

Teaching for student success: Promising practices in university teaching

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Abstract

The ability of universities to teach in ways that support the success of diverse students is a matter of focused action in many nations, especially those where demographic trends suggest an increasing prevalence of students from groups under-represented in universities. This paper describes findings from research involving three Faculties and a service centre at a university. Ninety-two interviews were undertaken with Māori and Pasifika students using the Critical Incident Technique (CIT). Teaching and other interventions in non-lecture settings based on the Phase 1 interview findings were implemented. A second set of interviews followed to evaluate the impact of the interventions. Results from the interviews are discussed, along with an analysis of more than 1900 student stories of when teaching in non-lecture settings has helped or hindered their success in degree-level studies. Promising practices for university teaching that helps Māori and Pasifika success are described.

Keywords: university teaching, equity, Māori students, Pasifika students, success

Introduction

The ability of universities to teach in ways that support the success of diverse students is a matter of focused action in many nations. This paper reports on equity-focused research in New Zealand to explore good university teaching. Our aim is to promote

discussion among university educators as we consider how our own teaching practices help or hinder success by Māori and Pasifika students preparing for and undertaking degree-level studies.

While evidence exists about lecture-based learning in universities¹, little is known about how teaching activities in smaller groups of fewer than fifty students impact on indigenous and minority student success. As an interdisciplinary group of university educators, these small group settings were our commonality. Our research focused on these ‘non-lecture’ settings. This paper presents findings from our two-year research project in four different contexts in a New Zealand university of more than 30,000 students (Airini et al., 2010). Findings examine quality university teaching based on interviews with Māori (the indigenous population of New Zealand) and Pasifika (a heterogeneous composite of Pacific ethnic minority groups living in New Zealand) using the Critical Incident Technique (CIT).

This paper describes ‘promising practices’ for university teaching with Māori and Pasifika students. Promising practices are a “kaleidoscope” of “policies, practices and programmes, faculty, spaces and budgets all coming together in new ways, in the service of students, . . . and society” (Narum, 2008, p. 13). Promising practices also refer to simple teaching practices aimed at closing the achievement gap in schooling (National Education Association, 2010) or addressing the needs of specific student population groups in higher education (Schwartz & Jenkins, 2007). Common themes in the literature on promising practices in education are that no single set of practices will be effective with every student (Schwartz & Jenkins, 2007) and that statements of promising practices are dynamic collections offering new approaches (Narum, 2008).

However, research exploring promising practices has been limited by research that has not tracked individuals long enough to evaluate the impact of enhanced teaching (Schwartz & Jenkins, 2007). This paper seeks to address these limitations by describing promising practices in non-lecture university teaching for Māori and Pasifika student success associated with four different settings within one tertiary institution (education, creative arts and industries, health foundation programme, and careers services). In this context, promising practices are teaching methods and activities that help improve student progression to, and achievement at, higher levels of university study (Ministry of Education, 2010; National Education Association, 2010).

Although the research is situated within a single institution, the four different contexts offered unique and varied teaching and learning settings. Furthermore, this research specifically explores the impact of teaching and learning interventions introduced within the study. As such, this paper builds on understandings of promising practices in school contexts (National Education Association, 2010), in higher education with students with disabilities (Vreeburg, Hertzfeld, Simmons-Reed & Aaron, 2001), and in relation to ethnic diversity in higher education (Parker, 2007).

We collated over 1900 stories of times when teaching in non-lecture settings has helped or hindered success in degree-level studies, based on interviews with almost 100 Māori and Pasifika students in a range of university teaching contexts. Categories of practice derived from the student stories were used to guide and enhance teaching practices with Māori and Pasifika students. Further interviews followed to evaluate

any changes in teaching practices. This paper provides a summary of key findings on promising university teaching practices that Māori and Pasifika students have identified, and which we have applied and analysed.

Situating this research

The long-term performance of the university system depends on its ability to teach a broad cross-section of students, adapting to dramatic demographic shifts occurring as a result of social mobility, migration and immigration. In New Zealand universities, population groups that have provided most successful students are being replaced by increasing numbers of students “from groups that are traditionally underserved by higher education” (Middleton, 2008, p. 3). Middleton has argued that the changing demographic in New Zealand is “the largest challenge for higher education” (Middleton, 2008, p. 3) as it presents issues for both universities and economic growth.

