

# Northern Regional Hub-funded project

Project Report



## Cultural Treasures

A Youth Empowerment Programme to build relationships between Pasifika students, their families, and academic staff

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“you say that you think  
therefore you are  
but thinking belongs  
in the depths of the earth  
we simply borrow  
what we need to know  
these islands the sky  
the surrounding sea  
the trees the birds  
and all that are free  
the misty rain  
the surging river  
pools by the blowholes  
a hidden flower  
have their own thinking  
they are different frames  
of mind that cannot fit  
in a small selfish world”

Dr Konai Helu-Thaman, from her poem “Thinking” (1997).

## Acknowledgements

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## Executive Summary

Dr Konai Helu Thaman's poem which opens this report, sets the scene for our project. Thinking, and engaging in higher education, is no more than a single aspect of personal identity. To strengthen our learners' potential for academic success, we need to look to their unique cultural heritage, and to support them to understand where they come from, who has gone before, and where they stand today.

In recent years, Pasifika learners' participation in tertiary education in New Zealand has increased, and yet, the proportion of Pasifika (and Māori) students moving from school to tertiary study has been and still is much lower than that of Asian and European students (Education Counts, 2010). The 'Cultural Treasures' Youth Empowerment Programme was developed specifically to assist in this transition, supporting young Pasifika learners to build resilience and engage in education, while at the same time reigniting their passion for their culture and heritage.

Our project linked into the UniBound programme offered by the University of Auckland and was delivered in the Fale Pasifika building on their central city campus. Using indigenous research methodology, particularly informed by the Talona model of critical discussion (Vaiolleti, 2006), we developed and delivered a pilot programme based around the themes of family, navigation, art, village life, and belonging.

Programme aims included:

- To empower Pasifika youth participants through a heritage programme to support cultural identity and pride
- To work collaboratively with Pasifika and Māori youth to assist their transition into tertiary education
- To create a hands-on learning space aligned with cultural values.

Data was gathered from participants with a pre and post survey form, with 121, and 112 responses, respectively. Analysis of the findings showed that between two thirds and three quarters of participants connected strongly with different aspects of the cultural knowledge and traditions covered in the programme. Eighty percent would recommend the programme to others, and 76% were interested in continuing to learn about their culture by undertaking further Pacific Studies programmes at the university.

This 2017 project was the first time the programme was offered, and there were some challenges identified, as well as several elements of good practice we believe would be transferable to other similar transition programmes which address the needs of specific demographic groups. These learnings are summarised in a table at the end of this report, and we hope will be of interest and use to others in the sector. However, the main outcome of the project, we believe, was our graduates – a group of Pasifika youth with a strong, (re)confirmed sense of their own cultural identity, who now have a community of peers for mutual support and a sense of belief in their academic success to come.

## Introduction

### **Pasifika peoples in New Zealand**

Pacific Island communities are a long, proud part of this country's multicultural heritage. Samoa, the Cook Islands and Niue were territories under New Zealand administration in the 20th century, and substantial waves of migration after the Second World War have led to a large Pacific population in New Zealand (Fraenkel, 2012). Both in New Zealand, and in their home nations, Pacific communities are diverse – ethnically, generationally, economically, and in their language use. However, there are undeniable commonalities too, in the proximity of their geographic points of origin, and across many cultural traditions, artforms, and ways of viewing the world – strengthened by a long and proud history of seafaring navigation. Largely driven by government agencies for reporting purposes (and borrowing from a successful Auckland Arts Festival), the term 'Pasifika' has been coined to describe migrants from the Pacific region and their descendants, who now call Aotearoa home.

'Pasifika' refers to peoples who have migrated from Pacific nations and territories as well as the NZ-based (and born) population, who identify as Pasifika. Lemanu (2014) notes that this originally meant people who are descendants of the Polynesian nations of the Cook Islands, Tonga, Niue, Samoa, Tuvalu, Tokelau, and that Fiji is not considered part of Pasifika (Polynesia), belonging instead to a group of nations referred to as Melanesians. Other nations in this group include Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia (part of France), West Papua, Indonesia and Papua. However, he notes that within the context of Aotearoa, we can still include all these disparate groups in the definition of Pasifika. It is this wider definition, with its spirit of inclusiveness that has been adopted by this report.

Pasifika people in New Zealand in the twenty-first century continue to face a raft of challenges, which impact their uptake, success and completion of tertiary qualifications. While the rate of Pasifika students aged 18 to 24 years old participating in tertiary study is now over 25.6 per cent and continues to rise, only 75.6 per cent enrolled in their second year, and just 39.9 per cent were able to complete their qualification within five years (Education Counts, 2010). Pasifika learners are over represented in lower socio-economic communities; many may not speak English as their first language. Cultural reticence about challenging the teacher or developing the 'extended abstract' thinking of western-European classrooms can create further difficulties (TKI, n.d.).

Yet acknowledging these challenges does not mean dwelling on them. Most importantly, there is consistently strong evidence of the great importance that Pacific families place on education generally and, increasingly, on tertiary education in particular (Anae, Anderson, Benseman & Coxon, 2002). Chu, Abella and Paurini (2013) note the way research is moving from a negative, deficit narrative, to "an appreciative and positive approach for Pacific educational achievement" (p. 14). As accounts grow of activity in academic and student support areas for Pasifika students, attention is focused on good practice and benefits for learners. The *'Cultural Treasures' Youth Empowerment Programme* was conceived and implemented as an initiative which we hope will add to this body of knowledge.

### **Empowering Pasifika learners through cultural values, heritage, and pride**

Many of the factors that support success for Pacific learners are well-known. These include support from the Pacific community, courses and institutional structures that are responsive to Pacific needs, and a sense of a visible Pacific presence at the place of study. Tertiary staff

need to learn, to reflect, and to value the prior knowledge and life experiences that Pasifika learners bring with them. Teachers need to know their learners – their personal goals and external motivations - and to provide a clear picture of education as an enabling tool to create a successful and fulfilling life. Above all, research findings emphasise over and over again, the importance of relationship building: relationships with staff, but also with other Pasifika learners on campus, in order to maintain their sense of Pacific identity and cultural capital when times get tough (Chu et al., 2013; Lemanu, 2014; Nabobo-Baba, 2008; Smith, 1999; TKI, n.d.).

Another important element of Pasifika life is the value placed on cultural heritage, both knowledge and artefacts. With a tradition of oral, rather than written storytelling to transfer learning through the generations, objects from the past become a symbolic as well as physical resource. This project was inspired by the 'Pacific Youth Reconnection Programme' which has been run by the Australian museum in Sydney, since 2009 (<https://australianmuseum.net.au/blogpost/science/pacific-youth>). The concept here is to assist 'at-risk' young people from Pacific communities to interact and reconnect with culturally significant artefacts. Exposure to cultural collections is intended to help address the symptoms of cultural dislocation for newer migrants, and to assist second generation youth to learn about their cultural roots as part of building self-belief. On-site and outreach activities include in-depth tours of the collections, workshops and pop-up museum booths at various community events.

Members of the project team had previously been involved in exhibitions and lecture series which shared cultural learning, and had seen first-hand how powerful these could be for individuals who were trying to reconnect with their roots. The team reflected that if such a process positively affects adults, how might it help young people, in particular youths that are trying to identify their history and identity? With awareness of the Australian Museum initiative, the seed for the 'Cultural Treasures' project was planted.

