

Enhancing tertiary education for Pacific learners in Aotearoa New Zealand

Insights and strategies from ‘Phenomenal educators and the Kato Toolkit’

Introduction

Enhancing Pacific cultural capability is a significant part of the Manako programme provided by Ako Aotearoa, the National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence. The [Manako programme](#), formerly known as the Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Cultural Capability (ALNACC) programme, continues our partnership with the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) to enhance educational capability across Aotearoa New Zealand. Embracing our roots and expertise in literacy, numeracy, and both Māori and Pacific cultural capability, Manako expands our commitment to delivering inclusive and effective education, informed by the values and needs of all New Zealanders.

This paper synthesises insights from recent studies and the [Kato Toolkit](#) to enhance teaching practices. Focusing on the attributes and methods of the research project ‘[From Good to Great: The 10 Habits of phenomenal educators for Pacific learners](#)’, it aims to improve educational outcomes for Pacific learners. The core thesis is that adopting these educator practices and the Kato Toolkit’s principles can significantly transform Pacific learners’ experiences and achievements in tertiary education.

Strategies for empowering Pacific learners: Insights and applications

1. Understanding Pacific learners

The diversity of Pacific learners in Aotearoa New Zealand’s tertiary education system is profound, encompassing a range of ethnicities, languages, and cultural backgrounds. Studies highlight the necessity of understanding these learners’ unique contexts to cater to their specific academic and social needs effectively. Pacific learners often face challenges distinct from their peers, stemming from cultural differences and expectations. Recognising these nuances is crucial for educators to create inclusive and supportive learning environments. Tailoring educational approaches to these diverse needs not only respects their heritage, but also enhances their academic engagement and success.

2. Phenomenal educators: Attributes and practices

[Phenomenal educators](#), as identified in the studies, are characterised by their ability to establish authentic relationships with Pacific learners, demonstrate adaptability, and



exhibit a deep understanding of Pacific cultures. These educators excel in creating a learning atmosphere where learners feel valued, respected, and understood. They employ culturally responsive teaching strategies, integrating Pacific perspectives and examples into their curriculum. Such practices not only foster a sense of belonging among Pacific learners, but also significantly improve their educational outcomes. The ability of these educators to connect with learners on a personal level, while maintaining high academic standards, sets a benchmark for effective teaching in multicultural settings.

3. The Kato Toolkit: A guide to excellence

The Kato Toolkit offers a comprehensive guide for educators to enhance their teaching methodologies for Pacific learners. It outlines ten key habits, ranging from understanding learners' cultural backgrounds (Fakakoloa) to embracing creativity and enthusiasm in teaching (Aupuru). The toolkit emphasises the importance of building strong, nurturing relationships (Le Teu le Va) and creating collaborative, community-focused learning environments (Putuputu). By integrating these habits into teaching practices, educators can more effectively engage Pacific learners, accommodating their unique learning styles and cultural perspectives. The toolkit serves as a practical resource for educators to refine their approaches, ensuring their teaching is inclusive, respectful, and supportive of Pacific learners' needs.

4. Policy and institutional implications

The implementation of these educational practices requires strong organisational support. Tertiary organisations should consider incorporating the findings from these studies and the principles of the Kato Toolkit into their teaching policies and frameworks. This may involve providing professional development opportunities for educators to learn about culturally responsive teaching methods and creating support systems to facilitate these practices. Additionally, educational policies should be shaped to recognise and address the unique needs of Pacific learners. By institutionalising these approaches, the tertiary education sector can ensure a more equitable and effective learning environment for Pacific learners. Such policy and institutional changes are imperative for the long-term success and inclusivity of Aotearoa New Zealand's tertiary education system.

Conclusion

The adoption of practices by phenomenal educators and the Kato Toolkit's principles can markedly enhance Pacific learners' experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand's tertiary education sector. This advancement necessitates a unified effort from educators, organisations, and policymakers to adopt and embed culturally responsive and inclusive teaching methods. Embracing these approaches ensures a more equitable and enriching educational environment, pivotal for the success and empowerment of Pacific learners. This commitment to transformative practices is key to achieving educational equity and excellence across the tertiary sector.