Māori and Pasifika student success in tertiary education is of national strategic relevance to New Zealand. By 2021, more than 25% of New Zealand’s population will be Māori or Pasifika (Department of Labour, 2008) and will make an increasing proportion of the eligible workforce in New Zealand at a time when the median age of the population continues to grow. National trends show there has been an increase in Māori and Pasifika participation in tertiary education since 2005, particularly in lower level programmes and some growth at all levels (Middleton, 2008). In general, however, there has been no matching increase in tertiary education outcomes, as indicated by graduation rates (Ministry of Education, 2010).

Government strategy in tertiary education has prioritised more Māori students enjoying success at higher levels and increasing the number of Pasifika students achieving at higher levels by 2015 (Ministry of Education, 2010). Accordingly, there are a number of equity-related expectations of universities, including improved learning environments for Pasifika students, taking responsibility for strengthening Māori education outcomes by improving the learning environment and teaching practices and ensuring research informs teaching (Ministry of Education, 2010). A proportion of Government funding to universities is now linked to teaching outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2010).

To date, research into university teaching has focused on the perspective of the university teacher or organisation, explored postgraduate supervision and large lecture settings, and identified some support needs of indigenous students (Buckridge & Guest, 2007; Dall’Alba, 2005; Viskovic, 2006; Wimhurst, Wortley, Bates, & Allard, 2006; Page & Asmar, 2008). The recent development of tertiary research focused on Māori student success builds on the momentum gained from secondary education research investigating Māori student perspectives on their high school teaching (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai & Richardson, 2003). Similarly, a review of research into areas affecting Māori achievement in bachelor degrees endorsed the need to move away from a deficit model, which locates Māori underachievement in the shortcomings of the student, to a view that considers the ways in which university teaching can be improved to build and enhance the learning of all students (Earle, 2008).

Research into Pasifika university success factors has tended to focus on ways

in which Pasifika students influence their achievement (for example Tofi, Flett & Timutimu-Thorpe, 1996; Beaver & Tuck, 1998; Anae, Anderson, Benseman, & Coxon, 2002; Chu, 2009). Recent research has explored how wider institutional factors, including teaching, affects Pasifika student success (Benseman, Coxon, Anderson & Anae, 2006). Further research is needed, especially in-depth, larger scale research into Pasifika student perspectives on university teaching. In an analysis of research into Pasifika education issues, including at the university level, Coxon, Anae, Mara, Wendt-Samu and Finau (2002) identified the need for research that “is relatively large scale in coverage . . . [and] . . . documents the factors which contribute to educational success, including educationally successful Pacific students’ perceptions” (Coxon et al., 2002, p. 138).

When research into teaching values the voice of the minority researchers and students and is founded on critical understandings of indigenous and minority inquiry, there is a break from education research dominated by majority interests (Bishop, 2005). Listening to student voices can help university educators develop this critical understanding of their teaching – its content, effect and complexities. This is something of the honest dialogue Paulo Freire said was vital to education, even where the voices “bear witness to negativity” (Apple, Au & Gandin, 2009, p. 5). The critical lens in research means seeing educative processes and universities as connected to the larger society. Education is seen as about both social and individual economic advancement through professional education and the relations of power and inequality. Education and research into education processes in this sense are processes of “repositioning” (Apple et al., 2009, p. 3).

Through placing Māori and Pasifika student voices and the context of non-lecture university teaching at the centre of a relatively large scale research project, we sought to expand knowledge about teaching approaches that support Māori and Pasifika success in degree-level studies.

Research questions and assumptions

Two questions anchored the research: What teaching practices in non-lecture contexts help or hinder Māori and Pasifika success in degree-level study? What changes does research in this area suggest are needed to teaching and university practices in order to best support Māori and Pasifika success in degree-level studies? By describing promising practices derived from the research data, this paper reports on findings in relation to the first question.

A number of assumptions underpinned this research, including:

Success is more than we think: ‘Success’ includes movement towards and achievement of pass grades or higher, a sense of accomplishment and fulfilling personally important goals. The concept of success is broad, linking with individual and community notions of potential, effort, and achievement over time.