### **The project: Aims, development and setting**

We conceived our approach to assisting Pasifika learners to prepare for their move into university study as a hands-on experience, with applied and practical learning, using museum artefacts/treasures as cultural learning tools. The aims of the 'Cultural Treasures' Youth Empowerment Programme were:

- To empower Pasifika youth participants through a heritage programme that would serve as a 'creative incubator' for personal growth, cultural identity enrichment and cultural pride
- To work collaboratively with Pasifika and Māori youth to assist their transition into tertiary education, and to motivate them to excel and remain at the University of Auckland.
- To create a hands-on learning space that nurtured specific cultural values, such as collectivity, relationships, identity and togetherness.

Along with these overarching aims to create a brighter future for these young people through reconnecting our rich cultural past to the present, we hoped to bring about a positive change in students' behaviour i.e., respect to those in authority, improvement in time management and punctuality. We hoped the programme would help to develop a cohort of young people who can empower others, be positive role models, and be both humble and proud of their ancestry. Alongside the meaningful engagement with cultural traditions and artefacts, then,

we would also be focussing on learning, completing set tasks, and reinforcing commitment, motivation and resilience strategies.

Our original 2016 proposal to Ako Aotearoa, New Zealand's National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence, varied a little from the programme which we eventually offered, and report here. We initially intended to hold a 10-week programme at Auckland Museum and Maritime Museum's collection and exhibition spaces; and to recruit learners directly from secondary schools. However, following the project's approval, the team found that time and budget constraints, and ethics application restrictions, necessitated some changes. With the support of Ako Aotearoa's Regional Hub Manager, and the management team at the Fale Pasifika at the University of Auckland, the institutional partner in this project, it was decided to move the location to the University site, and to link in with their existing 'UniBound' programme for this pilot offering.

UniBound is an academic preparatory and Foundation program for Maori and Pacific students at the University of Auckland. Students receive a Certificate in Academic Preparation, which will enhance their chances of University entrance. UniBound staff offer mentoring support to help school leavers transition into tertiary education. The free, five-week academic enrichment programme includes:

- Academic preparation in numeracy and literacy
- Learning about Pacific and Maori cultures and knowledge
- Off-campus learning activities—such as field trips to the Marine biology lab, sports days, and intercampus visits
- University 101: getting to grips with study at the University—where and how to do things
- Team building activities and peer mentoring
- Working on projects in tech or culture or research  
(<https://www.auckland.ac.nz/unibound/>)

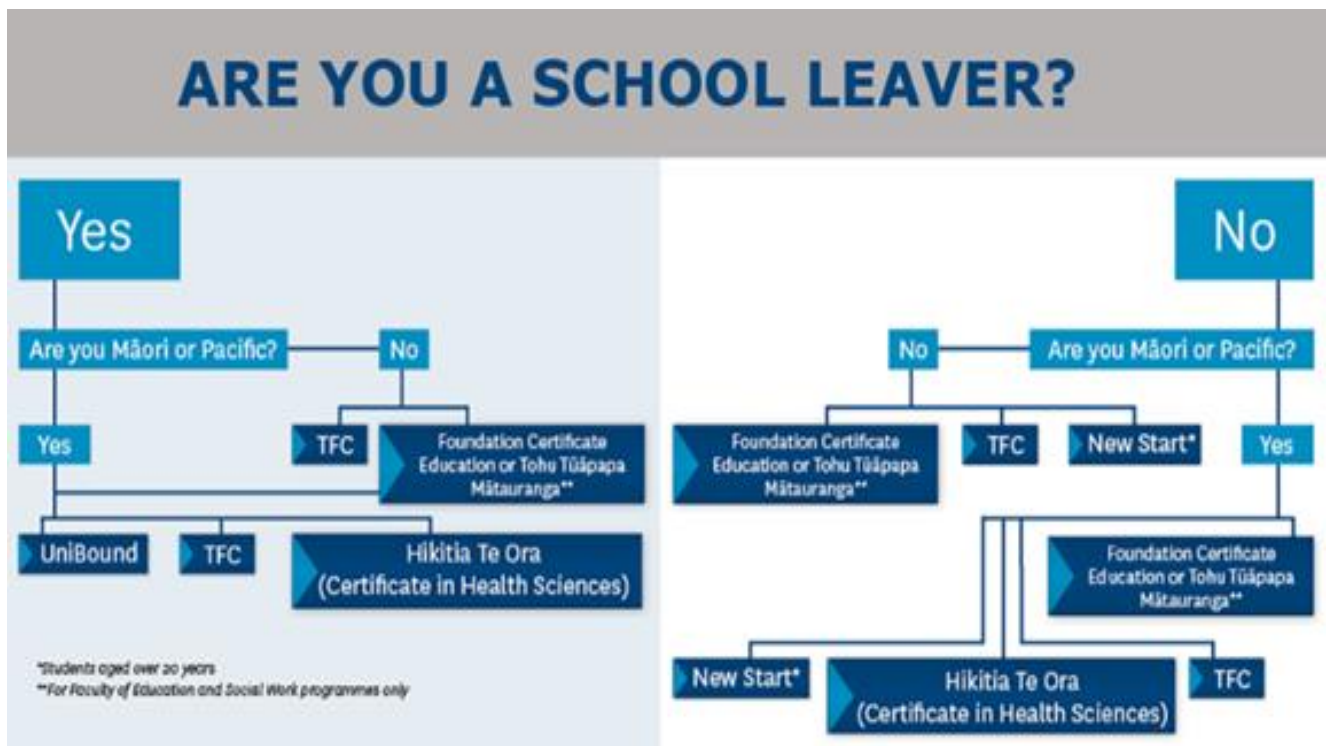


Figure 1. University of Auckland pathways for transitioning students, showing the place of the UniBound programme



The Fale Pasifika is an iconic building on the University of Auckland campus, and serves as the “touch-point between the University and Pacific communities” and “the spiritual home of the University's Pacific community” (<https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/on-campus/fale-pasifika.html>). In keeping with the role of fale in Pacific Island communities, the Fale Pasifika is used for meetings, social gatherings, community activities and events, performances and workshops.



**Figures 2 and 3. Outside and inside the Fale Pasifika, University of Auckland**



**Figures 4 and 5. Two groups of our learner participants at the Fale Pasifika, Day 1.**

# Methodology

## Pacific Research Protocols

The 'Cultural Treasures' project team was committed to ensuring that appropriate cultural protocols and processes were embedded in the programme design, implementation, analysis, report writing and dissemination. Over the years, many indigenous researchers have been pushed to develop their own research frameworks that are relevant and applicable to their communities. We reviewed a number of indigenous research models, and recognised the cultural wisdom and integrity of cultural values in each, including:

