Niue, Tuvalu, Tokelau and Fiji, living within Aotearoa, New Zealand.

In this context, “Pasifika” learning villages is an apt concept. It is acceptable to bring “Pasifika-ness” into ways of study and critical thinking. The concept has the capacity to sustain the development of Pasifika student academic leadership in forming a “community of learners” (Tinto, 1993), while engaging students in the allocated Fono room space where they can develop a sense of belonging and community with other island students (Tinto, Chile, 2003).

The model allows us to teach and mentor Pacific students in the social and cultural context of their families and communities (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett, and Famer, 2008) while improving outcomes. It also fosters professional learning communities, and offers the resources and support needed for teaching and learning while making culture more inclusive within the pedagogies and curriculum content of the tertiary institutions (Smith, 1999).

This “engagement” process is vital because in a village the success of one person can be celebrated together, especially when skills, knowledge and values are learned together and shared to ensure no one is left behind. Hence, the community, rather than the individual, is important.

The approach is also in line with student-centred teaching methods, and is driven by peer mentoring and academic advising conducted in the “Pasifika” way. More importantly, the PLV approach complements the overall AUT Strategic Plan (2007-2011) and supports its goal to become the “university of choice” for Pasifika communities by encouraging “access, success and advancement of Pasifika staff and students” with a comprehensive learning support system. During the process, the PSL established partnerships with faculty paper leaders as to the required assessments so that they are able to assist the students. The presence of the PSLs
creates a learning environment that enhances a culture of academia among Pasifika students (Tuigamala 2009, p. 3). In the process of peer mentoring, the PSL are continually updating their knowledge of the subject areas.

Allen, Taleni, and Robertson (2009) emphasize that “in order to teach you, I must know you”. These are discourses in Western pedagogies that have elements of cultural efficacy (Allen et al., 2009). Gibbs drawing on Bandura’s (2002, p. 105 as cited in Allen et al., 2009) work suggests that “self-efficacy mediates between what people know (knowledge) and can do (skills) and whether they will act in accordance with this knowledge and skills (motivation)”.

**Culturally-appropriate practices**

Scholars have commended New Zealand for integrating culturally-appropriate measures and policies when dealing with diverse ethnic patients within the Health sector (McKinney and Smith, 2005), but New Zealand has been quite relaxed when teaching “ethnic” students within the Health Sciences. Culturally appropriate considerations have just come into vogue, due to many factors, including recognition of indigenous rights but more importantly, due to the understanding that Western ways of teaching and learning reinforce colonial imprints and, to a great extent, create dilemmas for minority students. The PSL and the Pasifika Academic Equity Staff conducted the teaching of content, structure, APA referencing, critical thinking and literature review skills in ways they knew students would understand, either because of their background cultural experiences or because of their own vernacular.

The PSLs transferred content knowledge to their students through the method of “talanoa” (story telling). A similar method of “kakala” is highlighted by Vaioleti (2006). *Talanoa* in the learning villages allowed PSLs to teach, converse and provide examples of broader Western concepts by conceptualising them with Pasifika examples. *Talanoa* is sometimes conducted in the students' vernacular among themselves to communicate concepts that are relevant to them;
at the same time they deliver the subject content in the Fono room. Thaman (1995) asserts that appropriate forms of ako (to learn) should be internalised to cater for diverse students, including Pasifika groups. This method empowers students to take ownership of their own learning.

The PSL built relationships at three levels: with the faculty academic staff; with the students, who identified them as inspiring role models and motivated their academic success; and the PSL formed a collaborative relationship between the academic and pastoral support staff (noted in Figures 1 and 2. These strengths are also articulated in Wilson, Hunt, Richardson, Phillips, Richardson and Challies, 2011).

In addition to supporting the learning of Pasifika students, the PLV model identified curriculum issues. In implementing the model it was found that the failures of Pacific students in tertiary education cannot be blamed only on the students or on the faculty teaching staff, but also on the curricula and on the structures and systems that are in place.

In liaison with some of the secondary schools' science teachers, one Equity Team observed the gap between science at the secondary level and the tertiary level over discussions of a Pasifika Project. The facilitator made the following comment.

*Human biology, as a subject, has been removed from the senior secondary curriculum, (there are) lots of political issues around choosing what subject to be taught at each level; and a lack of support for students in choosing the right subjects for career pathways; and a lack of research skills (in the health area). No wonder that those poor students have issues when entering university, which is not entirely their fault. I think this is a good fono for breaching this gap* [Communication from a Pasifika facilitator].

While sharing the PLV model, these discussions allowed minority groups to share their views regarding courses that progress from secondary level to bridge the gap between Year 12 and 13 students and tertiary level.
Conclusion and future challenges

This paper presents three main messages. First, culturally appropriate models initiated by people within a particular social grouping are successful because the onus goes back to them to drive and sustain it for the benefit of their own people, in this context, Pacific students. Integrating the learner’s culture is an imperative factor in making learning relevant, thus improving educational outcome and academic pedagogies. In this sense, with the use of the PLV model culture has finally received the respect and social justice it deserves.

Second, the faculty commitment to take ownership of the model to create learning opportunities to ensure that student potential is realised has made a distinct difference to eradicating the reputation Pacific students have as low achievers in the New Zealand education spectrum.

Third, rather than having a dichotomy, it is necessary for the academic and pastoral arms to work hand in hand, because Pacific students come with their own baskets of values, beliefs, cultural expectations and practices and these must be recognized and accommodated, which is what the PLV model does. With the key actors working in partnership within the PLV model, Pacific Island students have a chance to succeed in a meritocratic society.

The learning villages provide a structure that can be applied to any content, which could be a way forward to achieve equitable outcomes. But the PLV model is still in its embryonic stages, it is not without its imperfections because the context is not yet fully supportive. Improvement of completion rates cannot happen in a vacuum. Ongoing challenges include retaining faculty support staff for the PLV, and securing sustained funding resources to aid PSLs so that PSLs can develop a balance between academic work and student support and avoid clashes, overwork and stress, which could lower the quality of their academic performance. The work in progress is positive, however, and the PLV model has great potential to improve Pasifika student academic performance in a range of subject areas.
References


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