Non-lecture teaching happens and is important: Teaching and learning in degree-level studies happens in mass lectures and in complementary non-lecture settings that more often involve a range of formats relating to inclusive and active learning strategies. For the purposes of our research, we guided our definition of non-lecture

teaching and learning as contexts involving less than 50 students. ‘Nonlecture teaching’ does not feature frequently in the literature. The term has previously been used to describe learning situations in which teaching has been either withdrawn or minimalised in favour of textbook, handout and diagram studies undertaken largely through independent study by large numbers of students (Kent & Spivey, 1971; Rod & Levine, 1973). *Success for All* has applied ‘non lecture’ teaching in reference to smaller clusters of students (less than 50) where an educator is present to support learning.

These assumptions were accepted as basic premises and beliefs underpinning our research (Walker, 2003; Burns & Grove, 2001; Polit & Hungler, 1997). We shared the view expressed elsewhere that recognizing assumptions and making them explicit strengthens research (Walker, 2003).

How the project was conducted

The research comprised three phases including:

1. Phase 1 - student interviews to record incidents of helpful/hindering teaching in four university sites and initial drafting of promising practices relevant to all four research sites;
2. Phase 2 - interventions in each of the four sites were developed to enhance teaching effectiveness based on the data from the Phase 1 interviews; and
3. Phase 3 - a further set of student interviews to record incidents of helpful/hindering teaching and compare Phase 3 with the Phase 1 interviews. The promising practices were revisited and revised based on Phase 3 data.

The range within the four research sites gave a rare opportunity for in-depth teaching studies. *The Centre* provided careers guidance and learning activities in university careers education. *Faculty 1* focused on teaching and learning practices provided by specialists in Pasifika academic support within an Education faculty. *Faculty 2* focused on teaching and learning practices within a foundation education setting that includes intensive pastoral and academic support aimed at ensuring Māori and Pasifika students are successful within a pre-degree level qualification, the Certificate in Health Sciences. *Faculty 3* sought to improve academic outcomes for Māori students and Pasifika students in studio and performance core-papers within architecture and planning (studio), fine arts (studio), music (performance) and dance (performance).

Research methodology

This project integrated kaupapa Māori (ideology incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of Māori society) research and Pasifika research methodologies. Accordingly, the focus was not on blaming students, and identifying changes students need to make, but rather on workforce development and organisational change. Kaupapa Māori research is a well-established research methodology (see, for example, Smith, 1999) that locates Māori at the centre of inquiry. It has, of necessity, an understanding of the social, economic, political and systemic influences on expanding or limiting Māori outcomes and is able to use a wide variety of research methods as tools

(Bishop, 2005; Smith, 1999; Curtis, 2007). Pasifika research is concerned with the well-being and empowerment of Pasifika peoples within New Zealand (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu & Finau, 2001; Health Research Council, 2004). Fundamental to Pasifika research is an acknowledgement of the tangata whenua (first people of the land) status of Māori and an affirmation of the teina-tuākana (kinship with certain roles) relationship of Pasifika and Māori within the Aotearoa New Zealand context; and ancient whanaungatanga (extended family relationship) of tuākana-teina within the Pacific region (Health Research Council, 2004). Ethnic-specific differences within the grouping 'Pasifika' are respected, along with the central importance of principled relationships to all ethical research practice.

In total, the research team comprised 15 co-researchers (six with Māori research expertise, seven Pasifika, two Pakeha/ Palagi). A number of practices in this project supported Māori and Pasifika research protocols. First, there was explicit commitment to Māori and Pasifika research methodology in all documentation. Second, our researchers with Māori and Pasifika expertise were included at every level of decision making. Third, participants were provided with the opportunity to be interviewed in te reo Māori and Pacific nation languages. The research model emphasised partnerships between educators, and research that was inclusive of Māori and Pasifika expertise.

Research method: Critical Incident Technique

As an established form² of narrative inquiry the CIT was used in this research to reveal and chronicle the lived experience of Māori and Pasifika students preparing for or completing degree-level studies. Bishop and Glynn (1999) have shown that narrative inquiry provides a means for higher levels of authenticity and accuracy in the representation of Māori and Pasifika student experiences through being grounded in a participatory design. Stucki, Kahu, Jenkins, Bruce-Ferguson and Kane (2004) and Bishop (2005) have suggested that in this way students are able to talk openly rather than present official versions.