- The 'Spider Web Conceptual Framework' by the American Indigenous Research Association (Lambert, 2017). This model places the researcher's heart at the centre of any enquiry: "Your place. Your heart and voice. Why you want to do this research." A web of community and tribal interests and imperatives surround and connect through the researcher.
- Kaupapa Māori research Framework (Smith, 1999). This methodology is based on Maori beliefs and thinking as opposed to western-style research, which was seen as a colonisation tool and not previously used for the self-determination and development of indigenous people. To decolonise the academy, Smith says, requires a set of actions by indigenous researchers and thinkers and greater socio-political, emotional, psychological, philosophical and spiritual control for Māori and their lives. Essentially, "research is conceived, developed, and carried out by Maori, and the end outcome is to benefit Maori" and is "both a form of resistance and a methodological strategy" (Walker, Eketone & Gibbs, 2006, p. 331).
- The Kakala Framework (Fua, 2014; Nemani, 2012) was developed by Tongan academic and poet, Professor Konai Helu-Thaman (whose words open this report), who used the metaphor of the kakala or garland. The model emphasises three process: gathering, design, and giving away. Similar to a kakala, knowledge has to be transmitted and promoted in the proper manner following protocols and tradition, even while adapting to the occasion.
- Vanua Research Framework (Nabobo-Baba, 2008). This framework was initiated by Dr. Unaisi Nabobo-Baba and details the processes used when researching indigenous Fijian histories, knowledge, skills, arts, values and lifeways (Nemani, 2012). As with other indigenous methodologies, it is designed to manifest Pacific cultural aspirations, preferences and practices that will ensure and protect the complex systems of philosophies that are reflected in arts and culture, such as songs, carvings, weavings, paintings and oral traditions. Even though such research findings may not be in written form as expected by academic institutions, there are other ways that research findings can be transmitted such as 'story-telling' (Nabobo-Baba, 2008).
- The Tongan and Samoan-derived Talona Model has been described as "relationally mindful critical oratory" (Tecun, Hafoka, 'Ulu'ave-Hafoka, & 'Ulu'ave, 2018, p. 156). The starting point is an open or informal discussion, "grounded as a continuum of Indigenous knowledge production and wisdom present from the past that is adaptable to research settings" (ibid.). Vaoleti (2006) explains that this literally means "talking about nothing in particular" and interacting without a rigid framework: "*Tala* means to inform, tell, relate and command, as well as to ask or

apply. *Noa* means of any kind, ordinary, nothing in particular, purely imaginary or void” (p. 23). It is the critical discussion which leads to knowledge creation and co-constructed narratives.

### Drawing on commonalities to design the ‘Cultural Treasures’ research framework

As the Samoan proverb exclaims: *e vave taunu’u le malaga pe a tātou alo va’a fa’atasi* – our destiny is within sight when we paddle our canoe together (cited by Seiuli, 2016, p. 53). The project team found many threads in each of the reviewed research methodologies, which were similar to, and complementary with one another. Indigenous research frameworks tend to be “non-linear and responsive”, almost always face-to-face, and verbal rather than written (Vaiolleti, 2006, p. 25). These frameworks value, rather than avoid, participatory researchers, and believe that a ‘cultural insider’ researching their own community will lead to a more relevant and grounded interpretation of that people’s condition (Seiuli, 2016). Transparency about purpose and benefit is important, as is observing cultural protocols, especially around relational boundaries and status. Seiuli also makes the point that insider cultural understanding is even more important when conducting research on Pacific communities in this country, as the diaspora from their home islands and their developing identity as New Zealanders will be a distinct part of many participants’ experience. As Seiuli puts it, making the case for more Pasifika-led research in adopted homelands like Aotearoa, “We are not brown-palagi” (p. 1). Pasifika people need to tell Pasifika stories.

Since many of our students were of Pacific and Maori descent, the ‘Cultural Treasures’ project team made sure that the program delivery was holistic and adhered to these indigenous research frameworks. We were mindful of the need to engage with our Pasifika participants through their own knowledge systems, experiences, representations, imaginations and identities – as members of a Pacific community, and as transitioning students new to the tertiary setting. The contextual interaction which was a feature throughout the programme sought to proceed in a manner appropriate to the cultural protocols concerned, and encourage learners to become proactive, participatory partners in a creative and consultative research process. We were definitely trying to use these indigenous paradigms, rather than “attempting to indigenize a Western one” (Tecun et al., 2018). The ultimate intent of applying these frameworks in a project setting was to make our students feel safe, to allow them to learn from our tailor-made program, to ensure that they could share their views and ideas in a safe space and most importantly, to ‘empower’ them in their learning within the university environment beyond the lifespan of the project.

### Project participants

Relationships between stakeholders were important throughout the project. There were four key stakeholder groups (Figure 6):

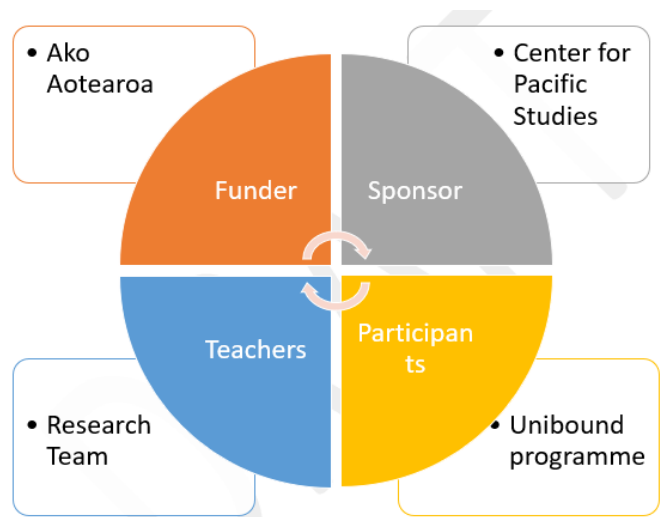


Figure 6. Key project stakeholders

- Ako Aotearoa – Northern Regional Hub. As acknowledged at the start of this report, Ako Aotearoa, represented by Ruth Peterson, played a far more significant role than just providing the funds to deliver our pilot ‘Cultural Treasures’ Youth Empowerment Programme. The project’s objective to improve outcomes for Pasifika learners is closely aligned to both the Tertiary Education Commission, and Ako Aotearoa’s priority areas, and we were grateful to receive strong support for the project, as well as ongoing mentoring for the researchers. Figure 6 shows Ruth Peterson and Maree Jex from the Northern Regional Hub visiting the Fale during the programme to get a first-hand feel for what we were delivering, and the learners we were working with.



**Figure 7. Researchers Tarisi Vunidilo (left) and Betty Loto (right) with Ruth Peterson and Maree Jex, Ako Aotearoa Northern Regional Hub**

- The Centre for Pacific Studies at the University of Auckland is located in a building adjacent to the Fale Pasifika, and coordinates Pacific Studies programmes and activities, as well as support services and Fale events. The Centre is the organiser for the UniBound programme, and was our host for the ‘Cultural Treasures’ initiative.
- The teachers – research team: Tarisi Vunidilo, Betty Loto and Kali Vunidilo (see Appendix A for biographies). As a team, we offer a range of experience and expertise in education, covering primary, secondary schooling, as well as higher education. We share a passion for supporting Pasifika youth and their communities. While we have worked in similar spaces (figuratively and physically!), this was a first Ako Aotearoa project for all of us. A fourth member of our teaching team was Ariella Gade Gaunavou, an acknowledged expert Fijian Masi-Maker (Tapa-Maker), who provided creative direction for this central part of our programme.



**Figure 8. Mrs. Railala Gade Gaunavou (centre) with Betty and Tarisi**

- The UniBound Preparatory Studies Summer School programme is offered each year to support school leavers with their transition into the University environment. In 2017, 121 students were enrolled, and were informed about the pilot being offered: the 'Cultural Treasures' Youth Empowerment Programme, and the research/evaluation which would accompany it to test out how effective this cultural programme could be for increasing both the achievement and retention of Pacific students throughout the year. In addition to UniBound staff, we were greatly assisted by three student mentors who had attended previous offerings of the UniBound programme, and who assisted with all aspects of the 'Cultural Treasures' programme, especially around group work, classroom and field trip logistics.



