Research Report

Le So'otaga: Bridging the divide

Holistic teaching and learning practices at Pacific private training establishments in Aotearoa, New Zealand

Taulalo Fiso and Lindsay Huthnance

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In our parents' holistic teaching and learning languages:

Māori: Rau rangatira ma, nga mihi nui ki a koutou e hapai ana i te kaupapa matauranga hei painga mo nga iwi mai i te Moana nui i te Kiwa me nga iwi katoa, hurinoa.

Cook Islands: Ki te au Arataki katoatoa, tei tanu, utuutu ma te akamou i te au apiianga tau i roto i te au apii tuatoru i Aotearoa nei, kia akameitaki ia te Atua no kotou. Kotou katoa tei aruaru i te au akonoanga mea meitaki i roto rae i te au turanga o te tua apii tuatoru, kia akatupu mai Iehova i te reira i tona tuatau tikai. Te Atua te aroa no kotou – Kia Orana.

Fiji: Vei kemuni na veiliutaki oni tauyavutaka, vakamareqeta, vakaliuca, ka na tomana na nodra vakatavulici na i sausau vou ena vuli torocake e Aotearoa New Zealand. Me nomuni na veivakalougata taki ni Kalou.

Hawai'ian: Aloha nui e na taula ame na tahuna o ia Au hou nei o ta holomua. Na'outou no ka i ho'opaepae i te tahua o na kula no ta katou hanauna hou o Aotealoa, na Ke Atua no e tia'i a alaka'i, malama a e ho'oiteita a e ho'omalu i ta 'outou holomua…mau a mau. Aloha.

Niue: Ki a mutolu ne kua tamata mai, fakamau, fakauka mo e lagomatai atu ke he tau Aoga Tokoluga i Aotealoa Niu Silani, kia fakamalolo ke ati hake e tau fakamooliaga Aga Faka-Motu, kia Tu Tagaloa e mafola kia fakamonuina mai e Ia, oue tulou.

Tokelau: E fakatalofa atu ma fakatulou atu ki na pulepulega kehekehe na kamata ai fakatuputupuake ai, ma atiake ai na galuega lelei ma na faifaiga ki na akoakoga ma na taulotoga i loto i fakalapotopotoga o akoakoga maualuga i loto i Aotearoa, Niusla, ke i na fakamanuia atu te Atua.

Tuvalu: Me takitaki kola ne kamata fakamatu, atiake, kae kola ko fakasoko atu i faifaiga a akoakoga mo taulotoga saukatoa i loto i tulaga o akoakoga maualuga i fakapotoga i Aotearoa Niusila ma tefakamanuiaga a te Atua.

Samoa: Faamanuia tele le Atua i ta'ita'i o e na amataina, tuufaatasiaina, faalauteleinaatoa ma le faaauauina o aoaoga taua nei mo lala o aoaoga Pasefika (Pacific Private Training Establishments) i Niu Sila nei.

Papa'alagi: To the leaders who started, maintained, developed and who will continue holistic teaching and learning practices for Pacific private training establishments in Aotearoa New Zealand, God's blessings.

CONTENTS

SUMMARY

Le So'otaga or 'The Bridge' is a project that focuses on understanding how holistic practices at selected high-performing Pacific private training establishments (PTEs) benefit Pacific learners and support academic achievement. It begins from the view that all Pacific learners are relational beings, who negotiate contested spaces for individual, mutual and collective benefit. The term *le so'otaga* represents a bridge between spaces, and is an appropriate metaphor for describing how PTEs support learners by acting as a bridge between different spaces to achieve positive outcomes for all.

Le So'otaga is premised on unpacking, understanding and appreciating key cultural values and worldviews, and is grounded in an explicitly Pacific theoretical and philosophical understanding of cultural phenomena. The research was guided by the Pacific methodology of *kakala* (process of project set-up and data collection) and *talanoa* (focus group process of dialogue). The *talanoa* process enabled the exploration of Pacific cultural phenomena and how these manifested in the negotiated relationships between PTEs and their learners. A literature review also explored relevant conceptual and research work, so that material from the *talanoa* could be placed in context.

Key findings

Fifty-six learners from three successful Pacific PTEs participated in the *talanoa*: 43 females and 13 males, ranging from 18 to 54 years of age, and representing Cook Islands Māori, Indian-Fijian, Samoan, Tokelauan and Tongan Pacific ethnicities. Through this process, not only were holistic Pacific educational practices explored, but also key contributors to success for Pacific learners were identified.

1.   Holistic Pacific practices

Successfully acting as *le so'otaga* requires PTEs to consider a set of core concepts that holistically create the experience of 'being Pacific'. In order to work with Pacific learners to best effect, the following core concepts need to be recognised and their relationship to learning understood:

- *Va* **(relational spaces):** *Va* is the bedrock of all Pacific relationships determined by relational spaces between people, their environment and 'divinities' (God). These are spaces that both learners and Pacific PTEs understand and appreciate because they are from similar cultural backgrounds also founded on relational values and world views. Learners are, therefore, able to effectively negotiate these spaces with support from their PTEs.

- *Fa'asinomaga* **(identity and belonging):** Pacific peoples are fundamentally relational beings. Their diverse relationships are of varying nature and depth depending on their genealogical descent, duties and responsibilities. Learners respond positively to their PTE environment when its provision supports these relationships and creates a sense of belonging, both of which contribute to mutually successful outcomes.

- *Fe'agaiga* **(relational covenants):** Special relational covenants exist across Pacific peoples. These are understandings or agreements between close family members, particularly between a brother and sister, on which gender relationships are also determined. Learners follow through with duties and roles from their defined relationships, and these can be used to further support educational success.

- *Tuā'oi* **(relational boundaries):** *Tuā'oi* are relational boundaries and parameters that govern the way many Pacific peoples relate to their environment, other peoples and their god(s). They are established as precautions for inappropriate behaviours and relationships. PTEs that discern *tuā'oi* successfully can construct guidelines that are useful mechanisms to support educational aspirations.

- *Lotu* and *tapuakiaga* **(worship and spirituality***):* *Lotu* is the act of worship and *tapuiakiaga* is best expressed as spirituality. These are strong personal pillars for many Pacific learners that both support and affect their learning. Learners are often strong in their spirituality and this can manifest as active church involvement that may hinder their study commitments. Helpful tutors and organisations recognise this and assist them to schedule and timetable well, so their church commitments are balanced with their study expectations.

- *Taui* **(reciprocity):** *Taui* is the pivotal practice of reciprocity that determines a process for many Pacific learners to relate to other peoples. It necessitates that learners repay various debts owed to a range of relationships for supporting them to succeed in their chosen studies. Unfortunately, these practices are also consistently demanding of learners' limited time, energy and resources.

- *Tautua* **(service):** *Tautua* is the notion of gaining leadership through service. A familial, community and personal moral debt is assumed by learners for others' support of their studies. Again, when *tautua* is required and depending on the *va fe'agaiga*, learners consistently and urgently respond to collective demands.

- *Vagahau* and *vosa* **(language and voice):** Pacific languages are endangered, but at the same time they are critical to maintaining culture and identity. Many people throughout different Pacific communities are becoming aware of their *fa'asinomaga* (identify and belonging) and need to maintain their respective indigenous languages. Learners speak their first/mother languages with confidence, and this can be reflected by *vagahau/vosa* tutors in PTEs.

- *Mālie* and *māfana* **(safety and security):** *Mālie* is the sense that all is balanced and secure; *māfana* is a response of gratitude/warmth that results from outcomes that are *malie*. Simply put, *mālie* is a successful outcome achievable when *māfana* is a guiding force. These *pou* (pillars) exist when all the other pillars are interconnected and whole-some, balanced and secure.

2. Success factors for Pacific PTE learners

The following factors and elements emerged as key influences on the success of learners at the participating PTEs:

- **Creation of cultural contexts:** Learners identified that the PTEs in this study purposefully created environments that were culturally appropriate, including Pacific and church decorations, motifs, symbols and rituals. Learners found that they could relate well to these familiar icons, which became the drivers for achieving successful educational results.

- **Motivation for academic achievement:** Learners identified that their acceptance into a tertiary education institution was a privilege and an opportunity they would not normally be offered if they were in their respective home countries. Their families, significant others and particularly church communities were inextricably tied to their motivation and commitment to academic performance and outcomes.

- **Motivation for employment opportunities:** Learners identified that they were motivated to succeed and acquire better employment than they had experienced prior to their PTE education. Mature learners noted that they would have studied earlier if they had known such PTE opportunities existed.

- **Inspiring tutors and teaching:** Without exception, all students acknowledged their tutors were a significant part of their success. Tutors were not only technically able but they were also cultural experts who understood that to negotiate a *va fealo'ai* (social relationship) determined by *va fealoaloa'i* (mutual respect) produced *mālie* results.
- **Security in a family-like context:** Learners identified that their PTEs were family-like contexts that engendered confidence and security. They were surrounded by Pacific and non-Pacific peoples who cared, interrelated and interacted with *māfana*, producing *mālie*.
- **Finding flexibility and fun:** Learners identified that they had positive experiences in their PTEs. The teaching styles were highly flexible and tutors adjusted to their learning levels and needs. They were satisfied learners who also found their learning was interactive and fun; this resulted in positive outputs for all concerned.

3. Key characteristics of successful Pacific PTEs and tutors

Bringing together findings from the *talanoa* and previous work, the key organisational features of best holistic practices demonstrated by Pacific PTEs included:

- they explicitly shared and encouraged '*ofa, fakalofa, alofa* and *aroa* or compassion for their students;
- Pacific staff demonstrated advanced understanding and knowledge of identified cultural values (*va, fa'asinomaga, feagaiga, tuā'oi, lotu, tapuakiaga, taui, tautua, vosa* and *vagahau)* and they competently integrated these in their own teaching practices;
- they provided a culturally appropriate context and atmosphere for their learners by promoting cultural appreciation and expression to create an atmosphere of welcome and f*a'asinomaga* to encourage confidence, self-worth and pride. This was particularly critical for learners with a limited frame of reference for tertiary study and/or who had negative secondary education experiences;
- Pacific PTE expectations were that all learners can achieve; and
- they acted as a bridge for professional development, ensuring accessible pathways between qualifications and providing a commitment to career readiness through explicit links to industry.

The key features of successful practice demonstrated by tutors in these Pacific PTEs included:

- most/some Pacific staff descend from and share similar cultural backgrounds as many of their Pacific students;
- through negotiated *va feagai'aga* with learners, tutors understood and supported a range of learning needs, and use flexible teaching approaches to ensure that all learners achieve successful learning outcomes;
- effective tutor-learner relationships reinforce mutual respect, trust and reciprocity through a *va feagai'aga,* where learners meet the achievement objectives of their learning programme;
- consistent, day-by-day monitoring and reviewing of learners and voluntarily provision of time for learners outside the classroom;
- dependable support, advice and encouragement for learners' personal circumstances, and willingly negotiated flexible schedules depending on special circumstances, particularly family and *lotu* obligations; and
- tutors set and consistently remind learners of higher goals and 'big picture' priorities.

Areas for further research

Le So'otaga is the first major piece of research conducted by a Pacific PTE about Pacific PTEs, and we hope that it provides a starting point for further work by Pacific PTEs.

Valuable future areas for deeper exploration identified during this work include:

- the nature of the identified cultural pillars: *va, fa'asinomaga, fe'agaiaga. tuā'oi, lotu* and *tapuakiaga, taui, tautua, vagahau* and *vosa, mālie,* and *māfana*. Deeper investigation of these areas will increase understanding about their influence in the lives of Pacific students, Pacific communities, and Pacific development and sustainable livelihoods;

- the impacts of, and opportunities created by, *tapuakiaga* (across several religious denominations) and activities for Pacific learners' success and transition in tertiary study. This report examines this area, but it is worthy of deeper exploration (including differentiation by denominations); and

- more detailed investigation of the 'added-value' experiences provided by PTEs, and how they affect learner motivation, satisfaction, achievement and retention. This project emphasises the value of these experiences, but a deeper analysis may yield a better picture of the relationship between the costs and benefits of such activities.

Key messages

1. *Le So'otaga* is a holistic Pacific education model that further defines significant pillars of Pacific cultural phenomena, and positions Pacific learners as relational beings who negotiate their lives through contested spaces with other peoples, their environment, their educational aspirations and their spiritual God.

2. Being *le so'otaga* is based on understanding and addressing the significant Pacific drivers and cultural pillars that influence the holistic relational practices of many Pacific peoples: *va, fa'asinomaga, fe'agaiaga, tuā'oi, lotu, tapuakiaga, taui, tautua, vagahau, vosa, mālie,* and *māfana*.

3. Pacific PTEs are important sites for Pacific learners, and PTEs are capable of achieving notable success for Pacific learners. In our view, increased accountabilities, expectations and funding conditions – including those from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority and the Tertiary Education Commission – must not reduce the number of Pacific PTEs.

4. For many Pacific learners to successfully study and achieve in a variety of educational contexts, PTEs need to be well connected and supported to teach relevant qualifications and training. The cultural match between PTEs and Pacific learners is integral to the educational achievements of Pacific communities.

5. PTEs can improve the educational experiences of Pacific students by offering added-value experiences aligned with a well-developed and organised learning programme, which provides a stronger foundation for sustained motivation, student satisfaction, retention, progression and educational success.

6. In order to succeed in the current and changing environment, PTEs need to be resilient, flexible, adaptable and responsive to Pacific students' holistic worldviews, Pacific community stakeholders, workforce environmental changes and the changing economic climate.

The completed *Le So'otaga* report is a cause for celebration, and we intend to mark this appropriately. We are committed to disseminating this work widely among those who directly or indirectly influence Pacific learners, and among the stakeholders who have been an important part of this project from beginning to conclusion.

Ensuring that this work reaches these audiences is not only an important part of getting the most impact from this work, but it is an actual part of our Pacific approach. Doing this embodies the concept of showing *fa'aloalo* (respect) to the educational leaders and all those who have given their time to this project, without whom developing *Le So'otaga* would not have been possible.

INTRODUCTION

From where I stand, I do not see the lost people of the South Seas, the defeated and the despairing, shrunken shadows of those who went before. What I observe are the proud descendants of some of the most remarkable explorers and settlers who ever lived. We carry the cultural and historical inheritance of ocean navigators of peerless skill and their courageous kin who crossed vast distances before the tribes of Europe had ventured forth from their small part of the earth. Our forebears populated islands scattered over the world's greatest stretch of water, covering a fifth of the planet's surface. It was one of the most amazing migrations in history, a triumphant testimony to human endurance, fortitude and achievement.