The CIT is a form of interview research in which participants provide descriptive accounts of events that facilitated or hindered a particular aim. As conceptualized originally, a critical incident is one that makes a significant contribution to an activity or phenomenon (Flanagan, 1954). The critical incident is a significant occurrence with outcomes. The research technique facilitates the identification of these incidents by a respondent. The resultant student 'stories' are collaboratively grouped by similarity into categories that encompass the events and which guide the co-construction of professional development initiatives and identification of promising practices. Participants were repeatedly asked: Can you describe a time when the teaching and learning practices at 'Site X' have helped your success in degree-level studies? Participants were also asked to describe times when teaching had hindered success.

As suggested by earlier studies, "reassurance" (Flanagan, 1954, p. 19) over categories is

achieved through submitting tentative categories to others in the research group for review. After these categories are established, brief definitions of them are made, and additional incidents are classified into them. During this process, needs for redefinition

are noted, the tentative categories are modified and the process continued until all incidents are classified. Consistent with the CIT, feedback on the categories was not sought from the participants, however we discuss this further within the discussion section.

Participants and incidents

Ninety-two participants were interviewed. Twenty-six percent of all participants were Māori, and 74% Pasifika (Table 1). Figures for participation by ethnicity were affected by the Pasifika-only focus of Faculty 1. Even when this was taken into account and Faculty 1 participants removed from calculations, Pasifika participation remained higher (64% of participants, excluding Faculty 1) than Māori participation (36% of participants, excluding Faculty 1).

Table 1

Ethnicity of participants

| Ethnicity | Centre | | Faculty 1 | | Faculty 2 | | Faculty 3 | | Total | Total | Total | % | % |
|--------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | M | P | M | P | M | P | M | P | | M | P | M | P |
| Phase 1 | 1 | 7 | 0 | 16 | 4 | 9 | 7 | 9 | 53 | 12 | 41 | 23 | 77 |
| Phase 3 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 7 | 8 | 4 | 4 | 39 | 12 | 27 | 31 | 69 |
| TOTAL | 2 | 12 | 0 | 26 | 11 | 17 | 11 | 13 | 92 | 24 | 68 | 26 | 74 |

Key: M= Māori; P=Pasifika

The research collated 1952 incidents of times when Māori and Pasifika students perceived a teaching approach had helped or hindered their success in degree-level studies. The number of incidents matched the recommended size (1,000 to 2000 incidents for skilled jobs) of sampling to describe requirements for a complex activity (Flanagan, 1954). Twenty-four categories of helpful or hindering teaching practices were identified from the incidents. In response to our first research question, the research team developed five promising teaching to help Māori and Pasifika student success practices via combined group research meetings from evidence gathered in Phase 1. The practices were implemented in Phase 2 interventions and evaluated through Phase 3 interviews at each of the sites. Based on Phase 3 data we further refined the initial set of practices via additional group research meetings, and further promising practices were added to cover incidents and categories from Phase 3.

Findings

Through the process above, nine promising practices were identified: use effective adult teaching practices; demonstrate content knowledge; use culturally appropriate practices, content, and staff; support the confidence, mana, and empowerment of the learner; grow independent learners; nurture interdependence between peers; promote professional relationships; resource quality teaching; and create a place to belong and

thrive. Each identified practice draws on both helpful and hindering student stories to provide guidance to educators hoping to achieve effecting teaching and learning outcomes for Māori and Pasifika students in non-lecture based tertiary contexts. Examples are provided below that illustrate the category. In two of the nine categories, both helpful and hindering practices are provided to illustrate dimensions of a category that comprised multiple sub-categories.³

1. Use effective adult teaching practices

Participants described times when educators understood them as adult learners, encouraging and scaffolding learning, supporting learning for a particular profession, being flexible, and not unnecessarily frustrating students (Shulman, 2005). Some emphasis was placed on active learning. By adopting effective, active adult teaching practices the university teacher was able to tap into the motivation (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005) of Māori and Pasifika students to learn.