**Figure 9. Tapeni Faalogo and Theresa Kiely - UniBound**



**Figure 10. Mentor Kesaia Tapuelueulu, who was a UniBound student and is now a University Graduate.**

## Data collection and analysis

At the start of the programme, all learner participants were informed about the project and invited to participate in the research aspect of the programme, although they were also told that this was optional, and they were under no obligation to complete any evaluations. We asked for their consent to photograph the teaching sessions and task work; all learners were happy to approve the request. We collected data from the students at the start and end of the programme (Appendices B and C) to help us learn a little about the young people attending and their prior cultural knowledge, and then to record their perceptions of the programme and level of interest in aspects of Pasifika culture.

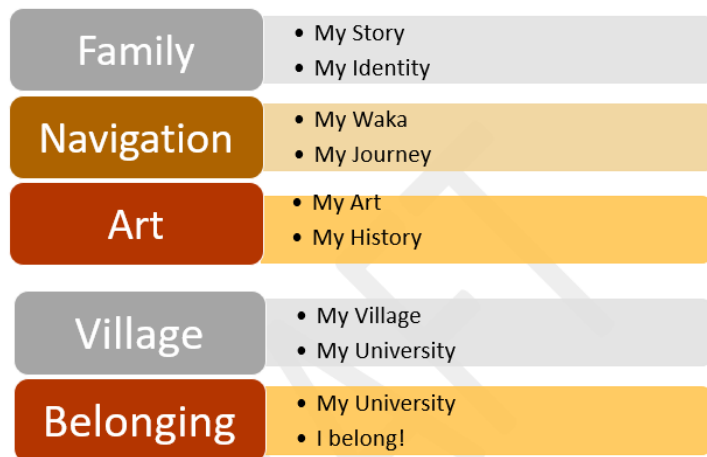
The team collated the data using an Excel Spreadsheet to graph total responses to each survey item. Following the Talona research process, we avoided setting topics and themes; rather, we held our own informal conversations in which discussed the results and noted the narratives as they emerged from our dialogue. This allowed us to thread in our own observations as we discussed examples of general, and personal shifts made by the learners.

Most of the findings reported here are quantitative in nature, as our feed forward and feedback forms were primarily a series of self-rating scales from 1-5, for students to indicate levels of interest or satisfaction, and to help us gain an overall picture of our cohort. There was a single item which allowed students to add a comment if they wished: we have included a few direct quotations in the Findings, but these were the exception, rather than rule, by nature of the research design.

# The 'Cultural Treasures' programme

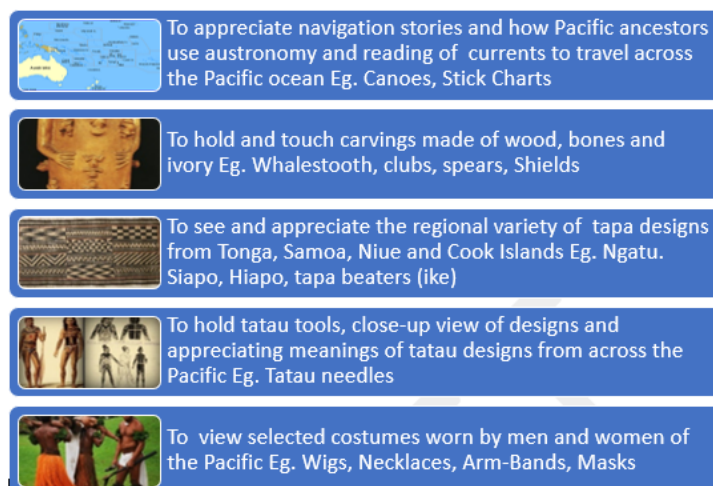
## Programme design

The Programme concept called for hands-on, applied and practical learning for our youth participants using museum artefacts/treasures, and cultural protocols and traditions as cultural learning tools. We designed a programme encompassing five themes (Figure 11) to assist each learner feel a sense of belonging. Every learner was reminded to take each theme and apply it to their own personal lives and journey.



**Figure 11. 'Cultural Treasures' programme content**

We then considered the artefacts and traditions which would best epitomise the themes and provide an avenue for learners to (re)connect with their own cultural heritage. Figure 12 summarises our selection:



**Figure 12. Selected artefacts and traditions to embody programme themes**

At the start of each session, we congregated at the Fale Pasifika, set the programme for the day and answered questions from students. Next, the students were divided into three groups, each led by one of the project team, and each accompanied by a UniBound mentor. At an agreed time, the groups rotated, so that all participants covered the same material, but in smaller groups to allow for ease of discussion.

## Programme elements

### 1. Cultural artefacts

Project leader Tarisi Vunidilo has had a long career related to Pacific archaeology and anthropology and is well-versed in museum collections of items of cultural significance. In this section of the programme, learners worked with actual objects, as well as images, that linked with Pacific history (Figures 13-15). Where members of the group had personal stories or childhood memories connected to the objects, we encouraged them to share these, which also helped bring the session to life.



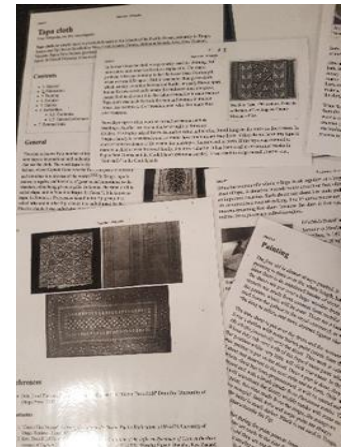
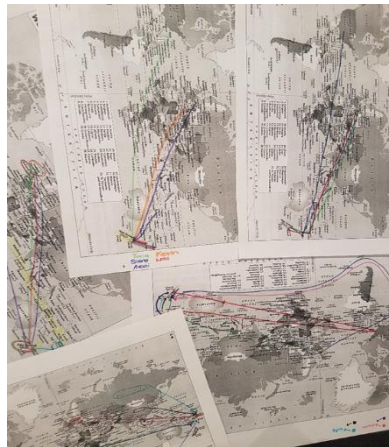
**Figures 13-15. Learning about cultural artefacts**

### 2. Cultural identity

Forming a cultural identity begins with an understanding of who we are, where we are from, how we got here, why we are here, and how we can be successful here. Key points that the facilitator of this section of the programme, Betty Loto, shared with the students were expressed as aspirational statements:

- *My identity is the foundation of who I am, I am proud of my heritage, my culture, and my language. My cultural heritage empowers me to succeed.*
- *I understand myself, my strengths and how I learn best therefore I will take responsibility for my learning journey*
- *I stand on the shoulders of my ancestors who have laid the foundation upon which I now build for future generations to add to.*
- *I need to form my own support community here at University because that will help build my resilience.*