Sir Ratu Kamisese Mara. 1999. Opening Address, Pacific Vision Conference, Auckland.

Le So'otaga is an important project. To promote Pacific educational development, it is important that Pacific tertiary education organisations are profiled, Pacific educational achievements are highlighted, and that good practices are identified and promoted. Similarly, for private training establishments (PTEs) to both maintain existing quality and to innovate – as with other tertiary education sub-sectors – they must collect information about themselves and conduct research into their identified issues. In doing so, this allows PTEs to maintain an analytical sharpness about their educational provision and outcomes.

However, there is limited Pacific research in the sub-sector that is focused solely on Pacific PTEs. Despite the information provided by formal Profiles, there is still limited 'deep' information and data about Pacific PTEs, Pacific PTE learners and other associated stakeholders.

The development of this report has also occurred against the backdrop of the priorities set out in the *Tertiary Education Strategy 2010–2015*. This places a stronger emphasis on outcomes from the tertiary education system, and in particular, higher achievement for Pacific communities and Pacific providers.[1]

Le So'otaga addresses all these points by adding to the body of educational research both by and for Pacific peoples. It also contributes to research on New Zealand's PTE sub-sector. It explores the critical success factors for good quality teaching, learning, guidance and support strategies used by Pacific PTEs, and it provides insight into the issues, needs, drivers and challenges affecting success for Pacific learners.

Notes on language

Reference may be made to Pacific people, Pacific peoples, or Pacificans when referring to those who trace their descent to, and for citizens of any of, the territories commonly understood to be part of the Pacific: Melanesia, Micronesia or Polynesia. Alternative terms used in place of Pacific include Pasifika, Pasefika and Pasifiki.

Throughout this report, the authors have chosen to use the term 'Pacific'. The researchers have also usually used 'peoples' in place of 'people', given that Pacific peoples are not homogeneous. It includes those born overseas and in New Zealand. It includes a variety of combinations of ethnicities, recent migrants or first, second, third, fourth and subsequent generations of Aotearoa New Zealand-born Pacific peoples.

---

[1] These include increasing the number of Pacific students achieving at higher levels, working with Pacific community groups, and – for PTEs – delivering tailored learning opportunities including within Pacific learning environments.

To further recognise this point, this report uses words and phrases from several different Pacific cultures. Pacific languages are critical tools, and some concepts are best encapsulated in their own vernaculars. The use of these terms recognises this, and emphasises that these words and phrases are not *fili*, that is woven into everyday Aotearoa New Zealand culture. Appendix 2 in this report includes relevant terms used in this report – along with others that arose during the research – including their country of origin.

Le so'otaga and holistic teaching and learning

The term *le so'otaga* is defined as 'a bridge' – a connection between divided spaces.[2] For example, there is a role for *le so'otaga* between learners and their education provider, between learners and their tutors; between cultures, between island-born and New Zealand-born Pacific learners; and even between the readers and writers of this report. It is a process by which strategies are developed to bridge these noted divides.

As an educational concept, *le so'otaga* champions leadership throughout Pacific PTEs; not only from the chief executive at the top, but also the other workers who are trusted with the 'keys to the organisation': from middle management to teaching staff to cleaning staff and all of the workers in between. It focuses on how we can create an environment for teaching excellence that will serve PTE learners – an outcome that will benefit all those with an interest in PTE teaching, learning, guidance and support.

This research has been framed in terms of 'Pacific Holism' and a holistic approach to teaching and learning. This refers to a balanced world view that includes a reasonable state of being in all respects: culturally, spiritually, mentally, socially, educationally, physically, and psychologically. Previous research has found that a holistic approach is the preferred approach for working with Pacific learners.

Holism exists when the identity, meaning and purpose in life is founded on connections to one's family, extended family, village, island nation, to the natural world and to humanitarian values. Marshall *et al.* (2008) cite Cram and Pipi and Pasikale as indicating that this is about "providing a holistic environment [and] includes caring for the physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing of learners" (14).

Many Pacific leaders have noted the relevance of this balanced integration of all components and what it means to be 'fully human', to use Freire's (1970) term. Wendt (1987) spoke of it as part of the art of remembering, Hau'ofa (1993) intimated this as the new Oceania, and for Hereniko (1994) it was the representation of cultural identities.

For this work, holism is expressed within the cultural pillars that form the foundation of *Le So'otaga*: *va* (relational spaces); *fa'asinomaga* (space of belonging); *fe'agaiga* (sacred covenant); *tuā'oi* (boundaries): *lotu* (church) and *tapuakiaga* (worship); *taui/tautua* (service); *vagahau* (speech/language) and *vosa* (speech and voice); *mālie* (balance) and *māfana* (being warm). However, just as important have been the principles of *fa'aloalo/ fakalilifu/ faka'apa'apa* (respect) within the

---

[2] When this report uses *Le So'otaga* (with initial capitals), it is referring to the report, project or specific findings. When using *le so'otaga* without capitals, it refers to the general concept of acting as a bridge.

project – not only between colleagues who have worked with one another for a long time, but also the negotiated *va'a feailoa'i* (social relations) between the Pacific professionals in this work.

As with all projects, this research has limitations and we do not presume to provide a generic and definitive description of 'best' Pacific practices. However, entering a *talanoa* (dialogue) about these practices is an important process for endeavouring to develop capacity and build outcomes in our field. *Le So'otaga* contributes to this by identifying significant building blocks to increased performance of Pacific learners, and to generate further thought, scholarship and research.

The completed *Le So'otaga* report is a cause for celebration, and we intend to mark this appropriately. We are committed to disseminating this work widely among those who directly or indirectly influence Pacific learners, and among the stakeholders who have been an important part of this project from beginning to conclusion.

Ensuring that this work reaches these audiences is not only an important part of getting the most impact from this work, but it is an actual part of our Pacific approach. Doing this embodies the concept of showing *fa'aloalo* (respect) to the educational leaders and all those people who have given their time to this project, without whom developing *Le So'otaga* would not have been possible.

1. BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

When Pacific groups expect a research or a professional type of relationship to move beyond one based on patronage and paternalism, difficulties had been encountered. This militates against change, and it works in favour of those whose interests are being served by this type of power relations. This underscores the point that in unequal power relations, whether it be indigenous people against a government department, a university or a crown agency, it is most likely to work against their interest being the weaker and the powerless in that relationship…research mirrors and reproduces power relations in society.

Tupeni Baba. 2004. 'Pacific and Indigenous Research: Beyond Bondage and Patronage' in *Researching the Pacific and Indigenous Peoples*.

As educators and researchers, we must encourage others to re-invent and re-imagine themselves and their work. My own advocacy for incorporating Pacific cultural knowledge and values in formal education from preschool to university is based on my belief that intercultural understanding is predicated upon our understanding of our own cultures.

Konai Helu-Thaman. 2002. Re-presenting and Re-Searching Oceania: A Suggestion for Synthesis. Keynote address, Pacific Health Research Fono, Auckland.

This chapter provides an overview of the aims, framework and research design used in the development of *Le So'otaga*. The research project has been designed to contribute to an understanding of holistic teaching and learning practices, guidance and support in Pacific PTEs in Aotearoa New Zealand. In particular, it examines the Pacific pillars and cultural building blocks that underpin holistic Pacific learning practices.

Le So'otaga has been a qualitative study, using focus group *talanoa* (dialogue), aimed at gathering evidence of the experiences and understandings of Pacific learners of holistic teaching and learning practices. The core research questions that guided this work were:

1. What are the teaching, learning, guidance and support practices that the selected PTEs utilise as part of a holistic approach?
2. What Pacific cultural elements are woven into the teaching and learning practices of the selected PTEs?
3. How do the holistic teaching and learning practices identified and elaborated on in this study compare to those in the existing literature for PTEs?
4. How do Pacific students at the selected PTEs perceive their outcomes as related to the application of the holistic teaching and learning practices identified and elaborated on in this study?

Pacific PTEs

The ultimate objective of *Le So'otaga* is to achieve the best educational outcomes for Pacific peoples. Pacific learners currently represent a large proportion of PTE learners relative to population size. Pacific PTEs were part of the Ministry of Education's initiatives for Pacific participation in the public education system; a development fund made it possible to assist Pacific individuals and communities to establish as Pacific PTEs. In 1993, the Pacific PTE sub-sector reached its peak and five percent (46) of all PTEs identified as a Pacific PTE. In 1996, four percent (32) of 780 registered PTEs identified as having a Pacific focus, and this has changed relatively little – now, after major strategic changes, there are still about 28 Pacific PTEs, from a total of 750 registered PTEs (Fiso 2009).

Private training establishments have become major players in educational provision for Pacific and other learners in Aotearoa New Zealand. Pacific learners comprised 40 percent of total PTE enrolments in 2007. Furthermore, domestic PTE students completed 25,000 qualifications, an increase of 84 percent from 2000 to 2009. This was partly due to the responsive expansion of this sub-sector. Level 4 certificates and Level 5 to Level 7 diplomas made the biggest contribution to the increase in the number of qualifications completed from 2000 to 2009 (Ministry of Education, 2011).

Significantly higher proportions of Pacific students enrol in courses at PTEs compared to the general population. For example, 26 percent of total tertiary enrolments for Pacific students in 2007 were in PTEs.[3] Of the students attending PTEs in 2008, 12.5 percent were Pacific learners (compared to six percent in universities or polytechnics).[4] Private Training Establishments have demonstrated notable success in serving Pacific learners. Five years after enrolling, 49 percent of Pacific students in PTEs complete their qualifications compared to the average completion rate of 34 percent across the rest of the sector (Tertiary Education Commission, 2009).

These factors indicate that PTEs are important sites of research for Pacific learners and Pacific education development. This is interesting and points out the importance of PTEs as an opportunity for second-chance education. Aided by government policy changes, PTEs are now significant within the post-compulsory education and training sector.

From the literature

This study has drawn on a wider base of indigenous conceptual studies, particularly Māori, to ground the focused research. An analysis of relevant literature specifically on Pacific PTEs was also conducted, and can be found in Appendix 1 of this report.

Important themes emerge from the analysed literature. These include:
- ethnic differences in learning styles;
- risk factors experienced by learners who are not supported in learning environments;
- general holistic principles deployed by Pacific teachers;
- increased student confidence resulting from targeted support;
- effective support being responsive: prioritised, individualised or collectivised to suit learners;
- mentoring and coaching as notable responsive forms of support; and
- Pacific learners' expectations, perceptions and experiences are positive when supportive networks are developed.

Generally, it is becoming increasingly clear that the intensity, volume and duration of holistic Pacific teaching and learning practices are pivotal in achieving significant progress for Pacific learners. This is expressed through the work of other Pacific practitioners, including Hunkin (1985), Laban (1989), Esera (1996), Fusitua'a (1992), Kalolo (1995), Mara, Tuhipa, Falesima and Greenwood (1996), Thaman (1996) and Tofi, Flett and Timutimu-Thorpe (1996). This selection of practitioner-based works was useful as beacons that contributed to the dialogue relevant to holistic teaching and learning practices.

---

[3] http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz
[4] http://www.mpia.govt.nz/section-2-education-pathways

Le So'otaga conceptual framework

To date, many non-Pacific researchers have interpreted, with arguably limited appreciation and knowledge, the building blocks of (and the diversity between) Pacific cultures; this report, therefore, partly endeavours to be *le so'otaga* between readers and Pacific conceptual frameworks.

The study was carried out in line with Pacific research guidelines developed for Pacific research (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu & Finau, 2001). A Pacific principal researcher was supported by an assistant, and the researchers were advised by their Research Advisory Group and supported by their own PTE, other participating PTEs and their respective Pacific communities. Pacific students/learners were supported through the research and were given an opportunity to speak in their own Pacific *leo* (language) if they wished to express themselves in their first/second language.

Community engagement is an important part of this process. The *talanoa* process enables *va fealoaloa'i* (mutual respect between people) based on *fa'aaloalo* (respect) and a process of co-creating collaborative stories with participants, which necessitates a process to construct meaning and follow-up to ensure these narratives reflect participants' views (Bishop, 1998). Bishop emphasises that the approach involves the researcher's connectedness – encouraging engagement of the participants within their own cultural world view. In short, a notion of personal involvement or engagement, and what implications this has for promoting self-determination, agency and voice among the research participants. *Talanoa* also means 'telling stories'; Bishop suggests that story telling is a useful research tool and a culturally appropriate way of representing the "diversities of truth", whereby the story teller rather than the researcher retains control (Smith, 1999).

Along the same lines, Hollingsworth and Dybdahl (1989) speak of "braided narratives" that unfold from conversations. This method resonates with the holistic approach adopted for this research that acknowledges the interwoven strands that bind and connect Pacific community members. The braided concept is not new. It involves the braiding or plaiting of coconut senet (coconut husk fibre) to produce a *kafa* (cord) for varied uses, including the lashing of a fale's *pou* (posts or pillars) or for securing the traditional mat for customary events and activities. Using this *fili* (braid) metaphor is like using the participant's shared dialogue to *fili* with another story. As noted by Smith, "intrinsic in storytelling is a focus on dialogue and conversation among ourselves as indigenous peoples, to ourselves and for ourselves" (1999: 145). The *fili* is also used for making of the *potu* or *whāriki* (mat), a metaphor adopted by early childhood education for the woven, interlinking philosophical tenets.

The focus on Pacific cultural phenomena is critical to the study; these phenomena are relevant to and understood by both those who are Pacific-born and those who are New Zealand-born. For the indigenous Pacific world view, as Peteru (2010) notes, understanding those concepts is about drawing on creation stories, lore and history. Such connectedness helps learners to avoid the key barriers to achievement identified by the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (2010), which include:

- feelings of social and academic isolation;
- no feeling of belonging;
- a lack of involvement in the academic and social spheres of campus;
- no 'critical mass' of students from similar backgrounds (ethnic and/or socio-economic);
- a lack of diversity (ethnic and/or socio-economic); and
- a lack of student networks, both with other students and with campus staff.

It should be acknowledged that many of the concepts and commentary in *Le So'otaga* are drawn from Samoan culture – this is due to Samoan learners being dominant within the research. Where meanings are common, however, other concepts and terms have been drawn from the cultures of Tonga, Niue, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Tokelau and Tuvalu.