Examples:

(Helpful)

Trigger: *You know, like [referring to the lecturer] class and like, you know, has all these little different ways of, instead of reading a book.*

Action: *He'll like cut out little bits of pieces of paper where you have to sort of organise them together. So it sort of makes you have to read it in order to putting them there and it feels like that, those, you could do the exact same thing just by reading the book, you know, or, and little tricks like that.*

Outcome: *It's like it makes it fun and it gets you up and you're doing things.*

(Hindering)

Trigger: *You have to just learn about artists that have been dead for a couple of centuries.*

Action: *Most of the courses normally are like two hours long and two hours of sitting down watching videos is, the lights dimmed, it's gonna help you go to sleep . . . I mean not that it's just watching video but I always need to be up and doing things all the time. Most of the time we do it so I wouldn't wanna say it's really, really bad, you know . . . that's just their teaching style.*

Outcome: *Just sitting there listening can be quite boring, uninteresting... I just don't take it in sometimes and [I'm] not learning.*

2. Demonstrate content knowledge

As a progression on earlier research, the students identified times when distinct bodies of content knowledge matter for teaching (Shulman, 1986). In this way, the incidents were developing in more detail the fundamentals of subject matter knowledge for teaching

(Shulman, 1986). The Māori and Pasifika students in this study described times when content knowledge that an educator has helps student success (if the knowledge is strong) or hinders success (if the knowledge is weak). Participants referred to the way in which the educator's competence in demonstrating knowledge and communicating it encouraged confidence as a student, that they thereby believed it was possible to do well in a course, and that they were enabled to develop their own knowledge in the area being studied. In contrast, there is a hindering effect when the educator is perceived to not have content knowledge.

Example:

(Hindering)

Trigger: *I don't like some of the tutorials. How some of the teachers teach in tutorials.*

Action: *[They're] like not talkative. [He/she] doesn't explain that well. When I ask [them] a question [they'll] be like 'That's just how it is' or [they] won't go in depth like most lecturers and teachers.*

Outcome: *And [they'll] just tell us... explain... expect us to understand. And it sux because you're just sitting in there knowing... wasting your time.*

3. Use culturally appropriate practices, content, and staff

This research showed that Māori and Pasifika students perceived their success to be linked to experiences in which university educators facilitated learning through links between university studies and culture. Examples included using Samoan language and metaphors to explain Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, using Pasifika humour to encourage a student to resubmit an assignment, performance of cultural items by individuals during a class held within a cultural context (e.g. marae), and integrating Māori and Pasifika experiences into explanations. Promising practices in teaching Māori and Pasifika students value diverse experiences. Similarly, ineffective links to experience, or the absence of links, were identified as barriers to success.

Examples:

(Helpful)

Trigger: *The wananga (camp) that we had over a weekend, the cultural wananga.*

Action: *because in [the] Pacific Health [course] we learn about the determinants of health and like, the poor house status of Pacific people, but actually seeing the culture and learning about it [at the wananga], like the traditional ways.*

Outcome: *you can kind of connect how and why it has led to some of the inequalities that we're facing today. So that was a good thing.*

(Hindering)

Trigger: *[Being taught by a particular lecturer]*

Action: *Without really realising it . . . I think [the lecturer] thought he/she was doing the best for us, but coming from a British educational background (which doesn't work well necessarily), um, you know, [with] New Zealand, Māori, Pacific Island students, because it is foreign. Oh, so they are bringing all these ideas, all these ways of teaching, all these pedagogies that don't suit well . . .*

Outcome: *. . . the way that [the lecturer] taught, like; it was already decided like what we were going to learn, rather than letting that happen in the moment and within the experience of the class.*

4. Support the confidence, mana, and empowerment of the learner

The research indicated that students perceive their success grows where teaching practices are motivating, and respect and affirm student identity and intellect. Where this is absent the students in this study saw that the teaching directly undermined 'success' – both in terms of achievement and self-identity.

Example:

(Hindering)

Trigger: *Cause Māori people and Pacific people are quite protective I suppose of their culture or whatever, or their way of expressing culture.*

Action: *The fact that I was shot down in such a brutal way [in a studio crit] so many times when I was just simply trying to illustrate these things that are normal to me, was quite difficult.*

Outcome: *I mean it will lead to me being unsure of myself and my beliefs. It made me question myself and what I was trying to achieve because they were all questioning me and so it just lead to this whole (unclear) confusion for me, that restricted me in more ways than just university.*

5. Grow independent learners

The research showed that students saw teaching that promotes independence as learners was a success-oriented strategy. Students described times when independence was developed through specific and relevant feedback, a planned approach to their academic skill development, confidence building through progressively challenging studies and/or their involvement in goal setting, targeted and scheduled intensive academic support, opportunities for critical thinking, and self-regulation.