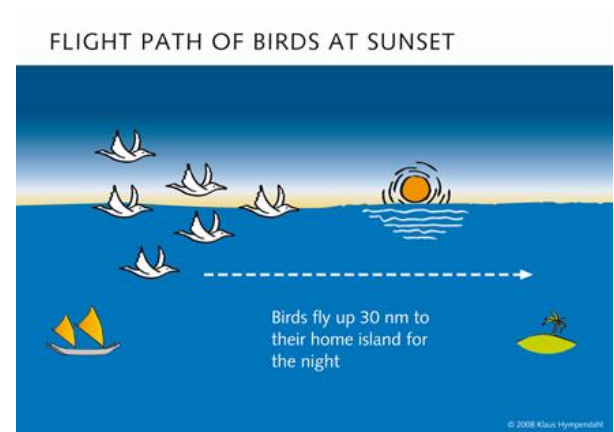
Each student created an identity chart (Figure 16) which included these elements: their full name and its origin, ethnicity, strengths, dreams and goals, values, the roles they play in their family, and their purpose for being part of the Unibound Programme. In another exercise, we focussed on values, and how their ancestors, as pioneers in new lands, faced hardships, illnesses, climate change, prejudices. We then worked on connecting ancestral values to their own academic studies; for example, perseverance, determination, commitment, faith, and resilience. Ancestral journeys were compared to their own travel arrangements (Figure 17). Fact cards which allowed for easy comparisons of different traditions across Pacific nations were a further teaching tool for this topic (Figure 18).



**Figures 16-18. Identity charts, mapping journeys, fact sheets**

### 3. Traditional knowledge

Sessions delivered in this part of the programme by Kali Vunidilo aimed to link Western Science and Mathematics with Indigenous Knowledge and Science, to both empower students' learning, and to make learning relevant. The first topic here was astronomy: the position and movement of the Earth and the seasons – linked to the movements of fish, flowering of flowers and fruiting of fruit trees, and how life can be organised using nature as a beacon. Another topic which captured learners' interest was navigation, tracing the migration patterns and learning about the traditional tools and techniques which allowed long and successful sea voyages – such as the flight paths of birds at sunset (Figures 19-20). Indigenous knowledge systems, defined by Thaman (2006, p. 176) as “specific systems of values, knowledge, understandings, and practices developed and accumulated over millennia, by a group of human beings in a particular region” often replicate the understandings generated by western science, being different only in issues of scale, or the rate of contextual change.



**Figures 19-20. Navigation aids: stick chart and bird flight patterns**

### 4. Ways of working

Our methodology for the programme called for collaboration and partnership with our learners and encouraging them to ‘find their voice’ (Tecun et al., 2018; Vaioleti, 2006). Group work was an important method of generating discussion amongst students (Figure 21), and in keeping with their Pasifika cultural backgrounds which are generally described as collectivist



and consensual, rather than individualist (TKI, n.d.). Setting up the Fale in a group layout helped make students feel at ease during each session and broke down the anxiety many felt about speaking in front of the entire group (Figure 22). All students were expected to share their views and opinions. The aim was to instil a sense of ‘belonging’ and make every voice matter, achieved through scaffolding participation through pair work, to small groups, and then the entire cohort. Increasing confidence in oral presentations was an important objective for the programme: not only are oratory and spoken narratives an important aspect of traditional knowledge sharing, they also figure strongly in university course work and assessments. Here again, group presentations were the key to group learning and standing in front of their class-mates.

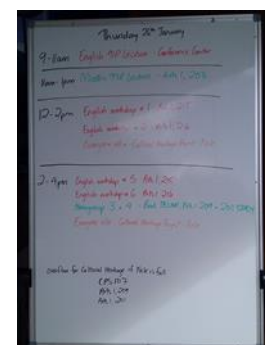
Linking in to recent studies about transitioning students to higher education, we also recognised the need to make the classes interactive, fun and engaging. It has been widely recognised that learning is a social activity, and that effective relationships between students and between students and teachers improve learning experiences and outcomes (Honeyfield et al., 2016). Again, pair and group work supported our enactment of this core principle of adult learning.



**Figures 21-22. Group work in the Fale**

Linked to the ways we worked, was the ‘look’ of our materials and delivery. Although we had four different teachers, we tried to ensure the programme resources fitted together, and that our learners had a sense of continuity as we worked through the topics. As a team, we made sure to use as much Pacific imagery and language as possible. In terms of the use of Pacific words, even the application of simple greeting words such ‘*Bula Vinaka*,’ ‘*Talofa Lava*,’ ‘*Malo e Lelei*’ and ‘*Kia Orana*’ would make students from Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Cook Islands respectively, to feel like they belong to this programme. Since many of them would be familiar with Pacific patterns, we believed that having such patterns on the screen when they come into the classroom would help to make them feel at home (Figures 23, 24).

