



Summary

From Good to Great: The 10 Habits of phenomenal educators for Pacific learners in New Zealand tertiary education

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Cover: Lalaga Kato
1994
Maline Ikiua
Private Collection Ianeta Ikiua
Porirua, New Zealand

<https://ako.ac.nz/knowledge-centre/from-good-to-great/>

Published by

Ako Aotearoa
New Zealand's Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence
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Wellington 6140
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ISBN: 978-1-98-856234-6 (online)

June 2021



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Contents

Objectives	3
Pacific People	3
Tertiary Education – Aotearoa New Zealand	4
Success – Not a grade!	5
Who are Phenomenal Educators?	6
The Four Phases of Appreciative Inquiry: A Knowledge Seeking Process	7
Our Method.....	8
Discovery Stage:	8
Talanoa-Interviews	8
Learning style preference questionnaire: VARK	9
Dream	11
Design	14
Pacific Learners’ Preferred Learning Styles	14
Pacific students’ talanoa of their experiences with phenomenal educators	16
Summary	21
References.....	22

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to review the findings of our project titled 'From Good to Great: The 10 Habits of Highly Phenomenal Educators for Pacific Learners in New Zealand Tertiary Education'. The principal knowledge seekers for this report were Cherie Chu-Fuluifaga (Te Herenga Waka/Victoria University of Wellington) and Janice Ikiua-Pasi (WelTec and Whitireia New Zealand). Dr Abella was our research colleague, who supported much of our work.

Taking a strengths-based approach, with an appreciative inquiry lens, the study explores how selected educators were phenomenal in their practices; and how they enhanced teaching and learning for Pacific learners in educational settings (polytechnics, private training establishments, adult education, community education and universities). Over a two-year period, we conducted a qualitative, ethnographic study that included twelve educators being observed (where available) and interviewed through talanoa. We included a quantitative measure to look at the preferred learning styles of Pacific students. A total of 135 students participated in a VARK (Visual, Audio, Read/Write, and Kinaesthetic) online questionnaire across Aotearoa New Zealand. Another 56 participated in student talanoa groups to discuss who, in their experience, were phenomenal educators.

The discussion and analysis of the report is framed around the question: "Who are phenomenal educators for Pacific learners, and what do they do in their practices. From the evidence synthesis, case studies of phenomenal educators, VARK results and Pacific learners' responses we have developed this Kato/basket.

Objectives

The purpose of this study is to identify phenomenal educators and teaching practices that are of immense benefit to Pacific students in tertiary education and to inform institutional and sectoral improvements.

The objectives of this study are to:

- Identify, analyse and describe phenomenal educators who have effective teaching and learning practices in place for Pacific learners.
- Ascertain the learning styles of Pacific learners.
- Develop a teaching and learning Kato (basket) for educators.

The study was guided by a series of questions that focused on the roles of phenomenal educators and the positive outcomes they have established for Pacific learners and communities. These are:

- What are the key enabling characteristics of phenomenal educators that have successful learning outcomes for Pacific students?
 - How do Pacific learners engage with their educational environments?
 - What types of resource are required for educators to further enable Pacific learners' success?
- What are the models of phenomenal teaching and learning that produce and reproduce continual success for Pacific learners and their communities?

Pacific People

Who are Pacific people? It's a question that gets constantly discussed in education. What term shall I use? What term is most suitable? Actually, there is no one appropriate response. The umbrella term 'Pacific' has been used by the New Zealand government, agencies, educational institutions, and academics to describe the ethnic make-up of people migrating from the Pacific Islands to Aotearoa New Zealand (Cook, Didham, & Khawaja, 2001). Bedford and Didham (2001) state that the term 'Pacific' has been commonly and widely utilised at all levels of society including educators, policy makers, community workers, the media, and institutions. The use of the term has often led to broad generalisations about a group of people who are extremely diverse and evolving.