Example:

(Helpful)

Trigger: *A very important thing is that like our tutors and like our lecturers within our course tend to kind of have a lot of faith in us like they actually want us to succeed.*

Action: *Like it's not like school where they just want you to pass so they can look good you know, and like they make it clear that if you need help you can go to anyone you want.*

Outcome: *So I think I really just kind of have a balance between like supporting us and giving us our own individual sort of way of doing things.*

6. Nurture interdependence between peers

The students described how their success was helped when university teaching practices created environments that encouraged collaborative, peer interaction that was supportive of academic success. Incidents were provided of times when group work (in pairs and larger) supported learning, success and students helping each other.

Example:

(Helpful)

Trigger: *There was another paper that we did in the first semester that was the history of western music so that was a more writing-based paper like we did a lot of essays and that kind of stuff. And one of the assignments was a group assignment.*

Action: *You could choose a recording. They gave to you a list of recordings to choose from and it ranged from like Bach to Michael Jackson and that kind of stuff . . . We had to go on to Google docs or Google groups or something and we also had to start a forum on Cecil and like yeah, have a discussion with the members of our group and we had to each pose a question and each pose an answer to one of those questions just to get us all.*

Outcome: *I just like working with other people . . . if I'm like working on something with someone else then I just feel a bit more secure . . . confident that I'm on the right track . . . I was really happy with my mark and then cos it was group work.*

7. Promote professional relationships

Participants described helpful teaching as maintaining clear distinction between educator and learner. They indicated that support by way of friendship from educators is not helpful for student success; being approachable and attentive though, are. In contrast to previous research that affirmed university educators' provision of informal support to indigenous students (Page & Asmar, 2008), participants valued their educators teaching

in ways that developed their independence as students. The indigenous students in this research valued educators who enabled them to be successful through *not* needing support as they enter and continue their degree-level studies.

Example:

(Helpful)

Trigger: Well most of the teachers are really like approachable um oh I think all of them are actually.

Action: They're really yeah like bend over backwards for us if we want something. Oh this was last semester anyway. They really help us with like office hours they're really helpful. They used to come down and see us instead of us going to them which is what's happening this semester but I think it was really cool they went out of their way to help us.

Outcome: Last semester they were really, really helpful. So they're trying to not do that so much this semester which is good to try and get us more independent and being able to do stuff by ourselves because that's how it'll be next year.

8. Resource quality teaching

Morosanu, Handley and O'Donovan (2010) have suggested the kind of resources students need and prefer to use to cope with academic life is insufficiently understood in current research. The data from this study did not show incidents featuring teaching enhanced by materials or technology. Rather critical incidents were associated with the nature of the teacher themselves. Addressing the gap identified by Morosanu et al. (2010) participants have identified a promising practice of investing in educators with relevant cultural and educational expertise, and an interest in supporting success in studies. Students felt increased confidence in their ability to succeed. The influence was such that simply knowing such resources were available, even when not used, was helpful.

Example:

(Helpful)

Trigger: I think it also comes back to support.

Action: Cause that's a huge level of support right there (Faculty 3 research assistant workshop), and the tutors . . . they all, you could tell they all really care about what you are going to become and who you are . . .

Outcome: I know that I would be able to seek those people out and I wouldn't have a problem expressing any worries to them or, and I know that they'd be able to understand as well.

9. Create a place to belong and thrive

The research data suggested that Māori and Pasifika student success is associated with having a place to gather together informally and formally, to study and interact. Such spaces created havens in which minority culture, language and identity could be normal, and learning, support, and success could occur through lenses of culture, language and identity. Without space, students felt stressed, isolated, and lacking in confidence.