**Figures 23 and 24. PowerPoint slide; the welcome whiteboard with the plan and key words for each day**

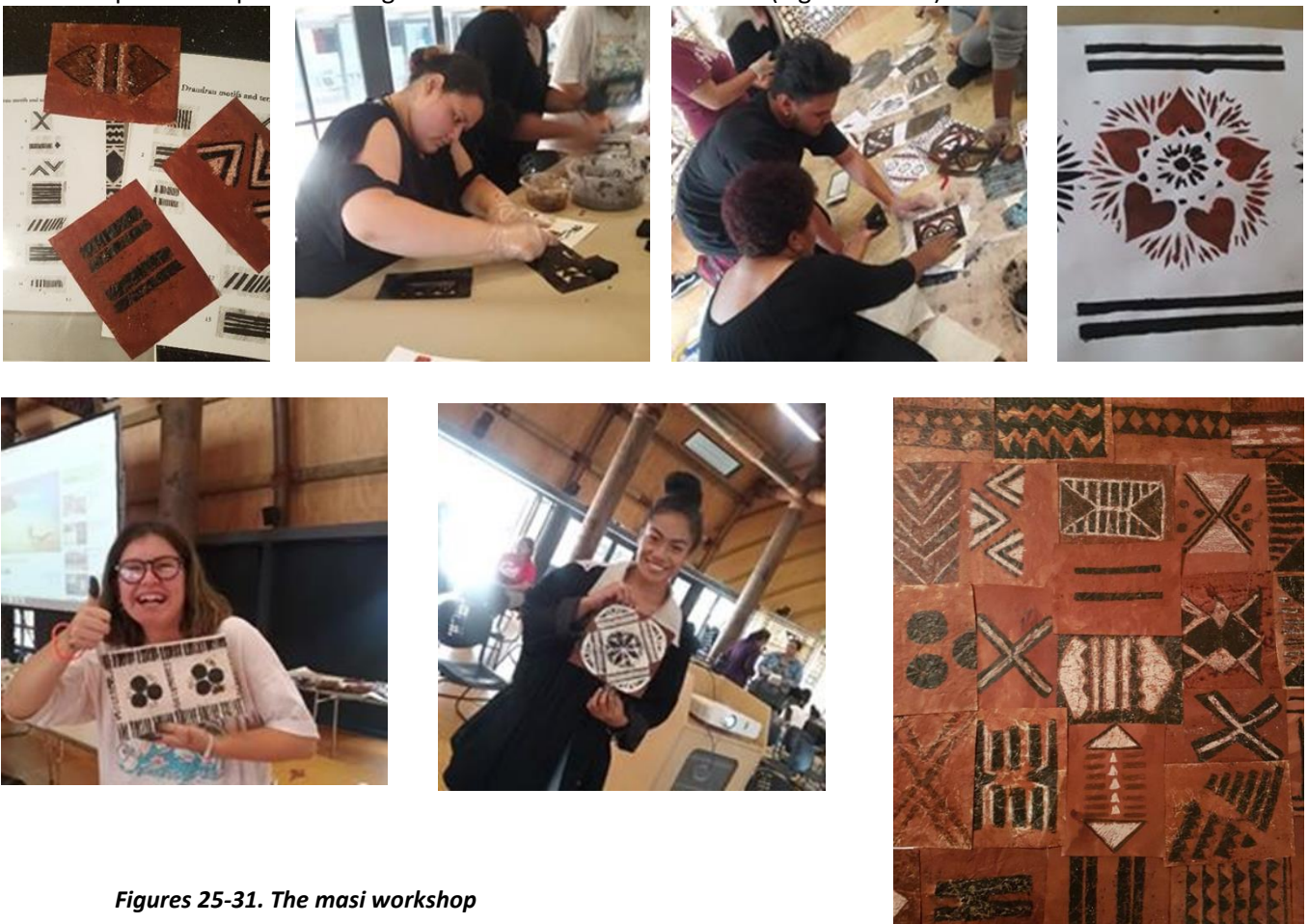


## 5. Creative expression

One of the direct outcomes of this programme was the creation of a giant tapa (bark-cloth). Even though masi making is traditionally a woman-focused art work, young men in the 'Cultural Treasures' programme were encouraged to take part; we wanted this program to be gender inclusive and an opportunity for students to bond during the UniBound program.

We began by sharing personal understandings and experiences with tapa from participants' own cultures. By comparing and contrasting facts about tapa from Samoa, Tonga and Fiji, students were able to recognise that Fijian tapa is the only one in which stencils are used, and that each stencil represents an aspect of culture, which then makes up the genealogies of the people, the place and the cultural identity of families, tribes, clans and specific areas. This indigenous knowledge is passed down through master experts born into that role.

We were fortunate to have the services of specialist masi teacher Ariella Gade Gaunavou, who led this workshop. Using traditional Fijian tapa patterns for inspiration, each student selected one to recreate on brown paper using black, brown and white crayons – or created their own new design using stencils made from x-ray film. The piece was then scrunched up to give it a crinkled look, unfolded, the loose crayon remnants are then shaken off, and brown dye applied with a paintbrush. The finished piece then became part of a unique contemporary piece of tapa to be hung at the Centre for Pacific Studies (Figures 23-29).



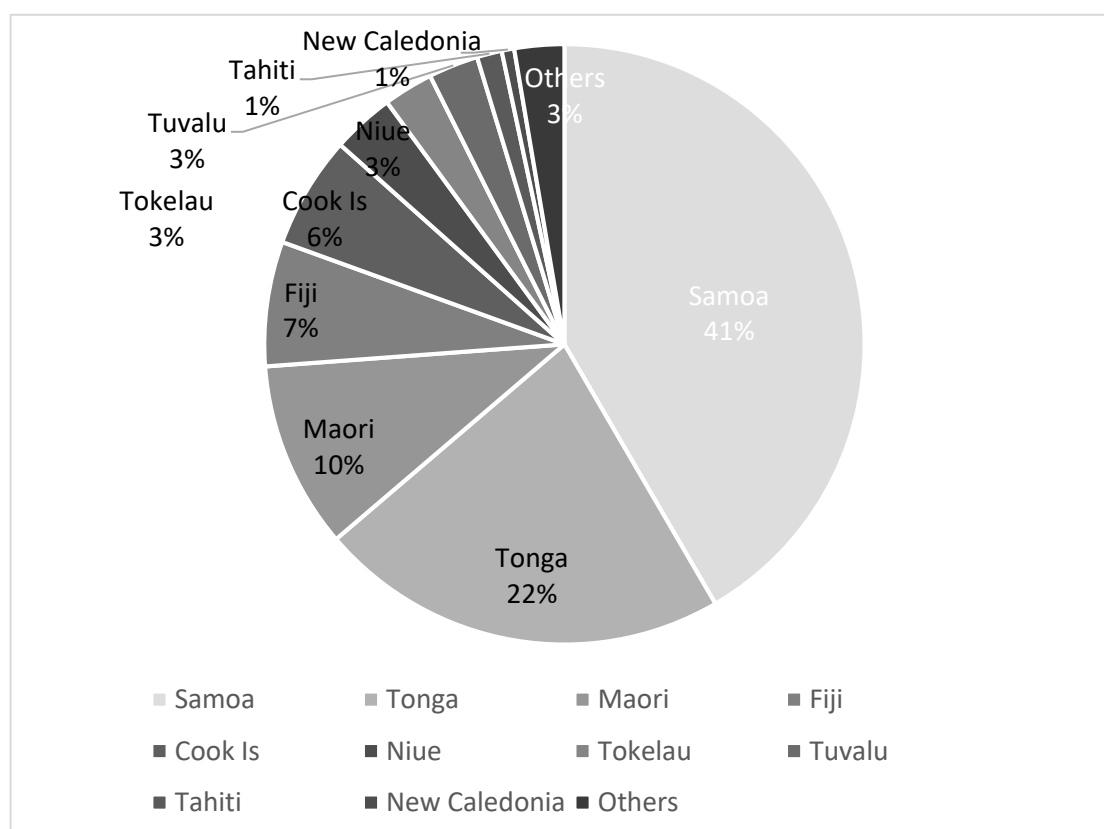
*Figures 25-31. The masi workshop*

## Findings and Discussion

### Pre-programme responses (n = 121)

#### 1. Demographics

Based on the 'Feed forward' forms (Appendix B) completed and submitted by 121 enrolled UniBound learners, 41% of our learner participants were from Samoa, with the second largest ethnicity represented being Tongan, at 22%. Other groups were New Zealand Maori, 10%; Fiji, 7%; and Cook Islands, 6%. Other islands such as Niue, Tokelau, Tuvalu, Tahiti and New Caledonia were also represented (Figure 30).



**Figure 32. Ethnic groups represented on the 2017 'Cultural treasure' Youth Empowerment programme**

#### 2. Language

Most of our learners were New Zealand-born, rather than immigrants. While 65% said they understood one Pacific language, and 23% said they understood two, we soon realised this did not equate to fluency. Given that 10% of participants had no second language in addition to English, these findings had a direct impact on our programme delivery. First, we made an active point of encouraging the use of Pacific words and phrases in the classroom. Second, we realised that we could not assume understanding of cultural terminology and made sure to provide translations and full descriptions of culturally specific vocabulary and expressions. A third response to this finding was to ensure learners who were willing to learn more about their language knew how to contact the Pasifika Education Centre (PEC), who offer free language lessons.

### 3. Family and community

From the first phase of data collection using the 'Feed forward' form, learners indicated an almost universal support from their family for their enrolling in a tertiary qualification: 74% rated this as 'excellent', 17% as 'strong', and 9% as 'fair'. There were no negative responses. This response was corroborated during the programme when each student stood up to share their 'Talona' (critical narrative) about their journey. Family support, and also expectations, played a large part in their motivation to attend the UniBound programme, and to make the most of all opportunities to be successful in their academic endeavours.

Support from immediate families for education extended to participants' wider communities as well, strengthened through school, church and community events and ties. Fifty-eight percent of our learners rated their connection to their Pacific community as 'excellent' or 'strong', and 28% as 'fair'. However, 9% said this was 'weak'; 5% had no community connection.