Research design

As discussed above, the research design for this project was informed by Pacific theoretical frameworks, in line with the search for a more authentically Pacific way of "world-viewing". The researchers embraced this as a necessary part of being a Pacific learner in any tertiary education organisation. A number of factors, therefore, informed the design of the research approach and methodology, including:

- the need to explore and confirm an appropriate Pacific-specific research methodology;
- Pacific principles and protocols;
- Pacific cultural responsiveness as an analytic lens; and
- practical factors constraining the research.

The research followed a staged approach, commencing with an up-front investment in design and planning and a literature review in order to frame the research within an appropriate Pacific-specific methodology (Stage 1). Field work was then undertaken, involving visits to three providers and a review of national data (Stage 2). Following completion of the field work, analysis of key findings and evaluative conclusions were presented and discussed with the research team, the Research Advisory Group, the management of three Pacific PTEs and their student participants, and other stakeholders (Stage 3).

The primary method for gathering data was through *fono talanoa* (Vaioleti, 1999–2002; 2006). The closest equivalents to this are focus group methods, described and discussed in depth by a range of other researchers (see, for example, Morgan, 1995; Kitzinger, 1995; and Gibbs, 1997). According to Kitzinger (1995), a focus group is a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data. This method is particularly useful for exploring people's knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way. It not only has the potential to provide a research source of narrative data, but is in keeping with the conceptual framework, and particularly the emphasis on holism, that underpins this work. It is, however, difficult to generalise the findings of focus groups to a whole population.

Research Advisory Group

In line with the protocols outlined in Anae *et al.* (2001), an advisory group was nominated to ensure expert input from within and outside the sub-sector. As leaders in their respective fields, all group members brought a unique dimension to the dialogue and added value.

The advisory group served as a support mechanism for alerting and signalling prioritised considerations, and for providing feedback on the research. Other support involved communicating any relevant commentary heard in the field, either about the research or any other relevant social, political or economic initiatives that may have an impact on the research.

The group articulated Pacific priorities for consideration and provided reminders and *fono* (meetings) about various forces at work: government positions, learner issues, organisational impetus, 'Pacific! Pacific! Pacific!', local stimuli, research schedules, market discourse and other interests. As one of the advisory group members shared: "Pacific peoples hail from great lineages of *so'otaga* built between families, villages and nations – we're not ever short on ideas of how to build bridges, just short on resources to bridge the divide."

Selecting the participants

The three PTEs that took part in this project were identified as examples of good practice for meeting the needs of learners. To begin with, they each met commonly articulated criteria of good practice in their approach,[5] including student-centred teaching, engagement between learners and lecturers, expectations that all learners can achieve, active academic support processes, accessibility of pastoral care, and a commitment to educational stair-casing.

Beyond this, all three participating PTEs have demonstrated strong records of learner retention and completion. For example, in 2008, retention rates amongst the three PTEs were 87 percent, 79 percent and 83 percent, while completion rates were 85 percent, 72 percent and 79 percent. All three organisations were also on three-year audit-cycle status with NZQA, demonstrating the Authority's confidence in their ability.

Following initial contact and endorsement from PTE leadership (who acted as essential 'door openers' for the project team), researchers contacted key staff at each organisation, who took responsibility for furnishing information and inviting individual learners to participate in the *talanoa*. Other than being a Pacific learner,[6] there were no specific criteria for taking part – it mattered more that participants were willing to take part and learn through the process.

Ultimately 17 learners from Provider A, 21 from a Provider B and 18 from Provider C agreed to participate; Table 1 shows the basic demographic details of these participants. The research team was unable to include any participants identifying as Niuean, Tuvaluan or Fijian (although four Fijian-Indian learners did take part); most participants were Samoan. Due to the gender ratio skewing heavily female at one PTE, there were notably more women in the sample.

Ethical considerations were reviewed by the research advisory group prior to the project and again before the writing of this report. Informed consent was obtained from all participants taking part in the focus groups and interviews, with potential participants informed when invited to take part in the study, of the confidentiality principles applying throughout the research. In keeping with these considerations, learner quotes are referenced by ethnicity, gender and age only. Except where explicitly mentioned, no distinction is made between New Zealand-born and Pacific-born participants, as the current study was not intended to explore these distinctions.

---

[5] See, for example, Pasikale and Yaw (1998) and Marshall *et al.* (2008).
[6] Potential participants were asked to identify the ethnic group(s) they belonged to, and the sample included all those who indicated that they identified with one or more Pacific ethnicity.

Table 1: *Le So'otaga* participants

		N	%
Gender	Female	43	77
	Male	13	23
Age	18–25 years	38	68
	26–35 years	6	11
	36–54 years	12	21
Ethnicity	Cook Islands	16	9
	Fijian-Indian	4	7
	Niue	0	0
	Samoa	32	57
	Tokelau	1	2
	Tonga	10	18
Participating Pacific PTEs from which study participants are drawn	Provider A	17	30
	Provider B	21	38
	Provider C	18	32
Total Participants		56	100

The *talanoa* process

Fono talanoa (focus group) sessions were conducted at the respective learning environments of each PTE, following informal ice-breaker introductions over a shared meal. In keeping with *talanoa* principles, the sessions featured open-ended narrative questions without time constraints; just time for brief breaks at emotional moments. Participants were presented with a small *koha* or *mea 'ofa* (gift) at the conclusion of the second round of *fono talanoa*. These steps were all taken as a natural part of the *talanoa* process, which culminated in honouring the participants' kindness and willingness to be involved. Sessions were recorded digitally and later transcribed, and participants were invited to edit and mark deletions on transcripts.

The format for conducting interviews was informed by prior consultation with the Research Advisory Group to ensure that protocols were followed and researchers were aware of cultural considerations. Each session was led by a Pacific interviewer and supported by a *Papa'alagi* (Pakeha) research practitioner. Both these team members were aware of the importance of conveying principles of *talanoa* as further defined by the following Tongan values described by Vaioleti (2006): *faka'apa'apa* (respectful, humble and considerate), *anga lelei* (generous, kind, calm, dignified) and *mateuteu* (well prepared, professional, responsive). These qualities are contained in a *fono* (dialogue and conversation) that is of high importance and significance, further confirming the *va* (social relations) between peoples.

The interview schedules used to guide discussions within the *talanoa* were developed over a two-month period. The writers developed initial drafts, which were then revised in response to detailed comments and feedback from the advisory group, other professional colleagues and students not taking part in the project. Trial interviews were also conducted with students to identify any difficulties or ambiguities. The final schedules included a mix of questions covering:

- information about the participants and their life experiences;
- participants' perceptions of themselves, their experiences and their abilities (both in the past before attending the courses and today); and

- open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to talk about themselves and others and their experiences.

The researchers strived to generate an experience that deployed components of the *talanoa* concept, with the goal of achieving "a personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations" (Vaioleti, 2006: 32). This emphasises the importance of *talanoa* as a conversation and an exchange of ideas in an interaction without a rigid format. For this reason, appropriateness and intended direction, the researchers avoided including written surveys. The study focused on Pacific learners who participated voluntarily in face-to-face focus groups in their own learning environments without time limits.

This approach established a space for a meaningful conversation, conducted with participants who trusted the process. This was assisted by the interview schedules and also because participants were selected by their respective managers – participants trusted that their managers would not allow them to *talanoa* with peoples/researchers who were not trustworthy. It also mattered that they were familiar with one of the researchers who hailed from a similar cultural background, and that the other researcher, although non-Pacific, was most importantly a skilled negotiator who had a responsive attitude and a demeanour they could trust.

Following completion and transcription of the *talanoa* interviews, the principal researcher organised the emergent themes, determining initial categories under which participant statements could be arranged. Upon determination of themes, sub-themes were defined and indexed accordingly. Focus group statements were coded under as many relevant themes as were applicable.

2. LE SO'OTAGA RESEARCH FINDINGS

Who am I?
I am a fale
Solid in construction
Strong in foundation
Proud of my identity

I am my father
I am my mother
I am my sisters
As well as my brothers
I am my faith
I am my family
I am my friends
As well as my others

I am all my worldly experiences
From USA and Europe
From the Pacific and Aotearoa
But most of all
I am me
I am Samoan
Who are you?

Taulalo Fiso. 1998. In *Our place in the Sun*.

This chapter describes the key themes to have emerged from the *talanoa*. In keeping with the holistic approach of *Le So'otaga*, the findings from this work are grouped into themes across three areas:

- holistic Pacific practices, as represented by the cultural *pou* (pillars) that underpin the concept of acting as *le so'otaga* for Pacific learners;
- the context that many Pacific PTE learners bring to their education; and
- what a holistic approach to guidance and support means in this environment.

Holistic Pacific practices

Successfully acting as *le so'otaga* requires considering a set of core concepts or *pou* that together create the experience of 'being Pacific'. In order to best work with learners, these concepts need to be recognised and their relationship to learning understood. The concepts are:

- *va* (relational spaces)
- *fa'asinomaga* (identity and belonging)
- *fe'agaiga* (relational covenants)
- *tuā'oi* (relational boundaries)
- *lotu* and *tapuakiaga* (worship and spirituality)
- *taui* and *tautua* (reciprocity and service)

- *vagahau* and *vosa* (languages in learning)
- *mālie* and *māfana* (safety and security).

As will be seen in the below discussion of how these concepts manifest, these concepts need to be seen holistically; they are interwoven, and one cannot be seen in isolation from others.

Va: Relational spaces

> *Yeah, this course is a really good course. It's not like [university] how, you know, you study and after that, well, after the class, you just leave. But this course is like a family course, where they can help you in any situation with studying, not only for studying, but like personal. And you know, you feel happy that you're in a warm environment, like you can talk to the tutors, friends, the boss, management.* (Samoan male, aged 20.)

The concept of *va* is critical to the Samoan world view, and this is also the case for many other Pacific nations. According to Aumua (2009), the *va* underpins all epistemologies related to Samoan relational identities and obligations. Aiono-Le Tagaloa (2003) and Wendt (2009) both state that the Samoan world view is encompassed in *va* and the Samoan view of reality: the concept of *va* as spaces of relationships and of sacred connections is central to the way in which Samoan people perceive and engage with the world.

In daily use, *va* is the physical space between objects and people. In social interactions, however, *va* and *tuā'oi* (boundaries) define and govern the way in which relationships between people, between people and the environment (SPREP, 1999), and people and their divinities (Tamasese *et al.*, 1995) are to be conducted. *Va* is space that relates (Wendt, 2009) and is lived holistically (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009), so that all human dimensions, cosmological elements and social environments are interdependent. It defines the Samoan person as a relational being who has *fa'asinomaga* (places of belonging), *tupuaga* (a genealogical context) and *tofiga* (duties and responsibilities to the collective identity) (Tamasese *et al.*, 1995). Two learners capture this as follows:

> *There is a bit of, like, Pacific stuff in this, like in classrooms and stuff. But it's not about that; it's about the people that make you feel welcome to continue to come to study. And that's what this place has, like, the people are so welcoming, everyone's lovely. The tutors are great. They always put a smile on your face and that makes you feel so welcomed and so, like, you're important to keep coming, because they know you and they include you and they just greet you. And just that is just something that puts a smile on your face. …there is some symbols and stuff, but it's just more about the people.* (Tongan female, aged 22)

> *Cultural day is just a day that we all come together to, like, appreciate the different cultures that come into [PTE]. And just make sure that, you know, everyone's welcome and knows, you know, that there's other cultures here as well. We need to appreciate that everyone's under one roof learning the same thing, you know.* (Samoan female, aged 20)

Va fealoaloa'i refers to mutual respect between people. *Alofa* (love) and *fa'aaloalo* (respect) are two key elements of *va fealoaloa'i* based on the Samoan paradigm of encounter and engagement. Efi notes that *alofa* and *fa'aaloalo* form "two critical values of our Samoan culture that are enacted in conversation that help to save or keep face" (2009b: 13). Furthermore, it is explained that *fa'aaloalo* involves *alo mai* and *alo atu*, literally 'face meeting face'. The loss of face means that there cannot be a meeting of faces and the basis upon which *fa'aaloalo* is premised no longer exists. *Fa'aaloalo* is the

cornerstone of Samoan religious thought and must be shown by people to the sacred essence of all things, and the sacred origins of their beginnings (Tamasese *et al.*, 1995).

> *And [the] majority of the time, because all of us is Pacific Islanders, all assignments that we had to do, that we had to do a role play or do a skit, it's always relating to, we always create it to our own kind of our identity, of where we come from, so from Samoan to Tongan…and so forth. So we only think about our history, where we come from and we always create that into our skits, into our roles, because we relate more, we relate to it more easily, because it's an everyday life that we live in with our family and our community and our religion and so forth. So we bring all those ideas forward, because it's got a lot to do with what we actually need to cover with the outlines of what they want us to do and the learning outcomes. So we always go back to our culture aspects in that, yeah.* (Samoan female, aged 36)

Fa'asinomaga: Identity and belonging

As shown by the discussion of *va* above, Pacific peoples are relational beings who identify with and belong to a wide range of spaces. These relationships are of a varying depth and nature depending on their genealogical descent, duties and responsibilities. Learners respond positively to their PTE environment when its provision supports these relationships and creates a sense of belonging, both of which contribute to mutual successful outcomes.

Identity and belonging are bound to the concept of *fa'asinomaga.* The designation of *fa'asinomaga* defines Samoan people's sense of belonging to Samoa and Fa'a Samoa, to ranks and status, relationships with others and *tuā'oi* − the boundaries within and across these relationships (Efi, 2009a). The expression, *o le tagata ma lona fa'asinomaga,* makes explicit that 'every individual is entitled to a designation' (*ibid*). Similarly, Tongans are raised on *ilo'i hotau tapu'anga,* knowing who they are and their place and role in society. This generates *va fealoaloa'i* between peoples, and the *veitapui* (sacred relationship space) that Tongan culture acknowledges in their inter-relationships.

> *One thing I remember is last year, before the year started, I was a [TEC-funded] student and before the year commenced, we had all the [funded] students went on an overnight camp to [place]. And that was really amazing, that was great to be able to come before the year starts with other [funded] students and get to know them. And we were all related in the sense we were, like… all had Māori or Pacific Island backgrounds. It was really cool.* (Tongan female, aged 20)

> *The last time I been out for a practicum, they send me to [community], it's a Tongan community. And I can see how very, very important that they're teaching in a Pacific way, that the language, the singing, the action, how to respect, things like that and the behaviour. So for me, it, yeah, I can tell how very important you can keep your own, what do you call, your own culture.* (Tongan female, aged 33)

Fa'asinomaga has power and importance in establishing and maintaining optimal relationships within Pacific PTEs by establishing a sense of belonging within the learning environment. Where this notion may not apply is with some New Zealand-born students who suffer from 'identity-risk' because of their background: they do not identify well with either traditional or contemporary cultural beliefs. Although not a focus of this study, it would be interesting in the future to explore how education provision can cater to their needs.

Feagaiga: Relational covenants

Samoan and Tongan cultures, and other Polynesian cultural groups to varying degrees, uphold the practice of a sacred covenant between a brother and sister known as *feagaiga*. This determines gender relationships within wider Polynesia by being the basis of similar prescriptions for behaviour and language that extend to non-related males and females.

Feagaiga is derived from *aiga* (family), and also describes the sacred relationships between closely related kinfolk and other selected significants – between brother and sister, father and daughter, mother and daughter, son and mother, and such-like. It also designates duties and roles stemming from that relationship; in modern New Zealand, it has evolved to describe a contract or agreement and is used to delineate important social relationships (Johnson & Filemoni-Tofaeono, 2003). Following *feagaiga*, tutor-learner relationships take on a mutual agreement that the tutor(s) will fulfil their responsibilities as tutor (including other roles such as mentor and support person) if the learner will fulfil their responsibilities in the agreement by committing to their learning.

> *Yeah, I'm really thankful for this lecturer that we have, she makes her time, she's very flexible to us, even her own time after work she offers. She gives out the email address, her phone, home phone, telling us the time she'll be available, she tells us whatever time I can come... She is very flexible and very, yeah, helpful, in a lot of ways. It's just us students...we have to grab the opportunity.* (Tongan female, aged 20)

This relationship – whether with an individual teacher or with PTE staff as a whole – in turn creates an inspirational effect for learners.

> *I would say my role model is the people that founded or created [PTE]. I don't anyone have anyone in specific but...when they started this institute they had nothing; they would give up everything to start up this institute and from what I've heard, from when they started until now they have come a long way and it wasn't easy. They struggled, but even though they had less in their homes and in their pockets, they thrived themselves and that's what I want to do. I want to thrive [sic] myself to get to where I want to be and that's what they did...So I look at the [PTE founder's] family as my role model − even though you fall, you can still pick up and thrive [sic] yourself forward and if they can get to where they are right now, I can get to where I want to be.* (Cook Islands female, aged 34)

Tuā'oi: Relational boundaries

Tuā'oi are relational boundaries and parameters that govern the way many Pacific peoples relate to their environment, other peoples and their god(s). *Tuā'oi* are established as precautions for inappropriate behaviours and relationships. Pacific learners discern *tuā'oi* successfully and follow guidelines that provide useful support mechanisms that help their educational aspirations.

In Samoan speech protocols, the term *va fealoaloa'i'* is used when speaking of one's own personal or close relationships to them. In speaking objectively of the relationship of others, as in those relationships that are unfamiliar (at a personal level) to the speaker, the appropriate term is *tuā'oi*. Many Polynesian people grow up learning and being taught how to identify and to respect boundaries of relationships between themselves, their peers, family members and other peoples around them (Tui Atua, 2009c).

Understanding these boundaries, and how they may affect expectations and experiences, is critical to acting as *le so'otaga* for Pacific learners.

Lotu and *tapuakiaga:* **Worship and spirituality**[7]

Lotu is the act of worship and *tapuiakiaga* is best expressed as spirituality. These are strong personal pillars for many Pacific learners that both support and affect their learning. Learners are often strong in their spirituality and this can manifest as active church involvement that may hinder their study commitments. Helpful tutors and organisations recognise this and assist them to schedule and timetable well so their church commitments are balanced with their study expectations.

Generally, *lotu* and *tapuakiaga* are highly significant parts of the lives of Pacific learners, and provide an important base to which Pacific communities are anchored. They are embodied as a cultural obligation to attend church and be committed to religious activities. Anae describes Fa'a Samoa/Samoan culture as follows: '…go to church, be a good Samoan, and that means to try your best at education, and looking after family, and go to family functions, plus that we've got to look after them when they're old' (1998).

> *My family's really religious, real Christian people, they always go to church and when we're not at church, we were doing something else for church, you know. It's always surrounding the church stuff. So with me...my parents want to do and my parents are, like, they really want me to do well in school, but yet they want me to be there with the [church] youth stuff. And I can't really juggle all of that, but I try to work around that. Like, I do bring my church stuff to school sometimes. Like, I always say to my tutor, 'oh we got a youth camp' or 'we got a youth service coming up, if I could just like leave early or something like that'. But then I always miss out on the last minute stuff at course. But I always try my best to catch up.* (Samoan female, aged 20)

When commenting on the balance of academic work and extra-curricular and community responsibilities, 30 percent of participants disclosed they were struggling with competing demands on their time and talked about their church commitments as taxing and burdensome. Many learners shared that attending church worship was often just the beginning of their commitment to the church, the church leaders and the church community. The responsibilities of many learners were compounded by youth leadership gatherings, bible study and social functions, thus limiting self-directed learning time. Several learners stated that in addition to their church-sited activities, they were also bringing church-related work to class; again, this took time away from valuable classroom learning, academic focus or self-directed learning time. Twenty-nine percent of participants had competing time demands of study, church and other activities.

> *Yeah, clashes hard out for me. We got church on Sunday and then there's youth stuff on Wednesdays, Tuesdays and Mondays and like band and, youth centre all we're doing is just playing with kids, but it takes up a lot of like mental time, it takes away from class work. Try to do as much class work at school as possible*. (Samoan male, aged 26)

> *As I said in the beginning, everything I do is based around church so I have a real big problem with that. Before I used to like going to church and now it's, like, I'm forced; the*

---

[7] All comments made by participants related specifically to Christianity.

past few months I think my class noticed it. I've been behind in my work because of church…It's not putting me off; it's not making me not want to come …I try and do little bits and pieces here but there's just times when I'm tired and just want to have free time. (Samoan female, aged 22)

To address this – whether it is a formal organisational policy or not – the PTEs in this research have an understanding to resolve conflicts as they occur. They actively support learners to manage negative impacts on academic performance by setting limits and making plans or timetables to ensure their course requirements were completed. Embedding time management principles within the learning programme was identified as an effective strategy for ensuring that their competing demands of academic and church work were met.

We got our something that's called time management, so we all had to write out time to spend on this and this and this and it was because of our background, our island background, that our church always comes first to us. So that's why we got to do our time management with course and after that, then we got some time with other stuff to do. (Samoan male, aged 20)

In my situation, it's regardless to, like, my priorities at church and my religion. But I'm a busy person; I always have other things each and every day from Monday to Sunday, but I always try to manage myself to study and to always do any assignments or any homework that our tutor has given to us, so that I may be able to finish it before time. (Tongan female, aged 31)

On the other hand, *lotu* is a central part of Pacific values and culture, and can be a significant motivator for success. For many learners, the representation of Pacific culture in the learning environment was inextricably tied to including religious motifs, symbols and rituals. When asked what Pacific motifs were represented within the nominated PTEs, eight learners made specific reference to religious symbols and others noted the 'religio-cultural' ritual of prayer.

It's like [the cross]; it makes you think 'cause, like, how we have spiritual values, education, excellence and culture appreciation, it makes you feel like any culture's welcome to…It gives you that family and cultural environment that makes us all feel welcome, so. (Cook Islands female, aged 19)

Taui and tautua: Reciprocity and service

Taui is the pivotal practice of reciprocity that determines a process for many Pacific learners to relate to other people. It necessitates that learners repay various debts owed to a range of relationships for supporting them to succeed in their chosen studies through Pacific PTEs. Unfortunately, these practices are consistently demanding of learners' limited time, energy and resources. *Tautua* is the notion of gaining leadership through service. A familial, community and personal moral debt is assumed by learners for their families' support of their studies. Again, when *tautua* is required and depending on the *va fe'agaiga*, learners consistently and urgently respond to collective demands.

Pacific membership is hierarchically structured; *tautua* (service) and *taui* (reciprocity) are integral to maintaining the structure. These concepts are almost interchangeable and symbiotic notions that are dependent and reliant, one on the other. *Tautua* and *taui* (also *feveitokai'aki* in Tongan) are rewards

unto themselves; and learners are burdened with how these cultural expectations manifest in their lives. Both cultural practices demand time, energy and resources, and this can place great stress on learners and impact on their education. Conversely, it is a critical success factor for the benefit of learners when they receive *tautua* and *taui*, and following through on *taui* and *tautua* is reserved for times when they do not place learners' achievement at risk. Successful PTEs are attuned to such cultural demands, and assist their learners to meet these expectations as much as is practicable.

The predominant value of *fa'aaloalo* (respect) is also a contested space for today's learners. *Fa'aloalo* (respect) is a key ingredient that fuels *tautua* and *taui*. Heavy cultural expectations in place demand and expect respect from the young for the older, from the commoner for the titled, from the congregant for the church minister, from the 'statused' for the non-entitled, and so on. The notion of *fa'aaloalo* resonated in relationships between learners and their parents and other family guardians, particularly learners aged between 18 and 25.

Most of the younger learners expressed a strong sense of *tautua* to serve their elders and provide for their families. Twenty-seven percent of participants attributed their inspiration and motivation to succeed in their academic pursuits out of respect for the hard work of their parents and others to provide opportunities for them to achieve more/higher academic qualifications, hence, reciprocate or pay back the debt they owed their family for their sacrifice.

> *I got six sisters plus me and two little brothers. It's a big family so I have to look for a good job and serve my mum and dad and my little sisters, so when my little sisters grow up they follow in my footsteps as well*. (Tongan female, aged 22)

> *My uncle is always there to support me, like, 110 percent. Probably without him I'd be a beggar. By now I'd probably be working in a factory or somewhere. And with him it's just, you know, encouraging me to come and do my studies. 'I don't want to, you know, see you work in a factory like me, I want you to be out there.' So without him, by now, I actually wouldn't be here, so thumbs up for my uncle, yeah*. (Samoan female, aged 21)

Tautua to the family was not exclusive to younger learners, and it was particularly significant for parents who had migrated to New Zealand. Four out of seven island-born parents in the sample spoke about the importance of providing a better life for their children.

> *I'm full Samoan…I and my family have just moved here from Samoa to be in New Zealand from last year. We are living here for good, to educate my children… We have no opportunity such as this here in Samoa. Samoa, once you've left the school, that's all, that's it… But when I came here, there's a lot of opportunity and… So I had to take this opportunity*. (Samoan male, aged 42)

Vosa/Vagahau: Language and voice[8]

Many Pacific languages are in a precarious state, particularly Vagahau Niue, Cook Islands vernaculars and the Tokelau language. Hornberger (1998) uses 'linguicism' as a term to describe the plight of the world's vanishing linguistic resources, lined up against the dominance of English. UNESCO refers to speaking and teaching language as fundamental to sustaining culture, and encapsulates the importance of one's indigenous language:

---

[8] *Vosa* is Fijian and *vagahau* is Niuean, both meaning language, voice, speech and other related variants.

Language is an important component of one's identity. It is fundamental to understanding values, beliefs, ideology and other intangible aspects of culture. It enables people to communicate as specific peoples and determines participation, access to knowledge, leadership and depth of understanding (2009: 57).

Generally, a Pacific person's language is the most important part of their identity. Negative experiences of secondary education, including dispossession and loss of their Pacific language, were a recurring theme from the *talanoa fono* and this has had major implications for learner confidence.

When I was young, when I was about five, I sort of went to Alma Mater, learnt how to speak Samoan and stuff, but when I went to primary school, [I] ended up losing all my Samoan, so started speaking English; I don't really know any Samoan now. (Cook Islands/Samoan male, aged 19)

Some learners preferred Pacific tutors because those tutors related to familiar cultural identities (as well as technical expertise). Conversely, for those learners who are not native English speakers, language can be a significant barrier. Successful tutors demonstrated flexibility by breaking complex concepts and words down into smaller pieces to allow slower or less English, so that second language speakers may ascertain meaning. Just over half of the participants stated that they preferred having a Pacific tutor specifically because they understood and could assist with language barriers.

I think it's 'cause [tutor], he understand more about Pacific Island students, like, he knows we struggle with and 'cause the Samoan language is our first language and English is our second language, so I think that's why [tutor] always try and ask us questions if we are alright with our studies and stuff. (Samoan male, aged 20)

When learners can integrate concepts and symbols from/in their own vernacular, it helps them to make sense of their own learning. It enables them to make connections towards being more 'whole' – a fundamental principle in holistic learning. However, prioritising any Pacific language (other than in a specifically English as a Second Language context) is not yet prioritised with Pacific PTEs given their current challenges. Perhaps in time, Pacific PTEs may strategically consider incorporating learning and teaching in Pacific languages.

Mālie and *māfana*: Safety and security

With the prayers that we do in the morning… I mean, though we're different backgrounds, different Pacific islands, different religion, whoever gets chosen to do the prayer, they can do it in their own language or in their own religion, the way that they would. (Samoan female, aged 25)

Mālie is the sense that all is balanced and secure, and *māfana* is a response of gratitude/warmth that results from outcomes that are *mālie*. Simply put, *malie* is a successful outcome achievable when *māfana* is a guiding force. These *pou* exist when all phenomena are interconnected and whole-some, balanced and secure.

Mālie is about symmetry and balance, something that is aesthetically pleasing and right to all human senses. The practice of *fetokoni'aki* (reciprocity) or helping each other produces a sense of *māfana* and *mālie* that a balanced, secure good has beenachieved. As a result, learners feel *malu'i* or

protected and safe. *Mālie* is a common concept in many Polynesian cultures, and it carries similar meanings. It is the notion that all is well, balance is achieved, and security is firm.

The Tongan notion of *māfana* (inner warmth) describes the process of being comforted, being comfortable, feeling comfort and/or an emotionally moving experience that is found in something both tangible and intangible. Some literature describes institutional barriers where Pacific learners' experiences at the tertiary level suffer as result of a lack of familiar faces, people, things and the like. Learners experience *māfana* as a result of seeing, feeling or receiving something good that promotes wellbeing. Twenty-one percent of learners in the current study felt a sense of shared identity and camaraderie with other Pacific learners.

> *I was surprised when I came and I saw a lot of brown faces, which was good, because I didn't feel unwelcome 'cause everyone was smiling. Yeah, everyone's cheerful; I like the warm feeling when I come into course. And at [PTE], everyone's friendly and yeah, you feel like a big family. There's heaps of pride here.* (Samoan female, aged 20)

The presence of religious symbols and rituals of prayer made a significant contribution to fostering a comfortable atmosphere. It created a shared sense of belonging and engendered positive responses. Learners identified these symbols and practices as part of an environment that generated feelings of comfort, like home, hence, they spoke about 'feeling at home'. The notion of *māfana* is also evident in the experience of familiar Pacific ways of doing things, traits and behaviour as embodied by fellow learners and tutors in the participating PTE learning environments. The importance of such familiar behaviours is that it helps learners to bond and share commonalities that may also help them to assist one another with their common study concerns and challenges.

> *The Pacific way, you can tell the difference of how you respect the people, that's the main thing. In here, sometimes the way they talk, they behave here, you can tell the culture of each one of the student, where they came from. But the main thing is the important of the respect; it's really, really coming from the Pacific island[s].* (Tongan female, aged 33)

Learner contexts

As well as the core *pou* that represent holistic Pacific practice, *Le So'otaga* also identified other critical factors that promoted successful learning and positive teaching outcomes for Pacific PTEs. The first of these relate to the education context for Pacific learners, and can be grouped into three themes:

- pathways into and motivation for learning
- flexibility and fun within teaching practices; and
- the role of 'value-added' activities beyond the classroom.

Pathways and motivation

As noted earlier in this report, Pacific learners perform well in PTEs and PTEs continue to be destinations for possible and preferred institutions of study – especially for those who may be taking

'non-standard' pathways into tertiary study. This can in turn inspire learners to go on to further study.[9]

However, the *talanoa* narratives from the current research indicate a lack of information on Pacific PTE programmes from traditional outlets. Few of the learners in this research stated that they came to enrol at their PTEs via traditional channels, such as through a careers advisor at secondary school, a careers event or even an advertisement; these examples totaled just 14 percent of the sample. Learners instead enrolled by chance, or heard about opportunities through family, friends or Work and Income NZ.

> *I actually heard from one of the students that came here, which I'm related to. She just told me to come in one day when I was doing nothing. I just graduated from high school and I wasn't doing anything so she told me 'oh, why don't you just come in and have lunch with me here'. And I said, 'oh yeah, okay, I'll come and see what it's like.' And so I didn't know that on that day I would go into the office and enrol.* (Samoan female, aged 20)

> *So when I was filling out the papers for [provider] they said that it's quite full in that class, so if I would be interested in taking a free course here. And so I took it and I didn't know that I would be, yeah, interested...because I didn't really do well in high school. But I actually took my studies seriously when I first started here and yeah, I'm still doing that, which is good, because I've completed most of the units.* (Samoan female, aged 20)

In fact, for 70 percent of the participants, the original decision to study was not driven by a clear academic goal. However, for 34 percent of learners interviewed, entry into a tertiary learning programme triggered engagement in a new subject or a subject that was previously not of interest. Given the lack of information or interest in the subject area that many learners had prior to beginning tertiary study, the nominated PTEs in these scenarios effectively provided a context for academic motivation.

This 'resultative motivation' reflects two of the main good practice characteristics that Pasikale and Yaw (1998) defined as demonstrating a successful PTE: expectations that all learners can achieve, and functioning within a stair-casing environment that provides links from one qualification to the next. Some learners stated that this kind of results-driven motivation contributed to their retention in tertiary and progression to higher levels of study.

> *Basically, I started here because for my benefit is the reason why, but then all of a sudden I think I just got hooked... So yeah, I think this is my career path.* (Tongan female, aged 18)

Conversely, a common motivation was employment. Anae *et al.* (2002) found that older students transitioned into tertiary study more smoothly and were more apt to succeed than school leavers because they had greater focus and motivation to gain employment.[10] The *talanoa fono* responses were consistent with these findings, with mature learners (and a few highly motivated younger learners) stating that they were motivated to study by a direct pathway to employment.

---

[9] The average progression rate to higher study with the same provider across the nominated PTEs for total learners in the sample was a comparatively high 50 percent (with more learners progressing to study at other providers).

[10] This appears to be borne out in the current study, with 100 percent of mature learners (25 and over) completing their qualification compared to 91 percent of younger learners.

When I came here, I didn't take any course or anything at all. I was, went straight to work, so I used to work for in New Zealand for 20 years. 2008 and I thought to myself 'oh, I think I'm going to go do something else'. I'm sick of working in a factory, you know, doing all these job. So in 2009, I went down to [PTE] campus and that's where I enrol myself…I know how to speak, but I don't know how to go through these, all this stuff. Then last year, I was graduating from level --- …And I was very happy that's something new for me. And I thought to myself, I should do this ages ago. I'm a 46 year old single mother, you know, and I thought 'oh, I should grab those days that I was working', you know… if I get a job, I'll start working full time again, at least I've got a qualification. (Samoan female, aged 46)

Finding flexibility and fun

Well, they make learning fun as well. We also play games on what we learnt and they always, you know, make sure that everyone understands specific things that we learnt on that day. (Samoan female, aged 20)

Although learners valued Pacific tutors and Pacific language speakers as well as gender balance among tutorial staff, a much larger proportion (45 percent) of learners said that the most important aspect of tutor performance, regardless of gender or ethnicity, was meeting learner expectations, and the most important tutor characteristic described by learners was ensuring that all learners were able to acquire new knowledge.

In terms of *le so'otaga*, tutors build bridges between what learners currently know and what they are expected to know. The key feature described by learners in this respect was tutor flexibility and the need to cater to different learning styles and needs in the classroom. Where tutors used flexible and creative teaching approaches, students reported being more responsive. Role play and interactive activities were especially valued by learners unfamiliar with lecture-based teaching. Conversely, some learners commented on the challenges they faced with tutors who were rigid and used a traditional lecture style and approach.

It's mixed, especially with [tutor], her teaching style, some classes will be like a lecture and other times like we'll break into groups and do like a role play, just so everyone learns how to, oh, everyone gets it, what she's teaching … especially the role playing, cause I'm not really used to just writing down and learning the thing by words. (Samoan male, aged 19)

Because, like, [he] was saying with [tutor]'s classes, it's just sort of staring at a screen and this stuff's like really heavy, it's like really good stuff to learn, but it's like so heavy … But he's like real stubborn about it and... it's like starting to the point where you don't want to learn the stuff, which is a shame because, like, the stuff he's teaching is really, like, especially for [our programme], it's really important. (Samoan male, aged 26)

Fifty-nine percent of learners stated that their tutors encouraged learner interaction to supplement classroom teaching. The most frequently cited example of interaction was paired or group work.

Mostly she put us in pairs, in groups of three or four, so that when we start doing our activities, each student is sharing and we ask the tutor what's, you know, to explain more, if we're in the right track and things like that. So at the end of the day, we, all the student work together, you know, as a team of learning. (Samoan female, aged 46)

I think it's a really good opportunity that we work as groups sometimes, because there is some activities and assignments where we have to work as a group in order to get ideas of our group, in order to participate. So that, 'cause we're actually learning from one another. It's like putting in our ideas and our opinion, we'll actually help, 'cause we're all helping each other, we're actually learning about different ideas from each person within the group. (Tongan female, aged 31)

Other participants talked about their tutors' use of fun and creativity to assist with presenting and retaining learned concepts, and how their tutors regularly took feedback and remained open to suggestion on effective teaching practices.

Actually, they give us the opportunity to come up with our own idea in what way we want, you know… they ask for our opinions and it's from us that they – if we prefer in groups of 4s, then our lecturer will just let us do that. (Tongan female, aged 20)

Value-added activities

Some learners attributed motivation in their respective learning programmes to other opportunities presented to them outside of the classroom, through what the researchers refer to as 'value-added activities' offered by the nominated PTEs. Learners talked about the value-added activities as contributing positively to and enhancing their overall experience of learning.

I went on a school trip last year with a group of students to Samoa and I really learnt about and that was an educational trip. And I really learnt a lot about the Samoan culture as well, 'cause I'm a Cook Islander. And I really enjoyed that trip; it was only one week, but I really enjoyed it. Yeah, and I really learnt a different culture, you know, from a different person. (Cook Islands male, aged 43)

As part of work readiness and commitment to industry needs, two PTEs offered practical experience in a real work setting as a supplement to learning programmes. Twenty-five percent of the interviewed learners talked about the value they perceived through practicum placement, or work experience.

Extra-curricular activities set the participating PTEs apart from many other education providers. Dedication at these PTEs to developing and maintaining tailored opportunities for personal, professional and cultural development represented their commitment to a holistic approach to the learning experience.

Guidance and support

The first section of this chapter, describes the key *pou* that create *Le So'otaga*. For these to exist, however, requires an effective system of guidance and support structures within PTEs that is grounded in the experiences of Pacific learners. There are three main aspects to this:

- recognising the role of family as a support and motivation for learners
- the role of tutors as key figures of inspiration for learner; and
- the importance of cultural signifiers in the learning environment.

Firm familial-like feelings

Previous pieces of research, as described in Appendix 1, have discussed learning environments as providing a surrogate *whānau/aiga* (family). However, the authors of this report would argue that before taking over the role of *aiga* for learners, education organisations need to recognise the role that their actual families play for learners.

The first level on which this operates is recognising the learner's role as part of his/her own *aiga/famili/kainga/kopu tangata/magafaoa*. The role entailed duties and responsibilities of varying depth and range with all family members. When asked to 'tell us your story', the learners consistently described strong family ties. Most began their personal stories in relation to their family roles as children, grandchildren, siblings, nieces/nephews, parents and grandparents.

On the whole, *aiga* relationships provided essential motivation and inspiration to begin tertiary study. Family or community members were mentioned by over 95 percent of the participants as role models and motivators for participation. Seventy-nine percent of learners in the current research mentioned their parents as role models and motivators, while other family members (siblings, cousins, aunts/uncles, grandparents) were also mentioned as part of learners' stories and sources of inspiration.

> *I would have to say my grandad, he's the man, aye. He's my role model because he told me back in Samoa he dropped out of school at 12 when he knew how to write his name. He dropped to out to go serve the family; he's worked at the farms just to provide for the family and he's still doing it here.* (Samoan female, aged 22)

Many learners attested to having aspirations of academic success solely based on a family member or community member's encouragement, in the absence of which they may not have otherwise considered higher study. These family and community ties are essential to understanding learners' starting points in tertiary education.

> *It would have to be my parents as well, just with everything they've been through and still supporting me in what I do, everything, behind me, pushing me, yeah.* (Samoan male, aged 21)

> *My role models are, I guess, my parents, just because how, from their background, not having much growing up and stuff and lack of education back then, as well as my youth leader…she always teaches us never to settle for less than what God has in store for us.* (Samoan female, aged 19)

Successful PTEs do not attempt to replace learners' families, but instead complement them with another form of *aiga* specific to that organisation. Learner comments described feelings of *mālie* and *māfana* due to the sense of *aiga* created and being closely tied to relationships with other learners and PTE staff. For many learners, these relationships cemented the holistic environment. Twenty-five percent (or 14) of the participants talked specifically about feeling like part of a family when asked how they felt in their learning environment.

> *Okay, what I found in [PTE] is the fact that this is a Pacific Island environment and it's so family-orientated…Most of all, the best thing I've seen within [PTE] is the togetherness of*

everybody, you know, from the tutors, directors and also the students. (Cook Islands female, aged 44)

As opposed to other larger tertiary contexts, where in previous literature Pacific learners ascribe feelings of being marginalised and isolated as merely 'a number', the PTEs in this study succeed in making the learning experience more personal and, therefore, more aligned with holistic practices. The successful elaboration of the organisational philosophy to foster a welcoming and family-oriented environment as led by staff, management and directors is a key aspect of the nominated PTEs' success in making learners feel motivated with a sense of belonging intact.

Tutor inspiration and inspiring tutors

Oh yeah, tutors, yeah. [Tutor], yeah, she's, yeah, if it wasn't for her, I'd hardly be coming to school, probably just come twice a week, yeah. [Instead] I've been coming every day, Monday to Friday. (Tongan female, aged 19)

The importance of learner respect for tutors emerged strongly from the *talanoa*, in which over 90 percent of the interviewed participants chose tutors as their role model or point of inspiration from within their respective PTEs who most helped them to succeed in their academic endeavours. Learners stated that they received consistent monitoring and encouragement to succeed, and the precursor to this was a successful relationship with their tutors.

I find my tutors easy, like, they're not strict or scary but you confide in them, you don't look at them as just a tutor but you can look up to them as parents or somebody you can talk to... When they're talking to us, they bring themselves down to our level so we can understand and communicate with each other so I find they are very cool and you can confide in them. (Cook Islands female, aged 34)

The notion of tutors who were *māfana* was evident for a significant proportion of learners. This was similar to feelings of being comfortable and welcomed in the presence of familiar Pacific faces who shared a similar cultural identity. When asked about the importance of their tutors having Pacific ethnicity or backgrounds, 30 percent of learners preferred having a Pacific tutor.

Yeah, I do find it for my own experience, I do find it easier from a Pasifika…Just a feeling that we belong in one group, like from the Pacifics and yeah, with the views as well, it's quite common, it's quite easy to go with, yeah. (Tongan female, aged 20)

However, it would be misleading to claim that just because a tutor has Pacific reference points their practice will be of good/best quality – it would be erroneous to assume that simply because someone is of Pacific descent they will have the necessary depth of cultural knowledge, skills, expertise, attributes and experience required to support learners.

I wouldn't mind a Palagi tutor, you know, tutoring us, but then it's just depending on how they teach us, because they have to understand how some of us just can't, like, we can't, what do you call it? But you can't, how some of us just don't understand so fast and we need that time where we need the tutor to take their time and make us understand what we're learning. So I wouldn't mind. (Cook Islands female, aged 19)

A particularly strong theme in the *talanoa* discussions of tutors was the role that they play beyond simply being a teacher. Instead, successful tutors – in keeping with the holistic model of teaching

argued for in this report – support learners through many other areas and issues in their lives. Learners frequently mentioned that dependable support in the face of adversity and challenging personal situations are important facets of the learner-tutor relationship. Learner descriptions of tutors' volunteering extra help and support outside of classroom hours were regularly cited as a success factor. As Pasikale and Yaw succinctly put it, "The grassroots nature of most PTEs and their emphasis on second chance education has necessitated a greater involvement of providers in student welfare and support" (1998: 27).

> *My tutor tells us that if I need any help, I can ring her, she will come to my place. She will help me half an hour, one hour, or if I go to the library or just come here and meet her, she stays here till 4.30. Any time convenient, she's available for us.* (Indian Fijian female, aged 43)

> *My tutors, she and he support me with my up and downs, family members ... when I come to course I can't concentrate properly and then when it hits morning tea or lunchtime, I sit down and actually tell them 'oh yeah this is what's wrong. I can't focus on my school work because the stuff that's happened is spinning in my mind so that's why I can't do the work properly'. So I tell them and they give me advice.* (Tongan female, aged 20)

Tutors referred to in the *talanoa* negotiated flexible scheduling on behalf of learners depending on special circumstances such as family obligations, and even assisted with issues such as transport. However, learners also made reference to tutors' setting and consistently reminding them of higher goals and 'big picture' priorities.

> *Especially in our case... we have to pick up our children, so we asked her to give us permission to leave at 2:30 because the school will finish at 3pm. So that's when we make an arrangement with the management and tell them that we need to leave early, so that's the arrangement between us and the management has been done by our tutor on our behalf.* (Samoan male, aged 42)

> *Yeah, [tutor] like gives me like rides home, like, he always asks if we like need a ride, and, like, helps me in, like, volley[ball], my sport. And yeah, all the tutors always help; they always ask us if we need help to go to them or one-on-one teaching. So everything's available.* (Samoan male, aged 20)

Talanoa of traditional *tapa*

> *Like, especially in like most of the offices or around the daily notices, just like the pattern around the border, or there's, like, a* tapa *cloth, just yeah, kinda cool to see that.* (Samoan male, aged 18)

As part of their organisational philosophy, the PTEs in this project encourage cultural activities and support their Pacific learners by reinforcing the value of Pacific culture through celebration and appreciation. This confirms learners' feelings of *fa'asinomaga* to their learning environment. For many Pacific learners with no frame of reference for possible tertiary study, or who had negative experiences in secondary education, the sense of welcome or *māfana* and belonging encourages confidence, self-worth and pride in their Pacific identities.

In the physical learning environment of Pacific PTEs, a welcoming physical environment is one of the key concepts in the literature (see Pasikale and Yaw 1998) with regards to creating a family-like atmosphere. Representations of Pacific culture present and celebrated in the learning environment contribute to a comfortable and culturally safe atmosphere for Pacific learners. Seventy-five percent of learners in the current research made references to various vehicles for celebrating and appreciating Pacific (and other) cultures within the nominated PTEs, including artefacts on display, performance groups, cultural appreciation days and learners' own artwork on display. When asked what Pacific symbols or motifs they could identify in their learning environment, some of the examples pointed out were Pacific decorative patterns, *tapa* cloths and flags of Pacific nations.

Of the learners who responded regarding Pacific motifs on display, over half stated that they perceived few or no visual representations of Pacific culture within their PTE. These learners nonetheless linked the presence of visual motifs with the power to make them feel welcome or comfortable.

> *When I came through, it was just a European style. And just recently they just put in a* tapa *up there, which was quite, really nice. I noticed that before we came on the end of our last day of school. I just noticed the* tapa *on the wall, which was really, really nice, because majority here is culturally, you know, from the Pacific Oceans and it was really nice to have a, sort of like a logo or symbol.* (Samoan female, aged 36)

> *Yeah, like the girls said, I can't see anything Pacific around here, but I hope we get there. I'd feel good in that environment.* (Indian-Fijian female, aged 20)

Two of the three nominated PTEs regularly held designated 'culture days', where learners were encouraged to participate in cultural appreciation through various activities, for example dressing in national traditional garb/costume, making formal greetings or speeches using their respective Pacific and other languages, making and sharing a meal, *etc*.

> *Just recently, we have a culture day where we had all different kinds of cultures, where we had people sharing their food and backgrounds about their culture with everybody in our campus. And it was good for everybody that wasn't Pacific. We had Indians and other Pacific, oh, and Pakeha people that were there, so it was good to see everybody's cultural background on that day.* (Cook Islands female, aged 22)

Two of the participating PTEs offered extra-curricular Pacific cultural heritage performing arts ('Poly Group') activities. Various types of performance groups performed for Culture Day celebrations, ceremonies for special visitors and end-of-year graduation festivities. These vehicles for cultural expression mentioned in the current study included choir, dance performance and *siva/meke/koli/haka* groups.

> *Yeah, there was a big, oh, the graduation performance last year required a lot of, [another student] and I last year choreographed the girls' dance and that required a lot of hours for teaching the girls the Cook Island performance. Oh, also with that the feeds that have been going on, some of them are quite like, there's a lot of Island food, it's pretty cool, just to kind of maybe show some other people the food that we know.* (Tongan female, aged 20)

And yeah, I think, like, for us sometimes it's be proud when you see there's heaps of Pacific Islanders like talking in our own language and it makes you feel welcome as well, like to be honest. And see, our a capella *group, there's heaps of Māori, there's some Māori and like they always feel welcome to come in and sing. Like we sang the Fijian song and yeah, they're always happy. It just depends who you are.* (Samoan male, aged 21)

Irrespective of their original motivation to study with a given PTE, 61 percent of learners talked in the *talanoa* about feeling comfortable and/or welcomed in the atmosphere created in their provider's learning environment. Participants' feelings of comfort, welcome and belonging were attributed to the creation of cultural contexts and Pacific-like learning environments. However, visual representations and experiences of culture were also noted as being essentially meaningless without people to ensure their successful enhancement of the learning environment.

Thus, physical representations can contribute to a sense of belonging in the learning environment. These cultural icons and representations are not merely superficial; they have the power to motivate academic endeavour. However, physical cultural representations alone do not fully create successful learners; they are merely decorative. Rather, they need to be integrated with substantive cultural behaviours to fully achieve their potential contribution.

Successful practices: Bringing the themes together

When brought together, the themes present across these three areas (holistic practices, learner context, and guidance and support) can be used to identify key characteristics that encourage success for Pacific learners. Firstly, there are factors relating to Pacific learners themselves:

- **Creation of cultural contexts:** Learners identified that the PTEs in this research purposefully created environments that were culturally appropriate, including Pacific and church decorations, motifs, symbols and rituals. Learners found that they could relate well to these familiar icons, and these also became the drivers for achieving successful educational results.

- **Motivation for academic achievement**: Learners identified that their acceptance into a tertiary education institution was a privilege and opportunity they would not normally be offered if they were in their respective home island countries. Their families, significant others and, in particular, church communities were inextricably tied to their motivation and commitment to academic performance and outcomes.

- **Motivation for employment opportunities**: Learners identified that they were motivated to succeed and acquire better employment than they had experienced prior to their PTE education. Mature learners noted that they would have studied earlier if they had known such PTE opportunities existed.

- **Inspiring tutors and teaching:** Without exception, all students acknowledged their tutors were a significant part of their success. Tutors were not only technically able but they were also cultural experts who competently understood to negotiate a *va fealo'ai* (social relationship) determined by *va fealoaloa'i* (mutual respect) that produced *mālie* (results).

- **Security in a family-like context:** Learners identified that their PTEs were family-like contexts, which engendered confidence and security. They were surrounded by Pacific and non-Pacific peoples who cared, interrelated and interacted with *māfana*, producing *mālie*.

- **Finding flexibility and fun**: Learners identified that they had positive experiences in their PTEs. The teaching styles were highly flexible; tutors adjusted their delivery to their students'

learning levels and needs. They were satisfied learners who also found their learning was interactive and fun, resulting in positive outputs for all concerned.

Secondly, there are clear organisational features that allowed these Pacific PTEs to successfully act as *le so'otaga* between their learners and the tertiary education system:

- They explicitly shared and encouraged *'ofa*, *fakalofa*, *alofa* and *aroa* or compassion for their students.
- Pacific staff demonstrated advanced understanding and knowledge of identified cultural values (*va*, *fa'asinomaga*, *feagaiaga*, *tuā'oi*, *lotu*, *tapuakiaga*, *taui*, *tautua*, *vosa* and *vagahau)* and they competently integrated these in their own teaching practices.
- They provided a culturally appropriate context and atmosphere for their learners by promoting cultural appreciation and expression to create an atmosphere of welcome and f*a'asinomaga* to encourage confidence, self-worth and pride. This was particularly critical for learners with a limited frame of reference for tertiary study and/or who had negative secondary education experiences.
- Pacific PTE expectations are that all learners can achieve.
- They acted as a bridge for professional development, ensuring accessible pathways between qualifications and providing a commitment to career readiness through explicit links to industry.

Finally, the last of these organisational characteristics points to the important role of staff within a truly holistic Pacific PTE environment. In summary, the key characteristics of successful teaching staff that emerged from the *talanoa* are:

- most/some Pacific staff descend from and share similar cultural backgrounds as many of their Pacific students;
- through negotiated *va feagai'aga* with learners, tutors understood and supported a range of learning needs, and used flexible teaching approaches to ensure that all learners achieved successful learning outcomes;
- effective tutor-learner relationships reinforce mutual respect, trust and reciprocity through a *va feagai'aga* where learners met the achievement objectives of their learning programme;
- tutors demonstrate consistent, day-by-day monitoring and reviewing of learners and voluntarily provide time for learners outside of classroom;
- tutors demonstrate dependable support, advice and encouragement for learners' personal circumstances, and willingly negotiated flexible schedules depending on special circumstances, particularly family and *lotu* obligations; and
- tutors set and consistently remind learners of higher goals and 'big picture' priorities.

CONCLUSION

The *Le So'otaga talanoa* focused on high-performing Pacific private training establishments delivering best holistic practices for the increased academic performance and achievements of their Pacific learners. The *talanoa* emphasised that Pacific learners are relational beings who negotiate contested social, cultural and learning spaces.

The presence and understanding of key cultural values, pillars and world views at the PTEs in this study have supported Pacific learners to negotiate these spaces and achieve successful educational outcomes through a state of *māfana mālie* or balanced security, which led to positive educational results. The holistic approach to teaching and learning adopted by these PTEs encouraged and improved student participation, student decision making and students' developing a sense of 'place' in their own learning.

The key organisational features demonstrated by the organisations are best characterised as being *le so'otaga* (a bridge) between their learners and the educational system. The PTEs shared and encouraged *'ofa, fakalofa, alofa* and *aroa* or compassion for their students. Pacific staff demonstrated advanced understanding and knowledge of identified cultural values – *va, fa'asinomaga, feagaiaga, tuā'oi, lotu, tapuakiaga, taui, tautua, vosa* and *vagahau* – and they competently integrated these in their own respective practices. Pacific PTEs provided a culturally appropriate context and atmosphere for their learners by promoting cultural appreciation and expression, to create an atmosphere of welcome and *fa'asinomaga* or belonging that encouraged confidence, self-worth and pride. Most of all, these Pacific PTEs' expectations that all learners *can* achieve provides a spur to ensuring that Pacific students *do* achieve.

While it represents only a beginning that could be further developed to enhance and extend success, *Le So'otaga* has significant potential to inform practices that support Pacific learning – and not only at Pacific PTEs. Providing high-quality tertiary education necessitates responsiveness to individual learner contexts, effective contributions to learner motivation and achievement through viable pathways to higher study and employment opportunities.

This study emphasises that to achieve this for Pacific learners, PTEs (and other providers) need to increase their understanding of holistic Pacific practices by giving attention to the holistic teaching, learning, guidance and support of, and the impact of these components on, Pacific learners. This must involve understanding distinctively Pacific cultural phenomena and how they can be integrated into distinctively Pacific holistic practices; how these phenomena affect learning, teaching, guidance and support provision; and the role of access to extra-curricular 'value-added' learning. All these critical success factors can contribute to high overall progression, completion and employment rates.

In closing we hope that this work will be extended in the future. It is the first major piece of research conducted by a Pacific PTE about Pacific PTEs, and it represents a commitment to develop the capacity and capability of Pacific PTEs to develop and contribute to their respective research priorities. Valuable future areas for research that have been identified from this work include:

- The nature of the identified cultural pillars: *va*; *fa'asinomaga*; *fe'agaiaga*; *tuā'oi*: *lotu* and *tapuakiaga*; *taui*: *tautua*: *vagahau* and *vosa; mālie* and *māfana*. Increased investigation of

these areas will increase understanding about their influence in the lives of Pacific students, Pacific communities, and Pacific development and sustainable livelihoods.

- The impacts of and opportunities created by *tapuakiaga* (across several religious denominations) and activities for Pacific learners' success and transition in tertiary study. This report examines this area, but it is worthy of deeper exploration (including differentiation by denominations).

- More detailed investigation of the 'added-value' experiences provided by PTEs, and how they affect learner motivation, satisfaction, achievement and retention. This project emphasised the value of these experiences, but a deeper analysis may reveal a better picture of the relationship between costs and benefits of such activities.

This research has been about endeavouring to be a catalyst for social change and transformation, promoting significant pillars of Pacific knowledge and world views, and actively providing a framework for organising and conducting research for and with Pacific PTEs and their Pacific learners. *Le So'otaga* provides a contribution to understanding the evolving and potentially transformative situations that Pacific learners experience as they negotiate the contested space of learning. In this respect, it is truly and undoubtedly a bridge.

REFERENCES

Aiono-Le Tagaloa, F. (1996). *O Motuga-Afa.* Apia: Le Lamepa Press.

Aiono-Le Tagaloa, F. (2003). *Tapuai: Samoan worship*. Malua Printing Press.

Anae, M. (2010). Research for better Pacific schooling in New Zealand: Teu le Va – a Samoan perspective. *MAI Review*, 1.

Anae, M. (1998). *Fofoaivaoese: Identity journeys of New Zealand-born Samoans*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Auckland, Auckland.

Anae, M., Coxon, E., Mara, D., Wendt-Samu, T., & Finau, C. (2001). *Pasifika education research guidelines.* Report to the Ministry of Education. Wellington: Auckland Uniservices Limited.

Anae, M., Anderson, H., Benseman, J., & Coxon, E. (2002). *Pacific Peoples and Tertiary Education: Issues of Participation.* Ministry of Education: Wellington.

Aumua Mata'itusi Simanu, P. (2009). In Lilomaiava-Doktor, S. Beyond "migration": Samoan population movement (malaga) and the geography of social space (Vä). *The Contemporary Pacific, 21(*1), 1-32.

Baba, T. (2004). Pacific and indigenous research: Beyond bondage and patronage. In T. Baba, O. Mahina, N. Williams, U. Nabob-Baba (Eds.), *Researching the Pacific and Indigenous peoples: Issues and Perspectives,* 95–104*.* Auckland: Centre for Pacific Studies.

Benham, M. K. (2000). Mo'olelo: On culturally relevant story making from an indigenous perspective. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology.* Thousand Oaks California: Sage Publications.

Bishop, R. (1998). Freeing Ourselves from Neo-colonial Domination in Research: A Kaupapa Maori approach to creating knowledge. In N. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 109-138. Thousand Oaks California: Sage Publications.

Cleverly, M. et al. (1993). *Pacific Island Training Needs.* Education & Training Support Agency (ETSA). Wellington: Author.

Cook, L., Didham, R., & Khawajah, M. (1999). *On the demography of Pacific People in New Zealand.* Wellington: Statistics New Zealand.

Coxon, E., Anae, M., Mara, D., Samu-Wendt, T., & Finau, C. (2002). *Literature review on Pacific education issues.* Wellington: Report to the Ministry of Education.

Cram, F. & Pipi, K. 2001. Determinants of Māori provider success: Provider interviews. Summary Report. *Māori Research Development Volume 4*. Auckland: International Research Institute for Māori and Indigenous Education.

Crawley, L., Polutu-Endemann, K., & Stanley-Findlay, R. (1997). *Strategic directions for the mental health services for Pacific Islands people.* Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Crotty, M. (1998). *Foundations of Social Research*. Adelaide: Allen & Unwin.

Durie, M. (1994). *Māori health development.* Auckland: Oxford University Press.

Durie, M. (2001). *Mauri Ora: The dynamics of Māori Health.* Auckland: Oxford University Press.

Efi, Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Taisi. (2009a)*. Samoan jurisprudence and the Samoan Lands and Titles Court: The perspective of a litigant. In T. M. Suaalii-Sauni & I. Tuagalu (Eds.), *Su'esu'e manogi: In search of fragrance. Tui Atua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Samoan indigenous reference*. Lepapaigalagala, Samoa: The Centre for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa.

Efi, Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Taisi. (2009b). More on meaning, nuance and metaphor. In T.M. Suaalii-Sauni & I. Tuagalu (Eds.), *Su'esu'e manogi: In search of fragrance. Tui Atua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Samoan indigenous reference*. Lepapaigalagala, Samoa: The Centre for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa.

Efi, Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Taisi. (2009c). Fa'a Samoa speaks to my heart and soul. In T.M. Suaalii-Sauni & I. Tuagalu (Eds.), *Su'esu'e manogi: In search of fragrance. Tui Atua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Samoan indigenous reference*. Lepapaigalagala, Samoa: The Centre for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa.

Esera, I. (1996). Leading learning to promote Pacific Islands' students' achievements. *The Proceedings Report of the National Symposium 1996 Pacific Islands Learning: The Answers are Within Us.* Wellington: Education & Training Support Agency, 39-47.

Fiso, J. (2009). Address. *NZAPEP Conference 2009* (September), Auckland.

Fiso, T. (1998). *Our Place in the Sun.* Wellington: Education Training and Support Agency.

Forbes, S. & Martin, R. A. (2004). What Holistic Education Claims About Itself: An Analysis of Holistic Schools' Literature. Presented to the Wholistic Education Special Interest Group at the American Education Research Association Annual Conference, San Diego, California, April 2004.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* Middlesex, England: Penguin.

Fusitua'a, L. M. (1992). *Ko poto mo hono 'o e 'ulungaanga faka Tonga: Knowledge and the maintenance of Tongan culture*. Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Auckland.

Gibbs, A. (1997). Focus Groups*. Social Research Update 19, winter 1997.* http://www.soc.survey.ac.uk/sru/SRU19.html

Gorinski, R. & Fraser, C. (2006). *Literature review on the effective management of Pasifika parents and communities in education.* Wellington: Ministry of Education.

Hau'ofa, E. (1984). The Future of Our Past. *Pacific Islands in the Year 2000 Seminar Series.* Pacific Islands Studies Programme, University of Hawaii and Pacific Islands Development Programme, East-West Centre, September 1984.

Hau'ofa, E. (1993). Beginnings. In E. Waddell, V. Naidu & E. Hau'ofa (Eds.), *A new Oceania: Rediscovering our sea of islands,* 2-16. Suva: Univeristy of the South Pacific.

Health Research Council of New Zealand. (2005). Guidelines on Pacific Health Research.Auckland: Author.

Hereniko, V. (1993). *Manoa: A Pacific journal of international writing. 10*(1).

Hollingsworth, S. & Dybdahl, M. (2007). Talking to learn: The critical role of conversation in narrative inquiry. In Clandinin, D. (ed). *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology.* Thousand Oaks California: Sage Publications.

Hornberger, N. H. (1998). Language policy, language education, language rights: Indigenous, immigrant, and international perspectives. *Language in Society, 27*(4), 439-458.

Hunkin, D. (1985). Management strategies for the multicultural classroom. *Research Information for Teachers,* No 2, Item 3.

Johnson & Filemoni-Tofaeono. (2003). *Women and religious diversity*. http://vu.academia.edu/HelenHill/Papers/463475/Women_and_Religious_Diversity.

Kalolo, E. K. (1995). *Changes in Tokelau schools: Intentions and outcomes*. Unpublished MA thesis. University of Auckland.

Kavaliku, S. L. (2007). Pasifika Leadership: An issue of quality and relevance. *Pasifika Leaders Forum 1*. Auckland: Massey University.

Kitzinger, J. (1995). Qualitative research: Introducing focus groups. *BMJ, 311*(7000), 299-302.

Laban, F. (1989). Equity: A Samoan Perspective. *PPTA Journal, 2*, 39-41.

Lilomaiava-Doktor, S. (2009). Beyond "migration": Samoan population movement (malaga) and the geography of social space (Vä). *The Contemporary Pacific, 21(*1), 1-32.

Mara, D., Tuhipa, T., Falesima, T., & Greenwood, A. (1996). Teacher education: Implications for Pacific students and their communities. *The Proceedings Report of the National Symposium 1996 Pacific Islands Learning: The Answers are Within Us.* Wellington: Education & Training Support Agency, 70-79.

Mara, Sir Ratu Kamisese. (1999). Opening Address. *Pacific Vision Conference Proceedings (July)*. Auckland: Pacific Vision Conference.

Marshall, J., Baldwin, K., & Peach, R. (2008). *Report on Successful Māori and Pacific PTEs. Te Rau Awhina: The Guiding Leaf. Good Practice Examples of Māori and Pacific Private Training Establishments.* Wellington: New Zealand Qualifications Authority.

Martin, R.A. (2000). *Paths of Learning: An Introduction to Educational Alternatives*. http://www.ratical.org/many_worlds/PoL.html.

Miller, R. (1997). *What are schools for? Holistic education in American culture*. Brandon, Vermont: Holistic Education Press.

Ministry of Education. (2010). *Tertiary Education Strategy 2010-2015*. Wellington: Author.

Ministry of Education. (2008a). Team Solutions – Talanoa ako: Improving the engagement and achievement of Pasifika learners. *New Zealand Curriculum Online*. http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Ministry-curriculum-guides/Secondary-middle-leaders/Past-editions/Creating-a-supportive-learning-environment/Effective-teaching-and-learning/Success-for-Pasifika-students

Ministry of Education. (2008b). *Pasifika Peoples in Tertiary Education in New Zealand in 2007*. Wellington: Author.

Ministry of Education. (2002). *Tertiary Education Strategy 2002-2007*. Wellington: Author.

Ministry of Education. (2001). *Talanoa Ako: Improving the engagement and achievement of Pasifika learners. Pasifika Education Plan.* Wellington: Author.

Ministry of Education. (n.d.). Effecting change for Pasifika students: A synthesis. *New Zealand Curriculum Online*. http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Ministry-curriculum-guides/Secondary-middle-leaders/Past-editions/Creating-a-supportive-learning-environment/Effective-teaching-and-learning/Success-for-Pasifika-students

Ministry of Education. (n.d.). *Pasifika Education Statistics.* http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz

Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs. (2010a) *Career Futures for Pacific Peoples: A report on future labour market opportunities and education pathways for Pacific peoples.* Wellington: Author.

Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs. (2010b). *Current trends and economic status of Pacific Peoples.* Wellington: Author.

Morgan, D. L. (1995). Why things (sometimes) go wrong in focus groups.*Qualitative Health Research, 5*(4), 516-523. doi:10.1177/104973239500500411

Nasili, V. (2009). Presentation on *Reading the Bible Tu'a-wise.* PhD thesis. University of Auckland Pacific Postgraduate seminar, 25 May 2009.

Pasikale, A. & Yaw, W. (1998). *Weaving the way: Pacific Island Peoples' participation in the provision of learning pathways for Pacific Island learners.* Wellington: Education and Training Support Agency.

Peteru, M. C. & Percival, T. (2010). *o 'Aiga o le 'anofale o afio'aga ma le fatu o le aganu'u: Samoan pathways to the prevention of sexual violence*. Auckland: Uniservices Ltd.

Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples.* Dunedin: Otago University Press.

Smith, L.T. (2004). Building research capability in the Pacific, for the Pacific and by Pacific Peoples. In T. Baba, O. Mahina, N. Williams, U. Nabobo-Baba (Eds.), *Researching the Pacific and indigenous peoples: Issues and Perspectives,* 4–16. Auckland: Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Auckland.

SPREP. (1999). Media workers, key carriers of environmental messages. *Environment Newsletter,* Jan-March. Apia: South Pacific Regional Environment Programme.

Statistics New Zealand and Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs. (2010). *Education and Pacific peoples in New Zealand.* Wellington: Author.

Tamasese, K., Peteru. C., & Waldegrave, C. (1995). *O le taeao afua: The new morning.A qualitative investigation into Samoan perspectives on mental health and culturally appropriate services.* Lower Hutt, Wellington: The Family Centre.

Tertiary Education Commission. (2004). *Pacific Peoples Strategy.* Wellington: Author.

Tertiary Education Commission. (2009*). Improving Student Results, Tertiary Education Sector Performance, 2008.* Wellington: Author.

Thaman, K.H. (1987). Good schools (and bad): Some issues in assessing school effectiveness in Pacific Islands contexts. *Studies in Educational Administration, 44*.

Thaman, K.H. (1992). *Towards Cultural Democracy in Teaching and Learning with specific References to Pacific Island Nations (PINs).* Suva: University of the South Pacific.

Thaman, K.H. (2003). *Educational ideas from Oceania: Selected readings*. Suva: University of the South Pacific.

Tofi, T., Flett, R., and Timutimu-Thorpe, H. (1996). Problems faced by Pacific Islands at university in New Zealand: Some effects on academic performance and psychological well-being. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 35*, 51-59.

UNESCO. (2009). *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples*. New York: Author.

Vaioleti, S.L. (1999-2002). *Series of Talanoa.* Palo Alto, Oakland, San Francisco, California .

Vaioleti, T.M. (2006). *Talanoa research methodology: A developing position on Pacific research. Waikato Journal of Education*, *12*, 21–34.

Wendt, A. (2009). In Lilomaiava-Doktor, S. Beyond "migration": Samoan population movement (malaga) and the geography of social space (Vä). *The Contemporary Pacific, 21(*1), 1–32.

Wendt, A. (1987). Novelists and Historians: The Art of Remembering. In A. Hooper (Ed.), *Class and Culture in the South Pacific*, 79–91. Auckland: Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Auckland; Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

Wendt, A. (1993). Towards a new Oceania. In P. Sharrad (Ed). *Readings in Pacific Literature*. Woolongong, Australia: University of Wollongong.

Wensvoort, M. (2011). *Achievement in formal tertiary education*. Wellington: Tertiary Sector Performance Analysis and Reporting, Ministry of Education.

Williamson, A. & DeSouza, R. (2002). Creating online discursive space that legitimate alternative ways of knowing. *Proc. ASCILITE2002 Annual Conference of Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education* (Auckland), vol. 2, 731 – 739.

Wilson, S. (1999). *Recognizing the importance of spirituality in indigenous learning*.
http://www.acea.org.au/Content/1999%20papers/Shaun%20Wilson%20%20paper.pdf

APPENDIX 1: Literature Overview

There is a paucity of available literature about Pacific PTEs. General Pacific education references make little or no reference to learners in Pacific PTEs, and similarly there is limited analysis of the impact of educational initiatives on Pacific PTEs and Pacific students in PTEs. The literature selected for close examination in this review consists of the main pieces of research conducted specifically in Pacific PTEs (supplemented by other relevant work where appropriate). They are:

> *Pacific Island Training Needs Survey* (1993) by Mino Cleverly & Associates;
>
> *Seen, But Not Heard: Voices of the Pacific Islands Learners* (1996) by Anna Pasikale;
>
> *Weaving the Way: Pacific Islands peoples' participation in the provision of learning pathways for Pacific Islands learners* (1998) by Anna Pasikale and Wang Yaw; and
>
> *Te Rau Awhina − The Guiding Leaf: Good Practice Examples of Māori and Pasifika Private Training Establishments* (2008) by Jane Marshall, Kathryn Baldwin and Roger Peach.

The most recent of these publications is the NZQA-sponsored *Te Rau Awhina - The Guiding Leaf: Good Practice Examples of Māori and Pasifika Private Training Establishments* (Marshall, Baldwin and Peach 2008), which explored successful Māori and Pacific PTEs. It investigated practices of nominated Māori and Pacific PTEs, and specifically their teaching and learning, programme design and programme development. There was a focus on cultural elements interwoven into practices and an examination of good practices, including the inter-related components of holistic characteristics: surrogate *whānau/aiga*; an individual sense of belonging; and the concept of creating a greater humanity.

The *whānau* concept is critical to Māori educational processes, structures and pedagogy, and has parallels in the Samoan concept of *aiga*.[11] In *Te Rau Awhina*, the ability of a PTE and its staff to take on the role of surrogate *whānau/aiga* was the most commonly mentioned factor for creating and maintaining optimal PTE relationships.

Marshall *et al*. also posited that individualised learning is quite compatible with the *whānau/aiga* concept. The study argued that the *whānau/aiga* concept was important to PTEs' success because it created a feeling of cultural safety in their learners and staff. Cultural needs were not met by mainstream educational system; learners' self-confidence was promoted; and problems were discussed in a group context rather than individually. The elements of the *whānau* or *aiga* concept included:

- taking on the role of an otherwise largely absent family unit;
- taking on the guidance role of a mother and father;
- building and reinforcing trust;
- developing familial and friendship-based relationships between staff and learners; and
- the entire PTE functioning as a recognised family unit.

The second component, a sense of belonging, is a fundamental human need and provides a foundation for learners which enabled both holistic well-being and academic success. Pasikale and Yaw (1998) indicated that the *whānau/aiga* concept instills feelings of belonging and allows for

---

[11] Similar terms from other Pacific cultures include *Magafaoa* (Niuean), *Kopu Tangata* (Cook Island Māori) and *Kainga* (Tongan).

greater interaction among individuals. This is appropriate for many Island-born learners who are attuned to obedience and tutor-directed teaching.

The third component put forward by Marshall *et al.* was that of 'creating a greater humanity'. It bears discussion that Pacific circles have not quite encapsulated their development in terms of 'creating a greater humanity'. Thus far, the focus in many Pacific communities is on relating to one another through reciprocity: giving back specifically to one's community; respecting one's parents and elders; and surviving. Marshall *et al.* pose that a greater humanity is similar to 'a sense of belonging' and 'inclusivity', and it may be interesting for Pacific Peoples to re-envision themselves as beings 'creating a greater humanity', but Pacific Peoples have yet to have that *talanoa* or adopt those terms of engagement.

Marshall *et al*. also noted evidence of care in a holistic PTE environment, which was regarding PTEs developing and restoring a learner's *mana*. Learners feel valued through good tutor/learner relationships, learner/*whānau* interactions and peer relationships. The research supports the finding that learners who feel valued are more likely to be successful and shows that learner success can also be partly attributed to the caring, nurturing and respectful nature within PTEs. Learners who are valued are more successful at engaging confidently and effectively in their learning environment.

High levels of caring, nurturing and respect were mentioned by 27 percent of the interviewees as a key characteristic of their relationships. Various techniques for maintaining healthy tutor-learner relationships were noted, including setting clear boundaries/expectations, and using appropriate discipline to ensure expectations were met. Also mentioned was the use of a holistic approach in dealing with learners. This involved taking on the physical, mental, spiritual and general well-being issues of learners, both during their time at the PTE and often after they had left.

For example, PTEs generally offered post-placement and vocational support. The use of a holistic approach was often mentioned in conjunction with being able to see the potential in learners and actively focusing on their positive individual traits and values. The holistic approach was perceived as important because it allowed tutors to influence learners in a positive way, by not only engaging with learners in the classroom but also going the extra mile and demonstrating full commitment to all aspects of their wellbeing.

Creating a positive environment was also mentioned, in a physical and a learning sense. Cram and Pipi (2001) stated that the Māori principles of *whanaungatanga* and *ngā hononga* are applied in good practice PTEs to reinforce a supportive environment. However, again the point of difference was in the degree to which PTEs provided support. In that research, support ranged from additional academic literacy/numeracy support to the full range of personal support inherent in a fully functioning holistic model of care for learners.

Some tutors and management also spoke about providing support when they were often the only ones in the learners' lives who were able to offer this assistance. Tutors spoke of offering support to a level with which they were personally comfortable. The level of support offered generally seemed to be an issue decided by each individual tutor rather than by strict guidelines issued from their organisations. Openness enabled them to create mutual respect with learners and they could also use it as a vehicle to motivate them. Some PTEs chose not to offer certain support as they believed it did not enable the learners to be self-sufficient.

The second monograph examined in this overview, *Weaving the Way: Pacific Islands peoples' participation in the provision of learning pathways for Pacific Islands learners* (Pasikale and Yaw, 1998), was based on case studies of five PTEs with a Pacific focus. The authors pointed out the value of PTE providers offering a culturally welcoming environment for learners, many of whom had negative experiences in schools. The five PTEs were selected for their successful histories; therefore, they probably represented 'best practice' qualities, rather than being representative of PTEs generally or of Pacific-focused PTEs specifically. The resource was useful for modeling a possible qualitative research process amongst Pacific PTEs. It also demonstrated educational effectiveness in an area of the tertiary education system that was not well known and was probably easily dismissed by non-Pacific/mainstream providers at the time.

In commenting about Pacific participation, Anae *et al.* (2002) noted that some PTE environments were more conducive to success for Pacific students due to: small classes; the cultural match between lecturers and students; location; learner-focused environments; and lecturer relationships. In that particular review, the notion of relationships is only inferred and expanded by Anae (2010) in the cultural practice of *teu le va*. Pasikale and Yaw (1998) made every effort to detail major issues and continue the dialogue begun by Pasikale (1996) around promoting integral cultural issues.

Cultural maintenance and continuity was a consistent theme in the delivery of an alternative education for Pacific learners. The authors willingly opened the discussion about best practices and particularly Pacific cultural processes. The study explores contemporary practices and issues and in particular, the physical manifestations of Pacific culture in the décor and artwork. These cultural icons featured in a variety of spaces: from company logos, protocols in daily life and Pacific languages. The other emphasis was support of the 'family atmosphere' and 'organisational family':

> Creating a "family atmosphere" to foster safety and sensitivity to the needs of learners and staff was on e way of establishing a positive environment. (Pasikale and Yaw, 1998:11)

Seen, But Not Heard: Voices of the Pacific Islands Learners (Pasikale, 1996) provided information about the methodology, the selection of participants and the adopted research process. An overview of the participants was provided in terms of location, gender, ethnicity, age, income, marital status, employment status and educational background. Discussion and analyses of 'learning experiences', 'Pacific Island learning styles' and 'gender differences in learning behaviour' were interspersed with comments by study participants. Theoretical discussions drew on the writings of the researcher/commentators; it was an important snapshot of PTE learners and PTEs in Pacific education at that time.

Pasikale conducted a qualitative study of 80 Pacific learners on TOPS programmes. Many of the learners had not achieved well in compulsory education and TOPS became the last option for seeking tertiary educational opportunities. The Pacific learners identified a range of preferences for learning and teaching processes. Good practice requires that awareness of individual learners' backgrounds is vital for meeting learners' educational needs. The study group showed a preference for teacher-facilitated learning and skills practice ('learning by doing'). However, teachers are cautioned not to generalise or apply blanket assumptions about Pacific learners.

Pasikale noted that teacher empathy, not ethnicity, was of greater importance for academic success. It is not surprising that the study participants valued educators who cared empathetically about the

whole person. However, there was little noted and explored about the appropriateness of cultural matching and cultural fits between students and tutors of similar backgrounds. The study outlined an example of how 'Pacific-specific' research could possibly be executed. However, at the time there were components omitted, parts that make a difference to the whole project.

For example, the possible crucial role of a research advisory group was not well developed, as part of an ethnic-specific approach, or a description of the cultural processes was omitted;, such components were not given due space. The significance of the study was the need for more in-depth information about Pacific learners and, as Pasikale put it, "…the aims of the research were: to make visible the stories behind the statistics; to provide information to improve policy and practice impacting on Pacific Islands education; and to address gaps in research-based knowledge" (1996: 16).

The study identified the important issue of poor self-image, with participants (49 percent) claiming that certain personal barriers prevented them from achieving their goals, for example, time keeping, self-perceived laziness, lack of confidence, inadequate resources and family support, and attitudes to work. The researchers identify that although these findings are useful, it will be useful to unpack the cultural constructs of other particular parts, such as the holistic cultural depth of each of the integral parts. There is still a lot to find out about the veracity of the cultural processes of ethnic specificity and its place in achieving successful academic outcomes for learners, teachers, organisations, agencies and other stakeholders alike.

The report prepared for the Education & Training Support Agency (ETSA), *Pacific Island Training Needs* (Cleverley and associates 1993), was a summary of a survey of Pacific training needs amongst Pacific providers, initiated by the ETSA national office in 1991. The survey was intended to identify the effectiveness and performance of Access training programmes and how they met the training needs of Pacific communities. There are implications, suggestions and prospects arising from the survey. The discussion section provides an overview of the survey findings and the trainees' views of the Access programmes.

Concluding thoughts

The literature review undertaken as part of the *Le So'otaga* approach explored the conceptual and research-based literature pertinent to Pacific holistic teaching and learning practices of Pacific PTEs.

Williamson and DeSouza (2002) posited that although educators have long recognised and considered prior learning and life experiences in their pedagogical strategies, cultural differences have not been well scrutinised. Consequently, knowledge and experiences originating from within non-western cultural groups, whether indigenous or migratory, have not been valued and educators have failed to comprehend the benefit to be gained by allowing students to engage in learning in a way that values their own cultural and social heritage.

Furthermore, Pacific leaders, elders and advocates at many *fono* acknowledge and demand that in all fields where Pacific studies are limited, growing Pacific development research is encouraged, needed and welcomed. All studies should have the capacity to shift and further illuminate the needs of Pacific consumers and future developments in the field. For example, the tensions between individual and collective pillars are worth investigating as they are complex and island-specific, as well as being safety and risk factors.

As one example of this, the authors would like to note that there may be some concerns with the commonly articulated notion of using the *whānau/aiga* concept for thinking about the role of tertiary education providers. Specifically this relates to the notion of a provider as a surrogate *aiga* for a learner. Surrogacy is a huge *take* (issue) filled with different histories, meanings, intents and storytelling, and the term 'surrogate' is an odd and unfamiliar construct that does not sit well for some Pacific Peoples.

In compulsory education, 'real' families and caretakers are urged to take great interest, care and *aroa* for their children's academic endeavours and progress. The same principle must continue in Pacific PTEs; the learners' real family must continue to be the first point of contact, encouragement and support. It is of great concern that an individual's most important right and privilege could be given to the care of an 'organisational family'. It is erroneous to think that the organisational family should have as much power in their new designation as the real and rightful family of a learner.

Cultural phenomena will be a continuing *fono* and an ongoing challenge to all research conducted in the name of Pacific, for/with/by Pacific. Many mainstream non-indigenous academics produce theories that provide inadequate frameworks for understanding Pacific experiences due to their omission of Pacific world views. It is against this background that *Le So'otaga* has focused on cultural specificity and the cultural *pou* that are integral to Pacific practices.

APPENDIX 2: GLOSSARY

Cook Islands (CI)
Fiji (F)
Hawai'i (H)
Niue (N)
Samoa (S)
Tokelau (Tk)
Tonga (Tg)
Tuvalu (Tu)
Māori (M)

Aahi Ka (M); Afi kaka (N)	"burning fires"; keeping warm
Aiga (S); Magafaoa (N); Kopu Tangata (CI); Kainga (Tg)	family
Alofa (S); fakaalofa (N); faka'ofa (Tg)	love; compassion
Anga lelei (Tg)	generous, kind, calm
Aoga Amata (S); Punanga Reo (CI); Aoga Kamata (Tk); Aoga he tau Fanau Ikiiki (N)	early childhood education centres
Fa'aloalo (S); Fakalilifu (N); Fakamalo (Tg)	respect
Fa'a Samoa (S); Faka-Niue (N)	-way of…
Fa'asinomaga (S)	place of belonging
Faka'apa'apa (Tg)	respectful, humble and considerate
Fakamonuinaaga (N)	blessing
Faka'ofa (S); Alofa (S); Fakaalofa (N); 'Ofa (Tg)	compassion/love
Fanau (N); Tamaiti (S); Famili (Tg)	Children
Feagaiga (S);r 'o le feagaiga I le va o le tugane ma lona tuafifine (S)	Relational covenants; special/sacred covenants between groups especially between a brother and his sister, and a sister and her sister, a parent and his/her child
Fe-lagomataiaki (N); fetokoni'aki (Tg)	reciprocity; helping another/ each other
Fetokoni'aki (Tg); taui (N); toe taui atu I auala aloa'ia (S)	reciprocity; repay; to give back to another
Fono (N, S, Tk, Tg, Tu)	conference, gathering, meeting
Fono Talanoa (S; N; Tg; Tk; Tu)	focus group
Fonua (N, S)	land
Gagana (S); Vagahau (N); Fakalea (Tg)	language; speech
Hauora (M)/ ora (CI)	well-being
Kanohi ki te kanohi (M)[12]; alo mai alo atu (S); mata ke he mata (N)	face to face
Koha (M); Mena fakaalofa (N)	token of appreciation/gift
Lei (H)	fragrant flower
Leo (N; S; Tk; Tg; Tu); Reo (M; CI); Vosa (F)	language or voice
le so'otaga (lower case)	"the bridge"; a bridge that connects all things and builds on to adapt
Le So'otaga (S)	a bridge that connects all things and

---

[12] Our use of this term was challenged given that it is te reo Māori. The authors believe that it has become a well-accepted term and we choose to use it for the same reason that we use English terminology in this report.

	builds on to adapt (specifically in reference to the research or report)
Lotofale (N; S; Tk; Tg)	sitting rooms
Lotu (N; S; Tk; Tg; Tu)	worship
Māfana (Tg; N)	warm
Mālie (Tg; N; S)	well; balanced; sound; secure
Mamatua (N)	older peoples; parents (pl)
Mana (CI; F; H; N; S; Tk; Tg; Tu)	power
Mana'o (S); manako (S)	yearning
Mateuteu (S)	well-prepared, professional, responsive
Malu'i (S); mafola (N)	protected and safe
Nga tangata o tenei whenua (M)	people of this land
Pa'apa'alagi (N; S); Palagi; Papa'a (CI); kavalagi (F); Pakeha (M)	"white" person; European
Pasifika (N); Pasifiki (Tg); Pasefika (Tg)	another term for Pacific
Rangatira (M)	leader
Salusalu (F)	fragrant flower
Siva (S); meke (F); koli (N0; haka (M)	dance; cultural performing arts
Taha hinengaro (M); finagalo (N)	the dimension of thoughts and feelings
Taha tinana (M)	the physical dimension
Taha wairua (M)	the spiritual dimension
Tapuia'iga (S); lilifu fakatapu (N)	spirituality
Tofiga (S)	duties and responsibilities
Tupuaga (S); tapuakiaga (N)	a genealogical context
Whanau (M)	family
Talanoa (S; N; Tg; Tk; Tu)	talk/conversation/discussion
Tangata whenua (M); tagata he fonua (N)	people of the land
Taoga (N); Taonga (M; CI)	treasure[s]
Tautua (S)	service
Taulatua (N; S); Tohunga (M)	special expert
Te kohanaga reo (M); Aoga fanau ikiiki (N); aoga amata (S); punana reo (CI); punana leo (H)	Māori early childhood education centre
Tua'oi	boundaries
Tupu Ola Moui (N)	Pacific Health Chart publication: "Growing well"
Uhinga mālie (Tg)	balanced
Va (S)	spaces of relationships
Va fealoa'i (S)	social relationships
Va fealoaloa'i (S)	mutual respect between Pacific Peoples
Va tapuia (S)	sacred relationships