Examples:

(Helpful)

Trigger: *Yes the CertHSc room.*

Action: *Well for me just having the CertHSc room is always somewhere to go like you know and be surrounded by your friends, your peers, like people you feel comfortable with, like there's always the library but I always find I need to talk or read my work out loud, something you can't do in the library.*

Outcome: *So the CertHSc room is always good like there's tables and chairs in there to study on and there's also computers so you've got nothing to worry about, you can just go in there and just do your thing.*

Discussion

The identification of promising practices means helpful practices can now be described in relation to Maori and Pasifika experience in four university teaching contexts. The *Success for All* research provides university educators with examples of helpful and hindering practices in each of the nine areas on the toolkit, and thereby illustrate the tools-in-action. In addition, the Phase 2 interventions provide examples of actions individuals and organisations might take to improve practices, with the aim of supporting student success. Professional development can be informed by accounts of student experiences in each of those contexts. Finally, this research provides Māori and Pasifika accounts, thereby informing studies into indigenous and minority student experience, while also expanding the general body of knowledge into quality teaching in university education.

The *Success for All* research expands understandings of higher education teaching and learning in general and contributes to ongoing, evidence-based and evolving dialogue about how teaching can optimise Māori and Pasifika student success in New Zealand universities. A number of observations can be made about the findings and research approach.

Non-lecture teaching matters to Māori and Pasifika students: From this research we know that students perceive non-lecture teaching as influencing their success. Students can detail ways in which teaching in smaller groups has helped or hindered their success in university studies. They have distinct views of good practice in non-lecture teaching. For example, they want educators who make sure the students understand class material before moving on to further material, as well as clarity about assignments, challenging

academic work in lessons that promote learning, not ‘wasting time’, and teaching practices that develop students’ independence as learners.

It is also apparent that non-lecture teaching across the university has shared and unique features. The accounts from Māori and Pasifika students suggest that quality university teaching will reflect both unique contexts of study *and* shared approaches to teaching, and are worthy of further investigation.

Teaching for Māori and Pasifika student success matters

Good university teaching is a combination of practices that help holistic and academic success, however there is evidence that educators who focus on students achieving a pass (or higher) grade are viewed as the most helpful and most effective. This focus combines generic skills in teaching with helping learners to be both independent and interdependent, successful in university settings, and culturally strong.

This research has highlighted benefits that can come from collecting evidence of how the teaching practices used by university departments, faculties and service groups help or hinder student success. This suggests a need for resourcing to support evidence-based university teaching: for example, for workforce development programmes, and access to expertise in teaching skills relevant for Māori and Pasifika student success.

Culture matters when teaching Māori and Pasifika students

Findings from this project support the use of culturally appropriate, non-racist teaching approaches aimed at supporting academic success. Some university educators were reported as using practices that contribute to students internalising negativity. Students spoke of not being worthy to be at university, being reliant upon God (or others) to help them succeed, and failing to ‘represent’ (their communities) well enough as students. Alternatively, students described practices where their cultural pride and mana were included positively in classes or activities and, as a result, strengthened. Such practices were identified as helping success in university studies. University teaching practices that perpetuate ongoing colonisation/racism of indigenous and Pasifika rights and potential were rejected by students as hindering their success. If we apply Apple’s theorising about education as a critical process of “repositioning” (Apple et al., 2009, p. 3) then working effectively with Māori and Pasifika students means having a non-blame approach towards students, and focusing on changes the university (as educators and as an organisation) can make to support success.

There is evidence that Māori and Pasifika student success is helped when university educators are both proficient in generically effective practices and responsive to the unique learner dimensions of Māori and Pasifika students as distinct groups. For example, Faculty 1 (which had Pasifika participants only) highlighted the importance of nurturing the moral and spiritual dimensions, something that did not feature strongly in the other research sites. Practices for either Māori *or* Pasifika students (rather than combining both) may be needed if our teaching is to be most helpful.

The following three categories were major findings confirming the importance of culture in success-focused university teaching with Māori and Pasifika students: use

culturally appropriate practices, content, and staff; support the confidence, mana, and empowerment of the learner; and create a place to belong and thrive. Further research is needed to identify how these practices might be applied to support Māori and Pasifika success in specific degree-level programmes, for example in medicine, engineering, technology, law, and teaching.

Māori and Pasifika realities at the centre of research matters

The integration of kaupapa Māori research and Pasifika research protocols means explicitly advocating research from Māori and Pasifika realities. As a research method, the Critical Incident Technique was effective in enabling indigenous and minority group perspectives to be elicited. The method affirmed the importance to higher education research of Māori and Pasifika knowledge, Māori and Pasifika languages and cultures, and culturally responsive methodologies. Within the limited scope of the project we were able to create some changes to practice and undertake some evaluation. This is helping us to see which university teaching practices hold some promise for accelerating sustainable education gains for Māori and Pasifika.

The concept of ‘culturally responsive research’ is central to the *Success for All* methodology. This frame rejects notions of ‘normal’ or ‘culturally neutral’ research. Diversity and equity are central to the research endeavour and fundamental to the approaches taken to research in New Zealand university education. As indicated by Curtis (2007), the traditional positivist approach to research, where dispassionate objectivity is paramount, is not the only way to make sense of the world. The integration of kaupapa Māori research and Pasifika research protocols directly challenges Western notions of what does, and does not, constitute appropriate research. Māori and Pasifika are brought from the margin to the centre; centralising Māori and Pasifika concerns and approaches, so that Māori and Pasifika ways of knowing and, therefore, researching, may be validated.

A key challenge is communicating new findings that are potentially culture- and site-specific. The team is challenged to produce information that can be useful in improving teaching practices by all educators working with indigenous and minority students. At the same time, there may be findings that are particular to Māori and Pasifika realities and interventions. For the *Success for All* findings to be applied to greatest effect, ways need to be found to communicate culturally embedded findings widely and also to Māori and Pasifika specifically. This research has commented on how to research in culturally responsive and relevant ways for innovative outcomes.

Research limitations

Further research could address limitations in this study. First, research could introduce mixed methods: undertaking quantitative studies into student success in degree-level studies tracking measurable variables (such as training in university teaching, years teaching, student evaluation scores, student success rates) longitudinally, and exploring student experience further (such as diverse Māori and Pasifika groups by age, nation of origin; and discipline areas). Ethnic-specific and discipline-specific studies are needed.

Second, there is scope to include participants in a feedback loop. The CIT tends to be used for recording incidents rather than as a three-part intervention method as happened in this research. Feedback from participants or further students could be included in CIT research that includes intervention design and evaluation. There is also the potential for international comparative studies into student accounts of what teaching practices in non-lecture contexts help or hinder success in degree-level study, and comparative studies between non-lecture and lecture based settings. Finally, research could explore ‘signature pedagogies’ (Shulman, 2005) that successfully prepare Māori and Pasifika students for a particular profession. Signature pedagogies reveal much about the dispositions of a discipline, however an ongoing challenge is understanding how these are expressed through signature teaching abilities and how teaching competencies might be related to Māori and Pasifika student outcomes in that discipline (Poole, Taylor & Thompson, 2007).

Conclusion

The findings illustrate the positive influence of non-lecture based teaching and learning on student outcomes. They also indicate areas where students can see and suggest room for improvement. Each participant confirmed the importance of non-lecture based teaching for their success and can describe helpful or unhelpful features and experiences in these contexts. Change is needed both in how we teach and how we research. This paper provides a toolkit of promising practices that educators can utilise to help facilitate best practice in order to improve Māori and Pasifika educational outcomes in a tertiary context. In an increasingly diverse university environment, the quest for quality university teaching and success for all takes us away from the status quo.

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Acknowledgement

The support of the New Zealand Teaching Learning Research Initiative for funding this research is acknowledged with sincere thanks (see <http://www.tlri.org.nz/success-for-all-improving-m-ori-and-pasifika-student-success-in-degree-level-studies/>), along with the reviewers of this article.

Endnotes

- 1 A database search of research under 'lecturing' surfaced 84 books, and 9,918 articles in peer-reviewed journals.
- 2 See <http://www.apa.org/pubs/databases/psycinfo/critical.aspx> for a 301-page bibliography covering more than 50 years of research on the development and use of the Critical Incidents Technique.
- 3 For a fuller discussion of categories and sub-categories, and further examples of incidents, please see Airini, Brown, D., Curtis, E., Johnson, O., Luatua, F., O'Shea, M., et al. (2010). *Success for all: Improving Maori and Pasifika student success in degree-level studies*. Wellington: Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (<http://www.tlri.org.nz/success-all-improving-maori-and-pasifika-student-success-degree-level-studies>).

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