### 4. Cultural identity

Not surprisingly, learners who enrolled in a Pasifika-based UniBound programme generally already had a strong sense of pride in their cultural roots. Seventy-eight percent said they had a strong, or very strong interest in learning more about Pacific history; 79% had the same level of interest in seeing Pacific artefacts in museums and galleries; 83% responded at this level to Pacific dances and performance. As the programme progressed and we learned more about our learners, we learnt that many of the participants had taken part in the annual *Polyfest* event (<https://www.asbpolyfest.co.nz/>) during their high school years. Dance and music are an integral part of language and culture and therefore cultural expression across the Pacific (TKI, n.d.) so that interest and pride in these areas was a strong indication to the team that participants had joined the 'Cultural Treasures' Youth Empowerment Programme as much for the Pasifika connection as for the academic head-start in their studies.

Our final question in the Feed forward survey asked participants about their cultural pride in terms of being a Pacific student at the University of Auckland: 72% said this was very high, 20% said high, and 7% said it was 'fair'. This finding ratified our earlier observations, above, and confirmed the team's commitment to build capability through cultural engagement so that our participants felt empowered to remain as a successful Pacific student until they graduate.

#### Post-programme responses (n=112)

In conversations with the project team, and in a few cases, additional written comments on the feedback from (Appendix C), many learners noted the value they had gained from the programme as a whole:

*"UniBound has had a huge impact on my life because it has helped me find myself and be introduced to Pasifika culture and appreciate my ethnicity as well as helping me make amazing friends and develop greater motivation to achieve."* (2017 participant)

*"Great experience meeting new people and learning a-bit more about my own culture"* (2017 participant)

Learners had made a strong start in building a community which would sustain them through their academic life, sharing stories, building empathy and understanding. One memorable example was the similarities and the differences in travel time to and from university, with students who live in South Auckland, North Shore and West Auckland explaining that they had to get up between 4 and 5am, which took its toll on energy levels in the afternoon sessions. Classmates were amazed by the range of circumstances represented in a single cohort, recognising diversity even in an apparently shared cultural background.

### **Pasifika traditions and knowledge**

Before the programme began, 78% and 79% of participants had rated their interest in Pacific history and cultural artefacts as high, or very high; responses to the same questions after the programme were slightly down, at 60% and 71% respectively. While this response rate was still the majority of participants, we did wonder whether the drop in interest might be due in part to the more theoretical aspect of some of the delivery, which paved the way for the practical work. Certainly, more participants enjoyed learning about navigation tools (72% were strongly, or very strongly interested) and the relationship between indigenous knowledge and western science (77%). During delivery, we realised that this was an eye-opening session for many students. Most took for granted the importance of indigenous knowledge but had not realised how the reasoning and evidence on which it was based could be articulated in the same way as they had experienced learning about science in their secondary schooling, as “both systems involve rigorous observation, experimentation, and validation” (Thaman, 2006, p. 176). In the classroom, we observed much fascination and a sense of pride amongst the students as they discovered more about the creativity and intuition of their ancestors through their own hands-on inquiry into traditional Pacific navigation, tapa-making, carving and mat-weaving. As is well documented in the literature about supporting youth into higher education (e.g. Honeyfield et al., 2016), our learners generally preferred active learning exercises, which supported a kinaesthetic learning style. This observation also aligns with traditional cultural learning and teaching styles of learners working alongside elders, in an ako-ako relationship of reciprocity and sharing (TKI, 2008).

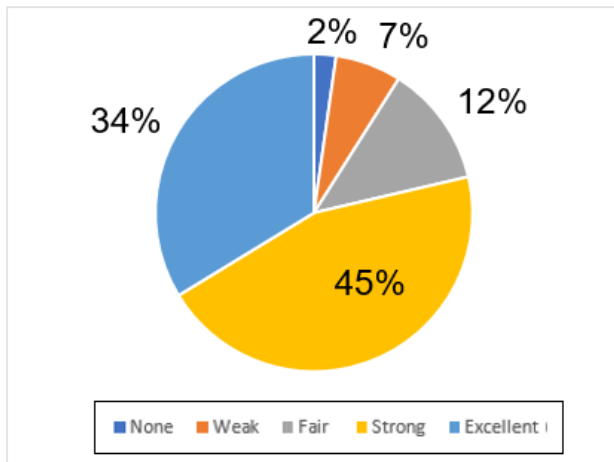
### **Redefining cultural identity**

One of the interactive activities in the classroom about family genealogy resonated with most learners in the ‘Cultural Treasures’ programme, as indicated by the 85% response rate of either strong, or very strong interest in knowing and tracing their family lines. Students recognised that knowing where their family originally came from, and how they as individuals had come to be where they are today, was a strong aspect of their cultural identity as Pasifika students. This finding concurs with much of the literature: when students are confident of their own history and identity, their outlook of life in general is more positive, which will in turn enhance the results of their academic studies (Chu et al., 2010; Honeyfield et al., 2016).

One of the exercises we asked participants to undertake during the programme was to interview their family members and to share in the classroom what their family origins and family affiliations were. Many students said that previously they had had little knowledge of their own family history and found some of the stories quite emotional. This approach enabled many students to deeply reflect on their own family stories, myths and legends they heard while growing up. For Pacific people, names are important as they connect families and also identify tribal affiliations, traditional roles and land ownership. Over two thirds of participants (68%) said they now realised the understanding of names was crucial in learning more about themselves.

### Pacific studies at university

Almost all participants thought the 'Cultural Treasures' programme was relevant to their studies, with 34% rating the fit as 'excellent', 45% rating it as 'strong', and 12% rating it as 'fair'. Combining these three measures, 80% felt that they would recommend this programme to others.



Similarly, 80% gave a positive rating to the programme content and delivery, with several commenting that they enjoyed the combined team delivery. Most pleasing of all, because of attending the programme, a combined 76% expressed some level of interest and commitment to undertaking future Pacific studies courses as part of their formal qualification.

**Figure 33. Relevance of attending programme to your academic studies**

## Summary

The focus of the 2017 'Cultural Treasures' Youth Empowerment Programme was to empower Pasifika students who are transitioning into tertiary education programmes at the University of Auckland. Based on our own experience as teachers in the secondary and tertiary sectors, on the literature, and on a similar museum-based programme in Australia, we hoped that (re) introducing learners to our Pacific treasures and traditions would inspire them, and instil a strong cultural identity and pride to support them through their university journey. Our findings show that when young people are reminded of how rich their culture is, and how brave their ancestors were, it enhances cultural pride, increases self-esteem and builds a sense of self-efficacy.

Naturally in any pilot programme, there are several challenges, as well as moments of serendipity. We have already described in the Introduction a series of adjustments we needed to make prior to the programme's commencement (relocation to the Fale; linking into the UniBound programme). Learnings whilst the programme was underway are summarised in Table 1, below.