A foundational document for research titled the 'Pasifika Education Research Guidelines' (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu, & Finau, 2001), that was developed for the Ministry of Education in Aotearoa New Zealand, provided one definition of Pacific peoples. At the time of development, it made reference to the six Pacific nations of Samoa, Tonga, Niue, Cook Islands, Tokelau, and Fiji. In this context, 'Pacific people' is exclusive of Māori; and in the broadest sense covers peoples from the Island Nations in the South Pacific, and, in its narrowest sense, Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand. Other research goes on to clarify the issue of Pacific people, defining them as being a heterogeneous group with different inter- and intra-ethnic variations in the cultures. Variations include New Zealand-born/raised and island-born/raised Pacific people; with these being recognised as diverse groups.

For the purposes of this review, we have used 'Pacific', rather than 'Pacific Island' or 'Pasifika.' The term Pasifika is used where the literature refers to the term specifically. We have used 'Pacific' to mean people who can 'trace descent to and/or are citizens of any of the territories commonly understood to be part of the Pacific (i.e., Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia)' (Davidson-Toumu'a, Teaiwa, Asmar, & Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2008, p. 11). The use of the term Pacific in this way is in line with current Ministry of Education policy.

Tertiary Education – Aotearoa New Zealand

There is growing recognition that the New Zealand education system does not adequately meet the needs of Pacific learners. There is evidence of varying support programmes that have been developed to enhance the pastoral care of students, but without any thought to the unique circumstances of Pacific learners' academic needs. Others have been superficially adapted with respect to programme materials, but without a deeper consideration of the myriad programmatic, organisational, and external factors that exist. Tertiary staff are eager for guidance to more meaningfully adapt or develop teaching and learning methods that meet the needs of these students.

Rather than focusing on these negative statistics, we must shift our whole paradigm to a strengths-based approach. This is an urgent shift. A strengths-based approach focuses on developing assets that are known protective factors, such as strong relationships, life skills, and school connectedness. In this study we were able to shift the responsibility for the perceived deficits away from the individual and focus

instead on how the educator can be phenomenal and enhance the experiences of Pacific learners in tertiary education.

Success – Not a grade!

What is success for Pacific people in education? Pacific scholars have tried to address this issue of success for Pacific people in all forms of education (Perrot, 2015). While there are signs that Pacific achievement is trending up and has made incremental improvements (Southwick, Scott, Mitaera, Nimarota, & Falepau, 2016); comparable to other groups, Pacific are still behind, statistically (Southwick et al., 2016). Therefore, we raise the question: Where to next?

Our research has shown that achievement for Pacific in education should be focused on the authentic development of self (Perrot, 2015; Chu, Abella & Paurini 2013). When education and learning environments develop students as strong positive people who have confidence in their ability, no matter what the circumstances; when education builds quality nurturing relationships with staff, educators and the school; and when environments are inclusive so that they reflect and legitimise Pacific culture, connections and values; the result is academic achievement. If educators apply the law of 'indirect effort' by steering their focus to the development of the person through authentic cultural learning environments and the building of quality relationships with students, achievement will follow.

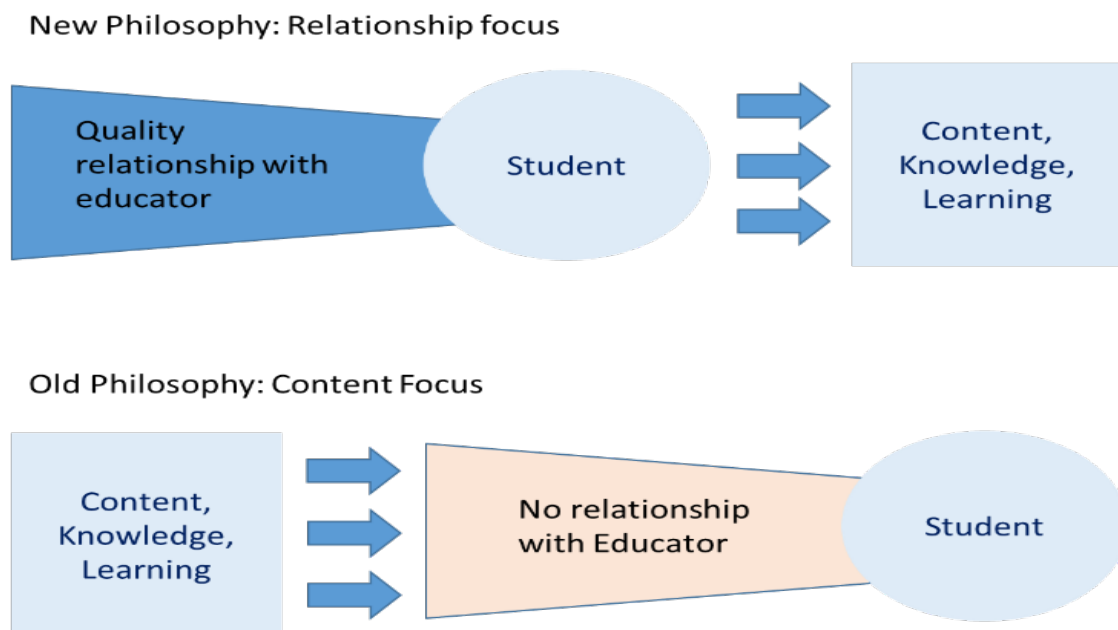
When educators put the person at the centre, the person becomes self-determined for achievement and not the other way around. Educators who put achievement over personal development are in for an arduous task if they honestly desire success for their Pacific students. Person-centred approaches connected to learning develop Pacific students who are eager to achieve long-term. They embody a strong sense of self, reflected in a strong identity as a Pacific person.

They develop strong character and espouse leadership. These students are then prepared for more than just education but continued positive development across their lifespan. When Pacific students are strong, they embrace their own their story; when they embody self-awareness, then their learning and achievement are almost predictable. What is also rewarding is seeing the shift that happens within students when they finally feel successful (Perrot, 2015).

Relationship Building

The importance of relationships for Pacific students in education is unquestionable and undeniable. If we want Pacific students to succeed in tertiary study, academic and non-academic/professional staff have to foster quality, intentional relationships with students. Students have to feel cared for and protected by the people that are involved in their education and support. Staff, as well as institutions, also have to foster learning environments that are collaborative and enable aiga-like (family-like) feelings to be cultivated between students. Relationship building cannot be an optional extra for educators, it has to be part of their core function.

Figure 1: Change in educator's philosophy



Who are Phenomenal Educators?

Our study is focused on phenomenal educators and their phenomenal practices. The term phenomenal educator is derived from two words: *phenomenal*, that means “extremely successful or special, especially in a surprising way” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018b) and *educator*, who, in general, is “a person who teaches people” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018a). Simply put, phenomenal educators are successful and effective educators.

The Four Phases of Appreciative Inquiry: A Knowledge Seeking Process

Following on from an appreciative methodology as a preliminary stage, Cooperrider (2000) devised four phases of appreciative inquiry (AI) that he called the 4-D process. They are:

1. **Discovery** that is an appreciation and discovery of the best of 'what is'.
2. **Dream** where members can envision what is possible and build upon strengths in this way by having conversations grounded in knowledge created in the Discovery phase. The dreams have been initiated by asking positive questions and developing a picture of what the organisation could and should become according to people's deepest hopes and highest aspirations.
3. **Design** where members devise short-term and long-term strategies to redesign the social, political, economic, and physical aspects of the group through dialogue. The task is to redesign the organisation's social architecture - norms, values, structures, strategies, systems, patterns of relationship, and ways of doing things that can bring dreams to life.
4. **Destiny** guided by these principles, the group works to accomplish stated goals and to be innovative in accomplishing these goals. The Destiny phase allows for 'what could be'. Through innovative ways, people can move the organisation closer to the ideal grounded in reality.

Our Method

In developing a Kato and transformative study, we wanted to change some of the traditional terminologies around research. For this study, and the journey of Talanoa alongside the participants, we have arrived at the term of “knowledge seekers” or the process of “knowledge seeking.”

As Cooperrider (2000) had devised four phases of AI, we decided to adapt the AI method for the research stages for this study.

Discovery Stage:

Here we are interested in appreciating and discovering the best of ‘what is’ in the way great educators teach. The primary task is to promote learning by sharing stories about the best times and analysing the factors that made them possible. Essentially, we are keen to build the foundations of understanding preferred learning styles for Pacific learners.

In the Discovery stage, we developed and disseminated a VARK questionnaire for Pacific learners across the tertiary sector in Aotearoa New Zealand. In this questionnaire, we were keen to obtain statistical data that gives us patterns of learning-style preferences. We are interested in understanding how well Pacific learners learn from different teaching methods.

A synthesis of relevant Pacific tertiary research was developed. We drew out the theoretical arguments of the New Zealand-based research as a way of building a foundation for the Kato.

Talanoa-Interviews

Vaioleti (2006) introduced the Talanoa methodology to Pacific research, and thereafter researchers have adapted and utilised Talanoa to advance the field of Pacific knowledge. Traditionally, the approach of Talanoa allows for members of a group to engage in a discussion that is usually inclusive and participatory. In research, Talanoa groupings have given life to participants’ and researchers’ processes of talking together in ways that are more familiar. For example, kava/’ava (traditional Pacific root drink) has been used in circles of discussions to enhance the talks that take place between Pacific people. Talanoa has been highly adaptable over the years

and the emphasis we have taken for this study is that Talanoa infuses a connection and relationship between participants and knowledge seekers.

Values of respect, humbleness, and equity were brought to the forefront so that all participants felt comfortable to speak openly. For this study, we have Talanoa methodology and method as the guiding value system to demark any formality that might occur in a typical interview process. For many of our Talanoa interviews, we met over food and in informal settings that were deemed appropriate (such as cars, cafés, garden walks, community events, classrooms, gymnasiums, etc.). In the case of Talanoa with students, groups of students talked together over food and drink. The use of Talanoa groups allowed students to feel comfortable with one another and the knowledge seekers and they were able to discuss ideas more freely.

Learning style preference questionnaire: VARK

Understanding and adapting to different learning styles is crucial for any educator, whether they are teaching in a classroom, at a marae or in a community setting. In tertiary education, we must do more by learning to understand the specific learning styles and interests of each of our Pacific learners. Our teaching styles should be able to reflect the various learning styles of the range of Pacific learners in our classrooms. When educators do this, we can then design teaching lessons that are focused on Pacific students' learning styles. Whether that offers more options to work independently or in groups, based on an area of interest or even based on the level of understanding of the content; we serve them best by having the best teaching and resources available for them.

As we were keen to know more about Pacific learners' preferred learning styles, we decided to use Fleming's (1987) VARK questionnaire, that was developed in New Zealand and has a popular following across the globe with different types of educators. Learning styles are a popular concept in psychology and education and are intended to identify how people learn best.

The VARK model of learning styles suggests that there are four main types of learners. These are:

- Visual images – the student prefers learning material in a pictorial or graphic format
- Aural messages or the spoken word – the student likes to listen to lectures and discuss the work
- Reading and making notes – the student learns best through reading and writing
- Kinaesthetic or active learning – the student prefers to learn through practical activities.

We decided to use the VARK questionnaire as it provided a baseline and was a useful tool for our study and for the educators. The questionnaire had a small number of participants (n=135), but it still provides some insightful information about learning styles.

There is not an extensive amount of quantitative data pertaining to Pacific learners and their preferred learning styles. It was important for us to have some idea about what students enjoy when it comes to learning. As an instrument, the VARK Inventory gives educators an appreciation of the way learners process information. It can influence how they teach. An educator with such an insight may be encouraged to make an effort to broaden their teaching style so that they may positively impact a greater number of their students. In essence, the phenomenal educators would include all modalities into their teaching.

The questionnaire was calibrated into the software program Qualtrics with a range of questions for people to answer by ticking a box. We sent the questionnaire out to educational networks across Aotearoa New Zealand. Our colleagues and community friends forwarded the survey to their students, and/or posted the questionnaire link to their teaching courses via their websites. The questionnaire could be accessed by any Pacific student at Private Training Establishments (PTEs), wānanga/Māori universities, universities, adult education centres, and institutes of technology and polytechnics. As knowledge seekers, we used our extensive educational and community networks (e.g., Association of Pasifika Staff in Tertiary Education/APSTE) to roll out the questionnaire as wide and far as possible.

It was important to have quantitative data and evidence as it would give us a clearer understanding and appreciation of the scope of Pacific students' learning style preferences.

One hundred and thirty-five Pacific students participated in the VARK inventory, that takes less than five minutes to complete and was easily accessible via a link on their computer or their cell phone.

For the Discovery stage we also pulled together past and current research on Pacific learners to form a best evidence synthesis of what works for Pacific learners. This review of the literature helped to form the foundational pillars for the Phenomenal Educators' Kato.

Dream

In this knowledge seeking phase, we used an ethnographic method combined with Talanoa that created conversations with learners and educators grounded in the knowledge created in the Discovery phase. Through the research in this phase, we elicited themes and patterns that inspire hope and possibility for Pacific learners through their phenomenal educators. Learners and educators envision what is possible and how to build upon the strengths. An underlying question of the Dream phase was: "What might we become if our exceptional moments were the norm?"

In this phase, we obtained 12 case studies of phenomenal educators across Aotearoa New Zealand. We came to this number because it provided us with specific teaching material, in-depth Talanoa, and field observations to draw upon for the Kato. Some of the educators (n=5) who had committed to the study had to withdraw due their very busy work schedules.

In the case studies, we were able to observe some of the educators' practice in the 'classroom'. For all the educators, we carried out Talanoa interviews. In gathering participants for these case studies, we recruited a specific selection of educators across universities, polytechnics, Private Training Establishments (PTEs), and adult learning contexts.

In selecting the phenomenal educators, the following criteria were used in the selection of the institutions:

Firstly, we wanted variances that included a spread of sites across the country and a range of different types of tertiary institutions: universities, polytechnics, wānanga, and private training establishments.

Secondly, we wanted a spectrum of disciplinary fields because this would provide us with a deeper insight into areas that Pacific students were learning within.

Thirdly, we selected on the basis of the educator's proven academic and personal success with Pacific learners, such as high levels (85% and above) of completion and retention of Pacific learners in their courses across a five-year span.

And finally, we also selected participants with at least five years of teaching experience in tertiary education.

Educators were asked:

What phenomenal practices do you use that produce great Pacific student learning outcomes?

Table 1: Characteristics of the Phenomenal Educators in the case studies

Type of tertiary education & region	Gender	Years of teaching experience	Role	Field	Ethnicity	Pseudonym
ECE/Porirua	Female	30	Retired/early childhood (ECE) and community	ECE	Niue	Anita
Polytechnic/Auckland	Female	12	Tutor	Tertiary	Tonga	Na'i
Adult learning/community/ Canterbury	Male	10+	Teaching English as a Second Language	Adult learning	Pakeha	Tobias
University/Wellington	Female	15+	Lecturer	Tertiary	Cook Island Māori	Reina
University/Wellington	Male	6	Lecturer	Tertiary	Samoan	Stevie
Private Training Establishment/Nelson	Male	8	Senior Tutor	Building	Pakeha	Ardie
Polytechnic/Waikato	Female	10+	Tutor	Nursing	Samoan	Carli
University/South Island	Male	20+	Lecturer	Education	Fijian	The Mentor known as "P"
Polytechnic/Central North Island	Male	5+	Lecturer	Science	Not stated	Eli
Private Training Establishment/Auckland	Female	10+	Tutor	Youth Development	Samoan	Emma
Wānanga/Central North Island	Male & Female	10+	Lecturers	Social Work	Samoan	Julo and Iga

Design

In this phase of the study, we developed a Kato/basket titled 'From Good to Great: The 10 Habits of Phenomenal Educators for Pacific Learners'. This Kato was built from the key learnings and results from the VARK questionnaire, best evidence synthesis, Talanoa discussions, observations, and the case studies. As we developed this Kato, we used an informal network of educators to co-design and check the accuracy of our data interpretation.

Pacific Learners' Preferred Learning Styles

As part of our exploration with Pacific learners we were keen to ascertain how students viewed their own learning. We used the VARK questionnaire as it has a long history with learning organisations globally. We acknowledge that as a tool, it has roots in a western paradigm. Perhaps, future research studies can take the VARK questionnaire and adapt it to meet the needs of Pacific groups. Of the 135 student responses to the Visual, Aural, Read/Write, and Kinaesthetic (VARK) questionnaire, 54 of the learners were multimodal having a near-equal preference for each of the different learning modes.

Twenty-two learners had a single preference for the Visual (V) mode; this preference includes the depiction of information in charts, graphs, flow charts, pictures, film, and videos. Layout, whitespace, clear headings, patterns, designs and colour are important in establishing meaning. Learners with a strong visual preference are more aware of their immediate environment and their place in space.

Nine learners had a single preference for the Aural (A) mode; this mode describes a preference for information that is spoken or heard. Learners with this modality report that they learn best from discussion, oral feedback, asking questions, oral presentations, classes, tutorials, and talking with others,

Fifteen learners had a single preference for the Read/Write (R) mode; this preference is for information displayed as words, either reading or writing. It means that learners prefer books and handouts. In practice, they are keen to use quotes, lists, texts, books, brochures, handouts, manuals, email, mobile chat, texting, and discussion boards. They have a strong connection with words.

Thirty-five learners had a single preference for the Kinaesthetic (K) mode; in this mode, the learner prefers experiential and practical hands-on learning. The learner is

connected to reality, either through experience, example, practise or simulation. It is often referred to as learning by doing.

According to Fleming (1987), these are the sensory modalities that are used for learning any information. During the processes of training, teaching, coaching or mentoring, VARK seems to reflect the experiences of our learners. It is important that there is some overlap between them. A learner can be a combination (multimodal) of VARK. For example, a learner may have a preference for using Visual and Read/Write (V and R), or Aural and Kinaesthetic (A and K) or all four (V, A, R and K).

Based on these findings, Pacific learners do not fit into one preferred mode of learning. However, the findings do indicate that Pacific learners have a varied approach in terms of how they learn.

Pacific students' talanoa of their experiences with phenomenal educators

The following attributes, skills and qualities of phenomenal educators were identified by the students when they were presented with the following key question during Talanoa: "Who is a Phenomenal Educator for Pacific Learners and why?"

A phenomenal educator has the ability to develop authentic relationships

The most frequent response was that a phenomenal educator develops meaningful teaching and learning relationships with students, a response that was also evident in the Chu et al. (2013) Ako Aotearoa study. They are confident and able to build trusting relationships with students in order to create a safe, positive, and productive learning environment. Safe refers to a culturally safe space where students feel acknowledged and do not experience racist attitudes or discrimination in any form.

A phenomenal educator demonstrates respect to students

In a phenomenal educator's classroom, each student's ideas and opinions are highly valued. This educator creates a welcoming and warm learning environment for all the students. Students feel safe to express their feelings and, because of this, they also learn to respect and listen to other students. Student's Pacific names are pronounced correctly, and they are not typecast into stereotypes. First and foremost, they are respected as individuals who have diverse backgrounds. Respect from the educator is demonstrated by listening to students, looking after them, giving them time to be who they are, acknowledging their cultures, and using their languages.

A phenomenal educator creates a sense of belonging in their classroom

This educator provides a supportive and collaborative environment where students feel that they are an important and integral member of the class, and that they can depend on their educator and the other students in the class. A phenomenal educator is approachable and builds rapport easily with the students. Students state that it is easier for the educator to foster belonging in smaller classes, rather than in large lecture theatres, though that isn't entirely impossible. Also, the educator providing kai/food at the start of a course facilitated a sense of community, togetherness, and belonging.

A phenomenal educator is warm, accessible, enthusiastic and caring

This educator is approachable, not only to students, but to other staff on campus or in the educational organisation. They generally have a caring reputation, that is well known to many people. This is an educator whom students trust and know they can go to with any problems or concerns. Phenomenal educators possess good listening skills and take time out of their busy schedules for anyone who needs them. They have time to take people out for coffee, or have a chat after class, to talk through what is going on in their lives.

A phenomenal educator sets high expectations for all students

Phenomenal educators know that their expectations greatly affect their students' educational achievement. They therefore communicate the expectation that their students will succeed, not fail. A phenomenal educator expects their students to succeed or define their own success. Pacific students need someone to believe in them. They need a wiser, older person to believe in their abilities, set the bar high and then create an environment where it is okay to fail.

A phenomenal educator has a love of learning and teaching

They inspire students with their consistent passion for education and for the course material. They are constantly renewing themselves as an educator to provide students with the highest quality of education possible. This continual learning and growth undertaken by the educator could be in the form of professional development workshops, working and living in the community and/or volunteering in the Pacific community. An example that came up regularly at the student talanoa was attending Pacific community events. This educator has no fear of learning new teaching strategies or incorporating new technologies into lessons, and always seems to be the one who is willing to share what they learned with their colleagues. Their love of teaching or passion for the work, includes commitment to students' success. To a student, this means a teacher should "always be willing to help and give time".

A phenomenal educator is a leader

Phenomenal educators focus on shared decision-making and teamwork, as well as on community building. They communicate to their students that leadership is for them by providing opportunities for each of them to assume and take up leadership roles. In some cases, these phenomenal educators have had prominent roles (e.g., youth

worker, workshop facilitator, mentor, etc.) in the community that has enabled them to be phenomenal.

A phenomenal educator is adaptable

They are openly flexible and adaptable when a lecture or lesson is not working. They take time to pause in class, and observe the level of student attention and enthusiasm. This educator can change their teaching approach on the spot. This educator assesses their teaching throughout the lessons and finds new ways to present material to make sure that every student understands the key concepts.

A phenomenal educator works together with other colleagues

This educator asks for suggestions or help from other educators, graduate students, or staff. The people that they work together with are individuals who share similar ways of working. They see this as a way to learn from their colleagues. A phenomenal educator uses constructive criticism and advice as an opportunity to grow as an educator.

A phenomenal educator maintains professionalism in all areas

This professionalism is exemplified in their personal appearance, organisational skills and preparedness for each day. Their communication skills are clear and exemplary, whether they are speaking with a student or a colleague. The respect that the phenomenal educator receives because of her professional manner is obvious to those around them.

A phenomenal educator has clear objectives

Students talk about phenomenal educators who are clear about their intentions for teaching and this is demonstrated in their teaching methods and curriculum. They have a plan and they are clear about their plan. Making a plan does not suggest that they have a lack of creativity in the curriculum, but rather gives creativity a framework in which to flourish.

A phenomenal educator has a sense of purpose and knows about motivation

Educators with a sense of purpose are clear about their teaching in class and day-to-day work. They are able to see the big picture and can ride above the hard and boring days because they have a vision for their subject area and the students who take their classes. Students also said that educators of this type are highly capable of engaging and motivating students to learn.

A phenomenal educator knows when to listen to students

A phenomenal educator actively listens to their students. They are genuine about their listening and are not distracted by outside disturbances such as text messages. They take the time to listen to their students either before, during, or after class.

A phenomenal educator develops and demonstrates a positive attitude

Phenomenal educators have an upbeat mood, a sense of vitality and energy, and see past momentary setbacks to the end goal. Positivity breeds creativity. A positive educator is someone that students want to go to class to learn from.

A phenomenal educator has a sense of humour

The use of humour makes an impression. It tells students that their educator is real and can relate to their lives in some way. It reduces stress in a classroom, and provides periods of light relief when learning difficult and challenging concepts.

A phenomenal educator uses authentic praise

Students enjoy encouragement but state that it has to be real encouragement. They believe that there is no point to praising work when it is only 50% of what they are capable of. The praise can be communicated verbally or as summative or formative feedback on written work.

A phenomenal educator can take risks

Risk-taking is a part of the phenomenal formula. Pacific students enjoy seeing their educators try new ideas and methods in their teaching. This could be about stepping outside of the educator's comfort zone or trying out a method they have acquired through on-going learning. Some will also watch closely how an educator handles any challenges in their risk-taking.

A phenomenal educator is consistent

The notion of consistency infers that educators have integrity and they will follow through on their word with action. This allows students to rely on the educator when they are in need. This consistency is also evident in the educator turning up to class on time and replying to email or online questions in appropriate timeframes.

A phenomenal educator is reflective

Phenomenal educators take time to reflect on their methods, their delivery, and the way they connect with their students. Reflection is necessary to identify any weaknesses that can be strengthened with a bit of resolve and understanding.

A phenomenal educator enjoys their work

It is easy to identify an educator who loves their work. The students state that this type of educator emanates contagious energy. Even if it is on a subject like information technology, the subject comes alive with the educator's passion about the subject. If an educator does not love their work or subject, students state that it comes through very clearly during their teaching.

A phenomenal educator adapts to student needs and welcomes changes

A phenomenal educator can change or adapt their plans or course schedule to accommodate the needs of students. They can also change their classroom or assignments to keep students connected to the course. As students develop, teaching methods need to as well. This educator does so through their connections with students and knowing their students' learning needs.

A phenomenal educator takes the time to explore new tools

With the advance of technology, phenomenal educators can acquire new resources and tools that stimulate interest in their teaching and course curriculum. They are not afraid to push for technology in the classroom or use technology in their teaching. This educator supports students if they do not have access to technology and offers flexibility if students do not have the appropriate means.

A phenomenal educator knows how to provide student support

There are days when Pacific students will need support. This could be in the form of listening, counselling, or through giving advice. Phenomenal educators are usually well-connected to other support services in the educational organisation and/or wider community and have a deep understanding of the purpose of the services. They will refer students to the relevant service.

A phenomenal educator is comfortable with Pacific cultures and people

Phenomenal educators are comfortable with Pacific students, people and their cultures. They are learned people who can create teaching environments that include

Pacific learners, rather than exclude them. Being comfortable with Pacific cultures and people is about being aware of cultural protocols and values.

A phenomenal educator brings fun into the teaching room

“Don’t be too serious” is the overwhelming statement from Pacific students. Some days, “fun” should be the goal. When students feel and see an educator’s humanness, it builds a foundation of trust and respect. Fun and education aren’t mutually exclusive either. Using humour can make even the most mundane topic more interesting.

A phenomenal educator teaches holistically

Learning does not happen in a vacuum. The physical, spiritual, cultural and emotional all have a major impact on the educational process. It is important for students that educators (and the educational model) take the whole Pacific person into account.

A phenomenal educator never stops learning with Pacific students

Phenomenal educators find time in their schedule to learn alongside their Pacific students. Not only does it help bolster their knowledge about Pacific students but it also puts them in the position of a learner. This could be through the process of conversation and/or attending Pacific students’ extracurricular events. This provides the educator with a perspective about the Pacific student’s learning process.

A phenomenal educator is a Master of their subject

Learn, learn, and never stop learning is the mantra here. Phenomenal educators know their own craft. In addition to the methodology of “teaching”, they master their own subject area. Phenomenal educators stay current and a step ahead of others. How does this affect Pacific learners? Students believe that when educators are the master of their subject, that it infuses a passion for their teaching and this is continued in their desire for students to do well in their subject area.

Summary

Pacific students across Aotearoa New Zealand have a diverse range of learning styles and many enjoy a range of learning methods to suit their changing environments. The participants drew on their experiences of teachers and educators who stood out as phenomenal educators in their lives.

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