**Table 1. Team reflections on the "Cultural Treasures' Youth Empowerment programme**

<b>Key learning from workshops in the Fale and the classrooms</b>	<b>Key suggestions for what worked and what didn't</b>	<b>Suggestions for the future</b>
Embracing our cultural identity is empowering	Dividing the students into smaller groups made interaction manageable	Opportunities to run and develop the programme within a variety of institutions locally, nationally, and internationally
Knowing the origin of our names gives us confidence	Working in the Fale setting adding value to the context	
Tracking the migration and navigation journeys of our ancestors sets the foundation for our values	Having support mentors to support was invaluable	Including cultural identity (the 'CT' YEP) as its own module within tertiary institutions
Learning how to make a traditional tapa in a modern context enriches our cultural knowledge	Having resources available to use aided in the teaching sessions	Develop the resources and run workshops to train people to implement
Being able to work in the Fale provided a village feeling to the day	Adjusting our programme to fit within the UniBound timetable placed restrictions on the number of sessions we could run, which was unfortunate because we had a lot more material available	
Hands-on experience using traditional artefacts added an authentic element		

Overall, the project team agreed that the experience was phenomenal. The main theme of this project was EMPOWERMENT. We developed this project to empower our Pasifika youths, however over the course of the project, the teachers were equally empowered through the process. It was a journey of self-discovery for all involved.

*Thank you*

*Vinaka Vinaka vaka levu*

*Fa'afetai Fa'afetai tele*

*Mālō*

*Meitaki*

*Kia ora*



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## Appendix A. The project team

### TARISI VUNIDILO

During the project's development and implementation, Dr. Tarisi Vunidilo was a Professional Teaching Fellow at the Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Auckland.

Tarisi Vunidilo has an MSc in Anthropology and a Postgraduate Diploma in Maori and Pacific Development, from the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand, and a Postgraduate Diploma in Arts, majoring in Archaeology, Australian National University, Canberra, and a BA in Geography, History and Sociology, University of South Pacific, Suva, Fiji. She has published two books and several articles about Fijian pottery, language and archaeology. She was Programs Advisor, Pacific Arts, Creative New Zealand from 2007-2009; Collections Services Manager, Waikato Museum of Art & History from 2003-2007; Collection Manager (Registrar) of Pacific Collection at Tongarewa, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa from 2001-2003, and Director from 2000-2001 and Archaeologist and Head of the Archaeology Department from 1997-2000, and Graduate Trainee, Archaeology Department from 1994-1996 at the Fiji Museum. Tarisi is currently volunteering as Secretary-General for the Pacific Islands Museums Association (PIMA) and works between her office in Port Vila, Vanuatu and Auckland, New Zealand. She completed her PhD in Pacific Studies in January of this year- on the topic of *"iYau Vakaviti-Fijian Treasures, Cultural Rights and Repatriation of Cultural Materials from International Museums"*, at the Centre of Pacific Island Studies at the University of Auckland (New Zealand). She currently tutors and is a Professional Teaching Fellow at the University of Auckland. Given her background in museum work, her focus was based around artefact handling and story-telling.



**Dr. Tarisi Vunidilo, Project Leader**

### BETTY LOTO

Betty has worked with South Auckland youth, predominately Pasifika and Maori, for more than 30 years. Her many roles have included classroom teacher, sports coach, education transition mentor, academic mentoring, and youth leadership.

Betty has Samoan, Fijian and German heritage, but grew up in Auckland with little understanding of, or exposure to her own cultural heritage. Her journey has made her passionate about researching traditional cultural heritage and arts within the Pacific and beyond, to help raise student achievement and pride through understanding who they are, where they come from, and how they got here.



**Betty Loto**

## **KALI VUNIDILO**

Born and bred in Namosi Village, Namosi, Fiji. Kali completed his school education in Namosi village, Fiji. He then attended the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji and graduated with a degree in Maths and Economics. He worked as a high school teacher for 3 years, and migrated to New Zealand in 2001 with his family. Kali was offered a scholarship by the New Zealand government and graduated from Wellington College of Education, Wellington in 2002. He has taught Maths and Economics at various high schools in New Zealand including Hamilton Fraser, Pukekohe High, Tamaki College, and Wesley College and is currently with Pacific Advance Senior College. Kali has a MA degree in Pacific Development Studies from Waikato University and currently completing a Masters in International Development at Massey University.



***Kali Vunidilo***

## Appendix B: Feed forward form

### YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROJECT 2017

### FEED FORWARD & EVALUATION FORM

**1. Which Pacific ethnic group do you associate yourself with? You can tick more than one if it is applicable to you:**

- Samoa       Tonga       Fiji     Cook Is       Niue       Tokelau  
 Tuvalu       Kiribati       Tahiti     Hawaii       Vanuatu       Solomon Is  
 PNG       Vanuatu       New Caledonia       Others (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**2. How many Pacific languages can you understand or speak?**

- 1     2     3     4     5     6     More than 6

*From the following scale, answer questions 3 - 8.  
(Scale: 1 - none; 2 - weak; 3 - fair; 4 - strong; 5 - excellent).*

**3. Family support about my education and well-being.**

- 1                       2                       3                       4                       5

**4. My connections to my Pacific ethnic groups and community.**

- 1                       2                       3                       4                       5

**5. My interest in Pacific history, migration challenges and stories of my grandparents and ancestors?**

- 1                       2                       3                       4                       5

**6. When I see Pacific artefacts in museums or art galleries; do I appreciate these items?**

- 1                       2                       3                       4                       5

**7. Poly-fest is an event where Pacific dances are performed by most secondary school students in the greater Auckland region. Whether I am a performer or spectator, how connected am I to these events?**

- 1                       2                       3                       4                       5

**8. Being a Pasifika student at the University of Auckland; how proud am I in representing my culture and heritage as a motivating factor to succeed in my studies?**

- 1                       2                       3                       4                       5

9. Any comments:

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**MALO VINAKA; THANK YOU**

## Appendix C: Feedback Form

### YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROJECT 2017

#### FEEDBACK & EVALUATION FORM

From the following scale, answer the questions below by circling your best response:

**1 (none), 2 (weak) 3 (fair) 4 (strong) 5 (excellent)**

After the 3 weeks YEP 2017 Program at University of Auckland, rate your overall experiences:

(1) Your interest in Pacific history

**1 (none), 2 (weak) 3 (fair) 4 (strong) 5 (excellent)**

(2) Your interest in Pacific artefacts

**1 (none), 2 (weak) 3 (fair) 4 (strong) 5 (excellent)**

(3) Your interest in taking courses in Pacific Studies

**1 (none), 2 (weak) 3 (fair) 4 (strong) 5 (excellent)**

(4) Importance of family tree/genealogy

**1 (none), 2 (weak) 3 (fair) 4 (strong) 5 (excellent)**

(5) Self-reflection of your family origin

**1 (none), 2 (weak) 3 (fair) 4 (strong) 5 (excellent)**

(6) Understanding the meaning and importance of your name

**1 (none), 2 (weak) 3 (fair) 4 (strong) 5 (excellent)**

(7) Interest in Pacific navigation and indigenous science

**1 (none), 2 (weak) 3 (fair) 4 (strong) 5 (excellent)**

(8) Appreciating relationship between indigenous knowledge and western science

**1 (none), 2 (weak) 3 (fair) 4 (strong) 5 (excellent)**

(9) Relevance of the YEP 2017 program to your academic studies

**1 (none), 2 (weak) 3 (fair) 4 (strong) 5 (excellent)**

(10) How do you rate the Program Facilitators performance and contribution?

**1 (none), 2 (weak) 3 (fair) 4 (strong) 5 (excellent)**

(11) Program content and delivery meeting your expectation

**1 (none), 2 (weak) 3 (fair) 4 (strong) 5 (excellent)**

(12) Would you recommend this program to others?

**1 (none), 2 (weak) 3 (fair) 4 (strong) 5 (excellent)**

**(13) Any comments**

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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME**