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PROMOTING PACIFIC INDIGENOUS RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES AND PEDAGOGY WITHIN POSTGRADUATE HEALTH RESEARCH COURSE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT: Models of health currently provide physical and biological understandings of how human beings behave in terms of, and succumb to, illness or disease. Well-documented Pacific health models have extended such definitions to include holistic considerations such as spirituality, culture and social wellbeing. Within health research, similar shifts have occurred that signal a move away from traditional approaches, e.g., positivist or interpretivist descriptive designs, to approaches that are centred in Pacific worldviews and paradigms. This paper presents the experiences and perspectives of Pacific researchers in the health sector and the impact of these experiences on the delivery of a Pacific health research and design course in a tertiary institution in Aotearoa New Zealand. The paper provides a Pacific-centred health research lens through the discussion of research practices and methods undertaken in health research and the challenges and opportunities for growth. The experiences also highlight opportunities for curriculum development within health faculties in tertiary institutions that move away from traditional Eurocentric models of health to Indigenous Pacific-centric paradigms. The paper provides insight into the challenging spaces that such a move entails and its impact on the delivery of health research education and posits the researcher's positionality as the catalyst for a shift in approach. The paper focuses on the pedagogical approaches used by Pacific health lecturers and researchers within course development and delivery.

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These include Talanoa ‘Pacific oral communication’, veiwekani ‘relationship’ and faikava ‘kava circles’ cultural practices within the vā ‘learning space’.

Keywords: Pacific research, Pacific health, Pacific paradigm, Pacific teaching pedagogy

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Reframing Pacific health research is critical in addressing health inequities amongst Pacific populations (Ministry of Health and Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment 2017). Such shifts require an understanding of Pacific epistemologies, ontologies and worldviews and their application to health research. Within the health sector various health models have been developed that provide broader understandings of Pacific wellbeing. Fuimaono Pulotu-Endemann’s (2001) Fonofale model captures broader holistic definitions of health that align with Pacific notions of wellbeing and move away from biomedical definitions. Akin to Mason Durie’s Te Whare Tapa Whā model of health (Durie 1994), Pulotu-Endemann posits cultural and spiritual dimensions of wellbeing as integral to overall health. Additionally models of health have emerged that describe cultural traditions, values and belief systems significant in health service delivery and responding to the needs of Pacific peoples. These include the Fonua (Tu‘itahi 2007), Te Vaka Atafaga (Kupa 2009), Uloa (Vaka 2016) and Kakala (Thaman 1993) models.

Within health research, a focus on evidence-based approaches has stemmed from positivist reductionist methods that quantify and measure causes and outcomes (Comte 1856; Fadhel 2002). Questions regarding how these approaches address or respond to the challenges within Pacific health research highlight gaps in our understanding of how Pacific research methods and methodologies are applied in health (Mila-Schaaf 2009). The flourishing body of literature advocating for the decolonisation of research methodologies has led to developments in health research whereby Pacific worldviews and paradigms are prioritised. For example, Talanoa ‘oral communication’ has been increasingly used as a foundational method and methodology in much of the emerging Pacific health research (Cammock *et al.* 2021; Schleser and Firestone 2018; Vaioleti 2006; Vaka *et al.* 2016).

Within the tertiary education sector, the training of future health researchers to understand, apply and competently undertake Pacific health research using Pacific paradigms and frameworks is growing (Finau *et al.* 2000; Tualaulelei and McFall-McCaffery 2019). Given this, the reality for many health students who wish to gain Pacific research skills within higher education is that courses have limited content, depth and scope around Pacific health and Pacific health research framings and methods. The development of courses focussed on Pacific research methods and design is therefore

crucial in ensuring that Pacific research is conducted appropriately and that necessary skills are nurtured among those interested in working with Pacific communities (Sanga 2012).

This paper discusses the development of PUBH810 Pacific Health Research and Design, a postgraduate research methods course at Auckland University of Technology | Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau (AUT) in Aotearoa New Zealand. The paper begins with a discussion on the Pacific learner and the opportunities available to them for success in higher education. The paper sets out the AUT experience and strategic goals that guided the development of PUBH810, outlining key areas where future curriculum developments can be made within Pacific health research courses.

RATIONALE FOR COURSE DEVELOPMENT

According to the 2018 census, the proportion of Pacific peoples with post-secondary qualifications in Aotearoa New Zealand was 18 percent compared with 34 percent for the total population (Statistics New Zealand 2020), highlighting the inequities and challenges that exist for Pacific learners (Fa'aea and Fonua 2022; Teevale and Teu 2018). Key factors such as high attrition and low retention are critical to address given that the proportion of Pacific learners is projected to increase significantly over the next 20 years (Ministry of Education 2022a). Attaining higher education qualifications improves social mobility including through better job opportunities, increased incomes and higher living standards (Attewell *et al.* 2007). To address the Pacific disparity in higher education, the Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020–2030 (Ministry of Education 2022a) provides a holistic and culturally responsive approach to improving educational outcomes and opportunities for the diverse Pacific communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. In line with this action plan, AUT has been on a journey to develop "great graduates" by taking a holistic approach to student success that is "relational, mutually sustaining and mana ['identity']-enhancing" (AUT 2022). Increasing the visibility of Pacific staff, knowledge and pedagogy is a significant factor in AUT's response to Pacific disparities in education. Alongside these efforts, strategies to ensure that students and families (including prospective students) feel safe and welcomed are being driven at all levels (AUT 2022). This strategic and collective approach supports the development of a Pacific-centred research design university course for a number of reasons, such as to increase the visibility of Pacific scholars at AUT, elevate Indigenous knowledge and methodologies, increase Pacific capability and grow Pacific research capacity.

In recent times, there has been an increased drive from the New Zealand government to grow Pacific research capacities (Marsters and Hopwood 2022; Ministry of Health and Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment

2017). In collaboration with external experts to AUT in the education and health sectors, the PUBH810 course was considered AUT's opportunity to respond to the call and contribute to this growth. As mentioned above, the course aimed to build research capability and grow capacity for Pacific research within the community and within the university. A key outcome of the course was to provide students with a sense of belonging within the AUT community. Further, we wanted to ensure students enter the workforce appropriately equipped to engage with Pacific communities in a culturally safe way, thereby informing better outcomes for the people they serve.

At the time of developing the PUBH810 course, the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences was not offering any postgraduate Pacific health or Pacific research course that students could undertake. The introduction of PUBH810 offered postgraduate students a foundational understanding of Pacific research methods and their underpinning worldviews to better inform their research designs and improve their practice when working with Pacific communities.

STRATEGY FOR COURSE DEVELOPMENT

The PUBH810 Pacific Health Research and Design course was developed with key strategic goals in mind. These included the need to i) forefront the positionality of the teaching team, providing a basis for understanding and connectivity around key Pacific values and research practices; ii) integrate theoretical understandings of Pacific health research framing; iii) focus on the impact of Pacific research on Pacific health outcomes and equity; and iv) implement Pacific teaching practices to facilitate understanding and the delivery of content (see Fig. 1). These strategic goals provided the basis

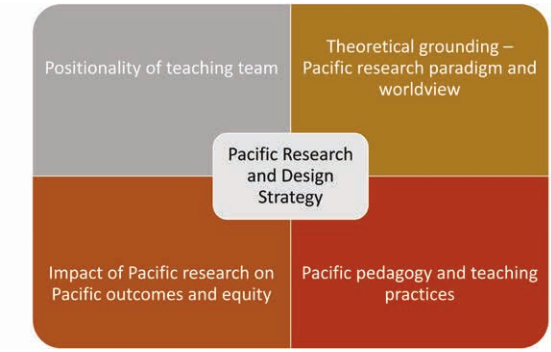

Figure 1. Strategy for development of the PUBH810 Pacific Health Research and Design course.

upon which key content deliverables were designed and offered within the course. It is important to note that the current strategic goals reflected areas within the health sector that as a team we felt were integral to addressing research gaps. These align with current health research priorities in the sector which address Pacific health and inequity (Ministry of Health and Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment 2017). According to the New Zealand Health Strategy (2017–2027) (Ministry of Health and Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment 2017), investments in research that focusses on equity among Pacific groups, training of a strong research workforce and strengthening relationships and networks between researchers and the community are needed. These efforts work to ensure that effective research impact is attained, clear capacity-building activities are supported and overall health is improved.

Positionality of the Teaching Team

The development of PUBH810 centred the expertise and experiences of Pacific researchers within the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences at AUT. As people of the Pacific, with history and genealogical ties to the Moana 'ocean', it would be remiss of us not to acknowledge our ancestry, as it is via our ancestral ties that our knowledge systems, beliefs and worldviews are passed on. Underhill-Sem (2020) and Ka'ili (2017) argue that the process of positioning oneself in relation to ancestors and extended families across a range of generations is part of forming a collective positioning. In addition, Hau'ofa (2008) articulates the importance of connecting throughout Oceania by drawing on what we have in common, but also drawing inspiration from our differences. It is through this process of positioning, he argues, that we are able to expand our thinking, our being, and build something new for all. Therefore, here we attempt to connect with you, the reader, in a manner that reflects who we are and what we bring collectively to this space of Pacific health, Pacific education and Pacific research. These Pacific academics formed the teaching team and through their positionality contributed to the pedagogical praxis and development of the course.

Radilaite Cammock

I am from the village of Vutia in the Rewa Province, Fiji. My village sits at the mouth of the Rewa Delta and is known for its boat rides and seafood. My mother is from the village of Nasolo in Ba Province on the western side of Viti Levu. As an iTaukei (Indigenous Fijian) woman I grew up with a real sense of family, responsibility, respect and being true to who I am. Throughout my academic and research journey, most of my choices have been influenced by my family, my community and the realities of many people in my position—an iTuakei woman born and raised in Fiji but

now living in Aotearoa New Zealand. The shifting sociocultural contexts have added to the complexity of how I have approached or experienced academia and in particular research. As an Indigenous person and a migrant to Aotearoa, both realities have influenced my research approaches and teaching practices. Given my upbringing I have found grounding my practice in iTaukei values of vakarokoroko 'respect', veitokoni 'reciprocity' and veiqaravi 'service' to be beneficial. These principles have created a value system that has provided much benefit when interacting with students and research participants. These values have influenced the way in which I have conceptualised research framings and paradigms within health, enabling a more Pacific-centred focus in philosophical discussions. This is reflected in our focus on Pacific research framings within the PUBH810 course.

Juliet Boon-Nanai

Being Samoan and a faletua 'wife of a matai ['chief']' and trying to balance the role of mother of six children and grandmother of three poses conflicting cultural struggles—especially after uprooting my family from the islands and migrating to Aotearoa New Zealand. I have found it challenging to navigate two worlds through my childhood and adult years. My children have also been challenged. For them, succeeding in their learning has meant that they have had to lose some of their Samoan language competencies so that they can speak, write, read and comprehend in the fa'apālagi 'English way'.

As a young graduate of the New Zealand tertiary system, I became aware of the challenges of leaving my Samoan culture and being confronted at university to:

think like a pālagi 'white person',
critique like a pālagi,
analyse like a pālagi, and most importantly
write like a pālagi.

That is what I thought I had to do to succeed and obtain a degree in New Zealand. In fact, during my first year at university, I quickly learned that to succeed I had to write from a western perspective, getting an A for a geography assignment, the second I had ever written. My world of study was very Eurocentric and reflected someone trained to use a western notion of scientific inquiry. I used this template for writing and seldom used my cultural lens: I was westernised.

Now, being a Pacific equity academic leader at AUT I am fortunate to be guided by other Pasifika and Māori scholars who have paved the way for me and my children to feel comfortable to think like Samoans, speak like Samoans, write like Samoans and integrate blended learning that meets our needs and knowledge bases. Scholars like Thaman (1993), Smith (1999),

Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo (2002), Vaioleti (2006) and Manu‘atu and Kēpa (2006) have published methodologies to decolonise western research framings and co-create knowledge that has epistemological groundings in either the anga fakatonga ‘Tongan way’, fa‘a Sāmoa ‘Samoan way’, Solomon Island way or iTaukei way of knowing. Therefore, in contributing to this course, I feel as those Pasifika academics before me, driven by a duty of care to instil our measina ‘cultural treasures’ and traditions for generations to come and contribute to the perseverance of our knowledge within western institutions. Therefore, providing courses like PUBH810 is our responsibility as kaitiaki ‘custodians’ and knowledge holders in ensuring that our ways of knowing and being, along with our values, practices and beliefs, are equally validated epistemological truths, ontological positionings and axiological paradigms that have a rightful place in universities and tertiary institutions. These perspectives feed into our delivery of the research framings and philosophical discussions within the PUBH810 course and help us centre our positionality when supporting students to understand theirs.

Jean M. Uasike Allen

> Ko hoku kāinga tukufakaholo ‘i he tafa‘aki ‘eku tamaí mei Kolovai mo Makaunga ‘o Tongatapú. Ko e kāinga ‘eku fa‘eé mei Pilitānia na‘a nau hiki mai ‘o nofo ‘i Taranaki, ‘i Nu‘usilá. Ko hoku husepānití ko e to‘utangata ‘uluaki ia ‘o e fāmili mei Pilitānia na‘a nau hiki mai ki Nu‘usilá ni ‘i he 1970. Koe‘uhí ko aú mei he kāinga na‘a nau fetukutuku mai ko e nofo fonua ‘i Aotearoa ‘o Nu‘usilá, ‘oku ou laukau‘aki ai hoku tupu‘angá mo tu‘u fakataha mo e faka‘apa‘apa‘i ‘a e tangata whenua ‘i he fonuá ni.
>
> I descend from the villages of Kolovai and Makaunga, on the island of Tongatapu, Tonga, on my father’s side of the family. On my mother’s side I descend from a family of English settlers who made their home in the Taranaki region of Aotearoa New Zealand. My husband is a first-generation New Zealand–born Englishman whose family arrived in Aotearoa in the 1970s. As a descendant of settlers and immigrants to Aotearoa New Zealand, I acknowledge my visitor status and stand in respectful solidarity with tangata whenua ‘people of the land’.

Through this introduction I am positioning myself within my kāinga ‘family’ and my ancestors. However, within Indigenous worldviews people are in relationship with and to not just each other but also places, objects and moments in time (Māhina 2010; Smith 1999). Therefore, the places and contexts of space become important in positioning myself as a Tongan/Pālangi within Aotearoa New Zealand, a land to which I am not Indigenous. Therefore, my connection to Pacific research is always within the context of the whenua ‘land’ of Aotearoa and Māori, the Indigenous custodians of the land.

I have always had heart and passion for my predominantly Pacific and migrant community of South Auckland. This passion has led to me working with members of my community to carry out research in the field of education. My work primarily focuses on challenging and disrupting colonial norms, stereotypes and representation within the fields of health education and education more broadly. While my work resides within education, it provides a contribution to Pacific health research through embracing Pacific ontologies, epistemologies and axiologies as a means of working with Pacific people to strengthen our communities and wellbeing.

Sierra Keung

Ko Maungaroa te maunga — Ko Te Kuri te maunga
Ko Marokopa te awa — Ko Waipaoa te awa
Ko Ngāti Maniapoto te iwi — Ko Rongowhakaata te iwi
Ko Ngāti Te Kanawa te hapū — Ko Ngāti Maru te hapū

Ko Sierra Keung tōku ingoa

The above pepehā 'introduction' acknowledges those sacred connections to the tribal lands and the surrounding environment within those tribal boundaries that inform my identity as Māori. I began with my father's side where my whakapapa 'genealogy' connects me to the land, maunga 'mountain', awa 'river' and surrounding environment, and iwi 'tribal group' (hapū meaning 'subtribe') located on the western border of the Waikato region of Aotearoa. On my mother's side I whakapapa 'trace ancestral connections' to the land, surrounding environment and tribal group located in the Gisborne region of Aotearoa. I would be considered an urban Māori, having been raised away from the tribal lands, surrounding environment and whānau 'kin' (both the living and those who have passed on). I was born in the United States of America and raised in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland, the largest city in Aotearoa and known as the largest Pasifika city in the world (Ioane and Tudor 2017) because of the city's high concentration of Pasifika people (Auckland Council Research and Evaluation Unit 2020).

My higher education journey took me to the USA before returning home to Aotearoa to complete my doctor of philosophy. Had it not been for my doctoral journey, I would not have been confronted by the necessity to decolonise my thinking and learn to privilege and reclaim my whakapapa and mātauranga 'Māori knowledge'. Since completing my doctoral studies, I have come to learn that I also whakapapa back to Sāmoa, a connection that I am still exploring. This gives context to why I had been (and continue to be) intentional about locating my voice within research using a collective Kaupapa Māori and Pasifika approach because of the greater Oceania kinship connection that binds Pasifika to Māori through Te Moana-nui-a-

Kiwa (Health Research Council of New Zealand 2014). Hence, I am in the game of building capability and growing capacity within our Māori and Pacific community through and within sport. My research was born out of the desire to create space for Indigenous thought leadership to better shape the support Māori and Pacific athletes, their whānau and their community need to thrive, regardless of the "field" they play on. My ability to teach and provide quality learning experiences is dependent on the strength of the relationships I build with my students. The strength of these relationships is incumbent on the learning environment that I cultivate. Hence, by bringing my whole self to the classroom (i.e., my culture, values, knowledge and imperfections), I invite my students to do the same. Knowing who I am, where I come from and who I represent shapes my relational approach to teaching and empowering our students.

Dion Enari

I descend from Samoan bloodlines through Vaiala, Nofoali'i, Malaela, Lepā and Safune. I am an Aotearoa New Zealand–born Samoan who then migrated to Australia. Having been born in Aotearoa New Zealand, raised in Australia and knowing I had Samoan blood in my veins, I knew very well who I was, a son of the Pacific. All the collective help I have received from my fellow Pacific brothers and sisters has helped me in my research journey. Alofa atu. I acknowledge my insider status in Pacific research (Nakata 2015), and my position as a Samoan where I balance roles including son, uncle, matai, mentor and researcher.

As a Pacific researcher, I know the enormity of my responsibility to ensure that my research is appropriate and representative of my people (Enari, 2021; Enari & Fa'aea, 2020). During my PhD studies, there was added pressure to ensure I did not talk around, about or over my community. I had to be careful in choosing my research methodology to ensure it encouraged the authentic voice of my community to be at the centre of my work. I always have to do research that harnesses the ways of being and knowing of my people.

A lot of my research was birthed from a concern my community had, particularly in terms of research that was done by non-Pacific people which painted our people negatively and often operated within deficit models (Enari & Taula, 2022; Enari & Viliamu Jameson 2021). The more Pacific researchers and teachers we have in the field, the better able we will be to formulate health initiatives done by our people and for our people. These notions are echoed in the PUBH810 course through Pacific research theorising, relationship building and mentorship.

Sione Vaka

My father, Malakai, is from Neiafu, Vava'u, and Lofanga, Ha'apai, and my mother, 'Asilika Tu'ifua, is from Lapaha, Tongatapu. I am the eldest of three children and we grew up in the village of Longolongo in Tongatapu.

I attended primary school and high school in Tonga and started my male nursing profession in Tonga in 1993 with two other men. My first time leaving Tonga was in 1994, to continue my nursing training in New Zealand. I have been working in different areas of mental health including cultural services, early interventions, crisis, liaison psychiatry, acute inpatients and the community. I am involved in education and research to ensure that we include Pacific worldviews when working with Pacific people in health. My work is largely focused on Pacific constructions of health and how health providers should integrate Pacific worldviews and practices into their models of care.

I am currently working at Auckland University of Technology and researching Pacific worldviews and practices in mental health. My grandparents have always inspired me on how to live life with whatever resources we have available. They always said to me to always remember who I am and where I come from, and that has always influenced my work. I now live in Tāmaki Makaurau with my wife, Olakaʻaina, and my son, Maʻafu Tuʻi Lau, who always remind me that it is our responsibility to learn our culture and pass it onto the next generation.

THEORETICAL GROUNDING: A PACIFIC RESEARCH PARADIGM AND WORLDVIEW

A research paradigm is defined as a "set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed" (Kuhn 1970: 43). A worldview is defined as "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba 1990: 17). Creswell further adds: "I see worldviews as a general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds. These worldviews are shaped by the discipline area of the student, the beliefs of advisers and faculty in a student's area, and past research experiences" (Creswell 2008: 6).

Such definitions value the use of beliefs and shared understanding between individuals, researchers and communities, which resonate with Pacific notions of communality, elevating the significance of Pacific beliefs and values for research processes. These discussions are supported by the work of Pacific scholars who argue for the decolonisation of research processes (Coxon and Samu 2010; Gegeo 2001; Smith 1999; Thaman 2003). Regardless of the ethnic viewpoint in the Pacific, e.g., whether issues are discussed within a Samoan or Fijian lens, shared values of holism, community, reciprocity and relationships remain constant.

The impact of such an inclusion ensures that the methodologies, methods, tools and procedures used in Pacific research are aligned, which ensures that Pacific worldviews, values and belief systems are at the forefront when making decisions about research methodologies, methods and procedures.

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) explain that paradigms are useful as they are the "conceptual lens through which the researcher examines the methodological aspects of their research project to determine the research methods that will be used and how the data will be analysed" (p. 26).

Figure 2 illustrates the alignment of research paradigms and the decision-making processes needed for methodologies and methods and provides an example using a Fijian worldview as the starting research paradigm (see discussion below).

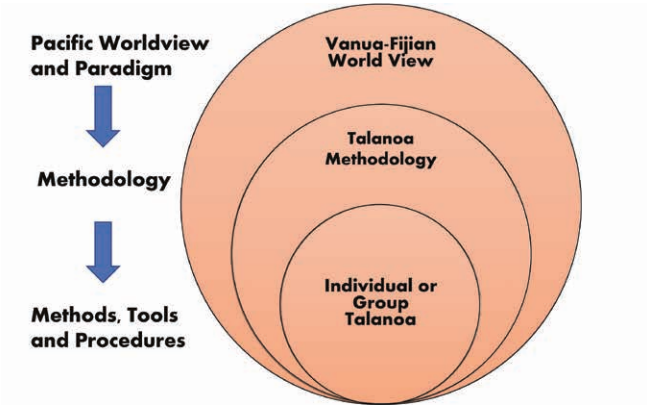

Figure 2. Alignment of Pacific worldview and paradigm with research methodologies and methods.

The nature and the construction of knowledge (epistemology), the reality and context for which that knowledge exists (ontology) (Goertz and Mahoney 2012) and the ethics and values involved with issues and phenomena (axiology) inform the types of methodologies and methods chosen to address research questions and objectives (Kivunja and Kuyini 2017). Therefore, the Indigenous and Pacific knowledges that dictate reality and the role of Pacific values and ethics are key in determining research methodologies and methods within Pacific health research (Tualaulelei and McFall-McCaffery 2019). The rising number of studies using Pacific research approaches advocate for the need to address cultural associations and contexts when carrying out and interpreting research in Pacific communities (Cammock *et al.* 2021; Mila-Schaaf 2009; Siefken *et al.* 2015; Vaka *et al.* 2016).

In Figure 2 we provide an ethnic-specific example of how Talanoa methodologies might be used within a Fijian context. We posit the need to ground Talanoa within an Indigenous Fijian or iTaukei worldview by

outlining values of the vanua (Nabobo-Baba 2006; Ravuvu 1983; Tuwere 2002). Nabobo-Baba (2006) defines vanua as "a people, their chief, their defined territory, their waterways or fishing grounds, their environment, their spirituality, their history, their epistemology and culture" (p. 155). Values such as veiwekani 'relationship' extend to practices of relationship building between researchers and participants during recruitment and data collection and through interpretations of the research findings. Other values like vakarokoroko and veitokoni or vedolei 'reciprocity' also apply to research processes and procedures (Cammock *et al*. 2021).

Similarly, within Tongan contexts, the use of Sione Tu'itahi's Fonua model is a result of the need to ground research methodologies within constructs of Tongan worldviews (Tu'itahi 2007). Based on Tongan perceptions of mental distress, Vaka's Uloa model proposes Tongan cultural practices around a metaphor of communal fishing to guide practitioners in their treatment of mental health amongst Tongan people (Vaka 2016; Vaka *et al.* 2016).

For pan-Pacific research, values and beliefs systems that might be shared amongst Pacific groups, e.g., alofa or loloma 'love' [Samoan/Fijian], are posited as the basis for theoretical discussion within Pacific paradigms and worldviews. For example, the Fonofale model, developed through consultation with various Pacific groups, provides a multiethnic exploration of health (Pulotu-Endemann 2001). The model was presented using the Samoan fāle 'house' as a metaphor for Pacific wellbeing, demonstrating how values shared across various Pacific groups could be represented through single Pacific ethnicities.

Grounding Pacific research designs in Pacific paradigms and worldviews in this way does poses some challenges within the health sector. Tualaulelei and McFall-McCaffery (2019) surmised that Pacific research approaches "need firm theoretical foundations to align with their stated purposes and goals" (p. 196), which makes efforts to move away from biomedical Eurocentric research positions within health research difficult. This is evident in the challenges and debates around the types of methods or methodologies that are best suited within research designs, e.g., whether Talanoa is a method or a methodology (Tunufa'i 2016). We argue that given the appropriate Pacific grounding whereupon discussions of worldviews, values and ethics are considered, such decisions will be based on the contextual realities and the feasibility of research methods and methodologies within those contexts. Other challenges include debates between pan-Pacific and ethnicity-specific impacts and the generalisability of research findings, and the validation of Pacific-born or NZ-born realities (Tunufa'i 2016). Reconciling these differences is an integral part of ensuring research projects are targeted effectively and are culturally responsive. Within the PUBH810 course these discussions formed the basis upon which research topics and subsequent research designs were developed.

IMPACT OF PACIFIC RESEARCH ON PACIFIC OUTCOMES AND EQUITY

A focus on equity within the health sector signalled the need to address research priorities and consequently the use of Pacific research designs (Ministry of Health and Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment 2017). The inequitable health outcomes that indicate unfavourable access and availability of health services lead to inequitable outcomes across many indicators of health (Ministry of Health 2011). Therefore, it is not good enough to carry out research projects without clear pathways indicating how they will positively affect Pacific communities and address outcomes. Outcome-, process- or goal-orientated evaluation models (Milgrom and Tut 2009; Siefken *et al.* 2015) provide some insight into how research impact is considered within research projects. A broader perspective on impact takes into consideration the many layers and complexities around individuals, communities and populations that are affected by research. The Health Research Council of New Zealand (2020) defines research impact as

> [t]he direct and indirect influence of excellent research on individuals, communities or society as a whole, including improvements to health and equity, and other social, economic, cultural or environmental benefits … Research impact is generated or enhanced by communication, relationships and actions that connect academic research to fields, people or organisations beyond academia. (p. 3)

The exploration of how such definitions apply to Pacific research became a key focus in the delivery of PUBH810. Key areas to consider within Pacific research included the individuals and communities that the research encompasses and having a deep understanding of the cultural realities faced by Pacific individuals and communities (Health Research Council of New Zealand 2014). Having this understanding establishes the basis from veiwekani can be fostered for planning, recruitment, data collection and dissemination discussions.

Stakeholder Representation

Freeman defines stakeholders as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm's objectives" (Freeman 1984: 16). Ní Chróinín *et al.* (2020) view stakeholders as "an individual, group or organisation with a specific interest or stake with the potential to influence aims, decisions, and actions within a given context" (p. 323, citing Bryson 2004). Within Pacific research, groups or individuals predominantly refer to Pacific peoples, their communities and the organisations that work to support their progress and wellbeing. Research shows that involving community stakeholders in health teaching and training at tertiary institutions provides

greater opportunities for applied learning as well as ensures universities are accountable and operate within corporate social responsibility models (Jongbloed *et al.* 2008; Koch *et al.* 2022). Ní Chróinín *et al*. (2020) argue that the incorporation of stakeholders within tertiary teaching provides a "richer set of perspectives" (p. 334) where new ideas can be cultivated and needs and interests represented. Other research in the health and medical sector indicates that improvements in students' ability to identify health problems and approach community groups were due to working with community stakeholders (Hoat and Wright 2008).

Designing the PUBH810 course included an exploration of the various layers for which research was needed within health and the breadth and depth of research topics. The course provided lectures and resources around local and individual impact as well as national and regional relevance. A key strategy we undertook involved providing real-life authentic perspectives from various layers of society on which the research might have an impact. A specific example was the incorporation of key stakeholders in the sector that occupied key spaces for health service delivery and community understanding. This became a focus in the course where we invited various providers from diverse backgrounds to share their work and the impact that research has had on their practice with Pacific communities. These included representatives from government agencies, national health bodies and local community providers.

Their input in the course provided students with first-hand accounts of how research informs their practice and the gaps that exist where further research is needed. Students were able to interact and ask questions about certain aspects of the industry and how practitioners responded to challenges experienced by Pacific communities. They were also able to seek advice from practitioners who were familiar with the research journey and were also able to share their expertise around working with Pacific communities through research.

PACIFIC PEDAGOGY AND TEACHING PRACTICES

According to the Ministry of Education's *Tapasā: Cultural Competencies Framework for Teachers of Pacific Learners* (2018), delivering success for Pacific learners encompasses the need to treat Pacific young people as lifelong learners who are diverse with varying cultures, languages and experiences. At the tertiary level, raising the achievement levels of Pacific learners has been identified as a key priority in New Zealand's Tertiary Education Strategy (Ministry of Education 2022b). Success for Pacific learners also means that they are confident in their culture's languages and experiences, foster collaborative and respectful relationships and professional behaviours and have available to them effective pedagogies (Chu *et al.* 2013; Ministry of Education 2018). Within the PUBH810 course,

Pacific students made up about 70 percent of the student body. We aimed to create a space where Pacific students and those interested in being involved with Pacific communities feel empowered, connected and supported on their academic journey, as well as to increase their competency and capabilities around undertaking research among Pacific communities.

Our pedagogical journey through the development of the course became heavily reliant on both established and emerging Pacific teaching practices we experienced or encountered as researchers and teachers within tertiary institutions. The Ministry of Education's (2018) best-practice strategies for Pacific learners sets out a culturally responsive pedagogy, which we discuss in the sections below. Within our course, this was delivered through the practice of Talanoa within the vā 'learning space', through building relationship (veiwekani) and through cultural practices like faikava 'kava circles' (see Fig. 3). The following sections will discuss these areas.

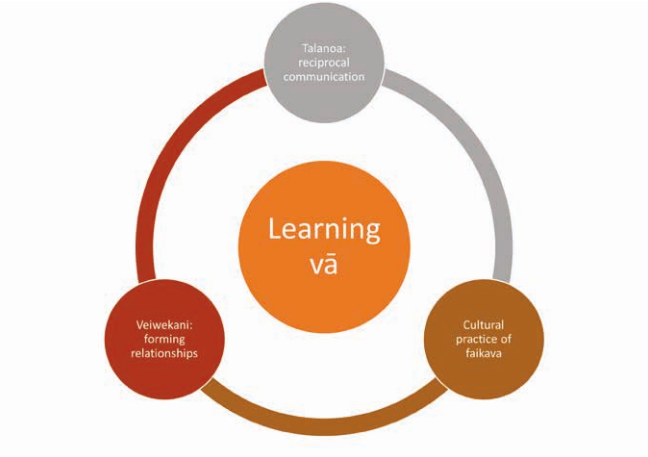

Figure 3. Pacific teaching pedagogy within PUBH810.

Talanoa Within the Vā Learning Space

Within Pacific literature, vā (Samoan) or wā (Hawaiian) is considered the relational space where knowledge and understanding are shared and negotiated. Matapo (2020) explains:

> The vā, as a relational sphere when applied to the teaching and learning environment, becomes a conduit for story creation, storytelling and story reimagining. In education, the power of story connects teaching and learning, content to context, being to knowing, genealogy to history, politics to power and the human to non-human life.

Both Matapo (2020) and Anae (2016) posit the vā within the classroom to be conducive to Pacific experiences of knowledge creation and connection to Pacific cultural systems and practice. Within this space, opportunities for Talanoa are integral in raising different viewpoints and asking questions. Talanoa as a culturally appropriate form of communication has been used widely in the Pacific (Cammock *et al.* 2021; Schleser and Firestone 2018). In Tongan tala means 'to talk/story/tell/inform' while noa refers to 'nothing'. Tongan academic Vaioleti (2006) posits noa as meaning "nothing in particular or ordinary", denoting casual conversation. Although noa can mean a space or channel that might be "empty", a deeper meaning of noa denotes an absence of expectation or rigidity in conversation. Halapua (2002) refers to noa as a process where individuals are being free and open. When applied to the vā, noa takes on significance because of the individuals involved in the Talanoa practice. Fa'avae and colleagues argued:

> When considering vā as a living spirit or entity, the 'noa' space is therefore not empty. Instead, if vā already exists in the noa space and takes form as people occupy the shared space, the kinds of talking/storying/telling/informing are dependent on who people are, their kin connections, religious ideals, and race, including gender constructions. Talanoa, therefore, is framed based on the relational constructions of connections and the 'noa' space is one of real potential. (Fa'avae *et al*. 2022: 1079)

Opportunities for Talanoa occurred within the learning vā during the PUBH810 course which involved sharing personal or work experiences, raising questions and gaining insight from individuals. Our positionality as researchers and teachers was discussed in the Talanoa, encouraging students to also share and express their struggles, triumphs and conclusions about how they feel they contribute to their own academic and professional journeys. The value of recognising our positionality as teachers, explained in the earlier sections of this article, was critical in ensuring connection within the learning vā and provided links to concepts and experiences. These efforts led to the opening up of spaces within teaching days to have Talanoa with students about various Pacific worldviews, health issues, topics and research designs. Within PUBH810 each student was encouraged to pursue a research topic that they were passionate about, initiating student discussions of their passions and any potential areas where they could make contributions through research. The Talanoa occurring in these learning spaces were free and open with students responding to one another's experiences. As teachers, our role was both as participants and facilitators.

Building Relationship or Veiwekani Within the Vā Learning Space

Regardless of the pedagogical viewpoint presented, in the classroom the teacher–student dynamic is important to consider (Chu *et al.* 2013). For Pacific pedagogies, a key value associated with Pacific cultural systems and practice is veiwekani 'relationship' in the Fijian language (Nabobo-Baba 2006). Among Pacific students and staff, establishing a relationship within the learning vā is essential for constructive Talanoa and success (Boon-Nanai, Manuel, *et al.* 2022; Boon-Nanai, Ponton, *et al.* 2017). According to the Ministry of Education guidelines on Pasifika academic achievement:

> [T]here is the dimension of a strong emotional relationship which, together with the instructional attributes, has elements of being both rigorous and challenging as well as being respectful and empathetic. The former includes high expectations and the latter a Pasifika sense for the students of education being service-oriented and, from the teacher, positive affect expressed with devices such as Pasifika-oriented humour. (Amituanai-Toloa *et al.* 2010: viii–ix)

Pasifika-orientated humour is connected to positive relationship outcomes within the classroom (Manu'atu 2000). Humour "is a Pacific norm" (Boon-Nanai, Manuel, *et al*. 2022) and it brings a sense of ease and warmth—an atmosphere described by Manu'atu (2000) as "mālie" and "māfana", one where students are relaxed and able to join in with others as they laugh and joke with one another. In this way, humour is used as a tool to connect with students on a level of comfort where both the students and the teacher agree about the topics being discussed. For teachers and students, laughing together cuts through any power imbalances that might be present (Nesi 2012). Within Pacific notions of veiwekani, humour is often the way a teacher might open the discussion, removing barriers in the learning vā, starting the process of making connections in the classroom.

Operating with an attitude of veiwekani acknowledges students' wider support network and the need to establish a system of connection where students feel supported and safe. This is reflected in research that places aiga 'family' as a key factor in student success (Wilson *et al*. 2011). The establishment of veiwekani among students and staff extends the vā to experiences and contexts that are shared among individuals within the learning vā. These connections are cumulative and add to a sense of belonging for students. They extend to the recentring of Pacific epistemologies as a dominant approach in tertiary institutions.

Veiwekani, within the learning vā, leads to both informal and formal activity in learning institutions. Informal activity applies to study or social groups within tertiary institutions. These groups support students' wellbeing and academic success. Within our course, because of the veiwekani

encouraged in the classroom, students were able to establish connections with one another outside the classroom. Formal activity such as mentoring could also be established because of veiwekani carried out during the course. Because of the relationships built, students and staff establish supervision arrangements for those interested in furthering their studies by doing a master's or PhD.

Faikava Within the Learning Vā

Faikava is an emerging methodology used for research within Pacific communities (Fehoko 2015; Fehoko *et al*. 2021). Kava or yaqona is a cultural drink made from the root of the *Piper methysticum* plant (Aporosa and Forde 2019). It is important to note that although kava is considered a relaxant, it is not necessarily taken for its cognitive properties but rather its social and cultural benefits (Aporosa *et al.* 2022). Drinking kava traditionally involves adherence to cultural protocols around the tanoa or kumete 'traditional wooden kava bowl'. Various Pacific scholars document the use of yaqona or kava as embodying Pacific value systems (Aporosa and Fa'avae 2021; Nabobo-Baba 2010). Processes of vakarokoroko, veiqaravi and vaka turaga 'Fijian customs and practices' are integral in carrying out ceremonial practices around the kava bowl (Nabobo-Baba 2010). Traditionally, the use of kava established the space or vā for ceremonial processes. Outside traditional settings the vā created by kava circles and kava drinking have encouraged Talanoa among those involved (Aporosa and Fa'avae 2021).

Within the faikava circle, individuals are presented with kava from the same tanoa, instigating a feeling of communality and shared spaces. The configuration of kava circles further symbolises continuous connectivity and unity; that is, no one is different, and everyone has a place. Within the learning vā, this is an integral tool in ensuring that relationships are formed and that students feel comfortable and are encouraged to ask questions, raise issues and debate ideas. Using faikava circles in this way is a practical exercise that students can participate in. This drives home the values of vakarokoroko, communality and veiwekani. The process of Talanoa begins to flow as such values facilitate notions of sharing and reciprocity. Using faikava in tertiary spaces has been carried out at other universities in New Zealand. Fehoko *et al.* (2021) share:

> The adaptation to use faikava as a forum for exchanging ideas and debates has … been taking place in several tertiary institutions in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland). Moana students of Māori, Sāmoan, Tongan, Papuan and Fijian descent gather to share their stories and even vent frustrations based on their experiences at university. The practice of faikava in tertiary institutions signifies the importance of epistemological particularity and Indigenous

> divergence, despite being in western colonial institutions. … The use of kava on university campuses and among university students demonstrates an intersection of dominant educational institutions in Aotearoa. (p. 4)

Fehoko (2015) further characterises faikava circles in tertiary institutions as "cultural classrooms" where Pacific identity is reinforced and Pacific wellbeing and issues are discussed with cultural contexts in mind. Within the PUBH810 course, faikava Talanoa sessions were held as opportunities to discuss student experiences throughout the course and raise questions about assessments or other academic concerns. During each session several members of the teaching team were present to contribute to discussions. Members of the community were also welcomed to join in the sessions and provide other points of view about certain issues or topics raised. As a consequence, within our faikava sessions, students were exposed to a range of Pacific academics, community members and students. Such input encouraged students to think about various perspectives and encouraged collective understandings around issues. It was also a chance for staff and students to interact informally, aiding in the practice of veiwekani.

Although challenges such as lack of understanding or familiarity with the kava practice has the potential to discourage students from joining in on the exercise, forming a relationship with students and ensuring that collective understanding was fostered was beneficial. We had students who had never seen or drunk kava before and who felt very positive about the experience after taking part. These students went on to encourage other peers to join in. We had students relishing the opportunity to get to know their peers and staff better. Our Pacific students were particularly enthusiastic about learning about cultural and village connections between their colleagues and staff. These opportunities further presented both students and staff the opportunity to not only gain more understanding of each other but also establish their positionality within the course.

CONCLUSION

The development of the PUBH810 course outlined in this paper sets forth a strategy that supports the growth of Pacific health research and design curriculum development in higher education. The strategy advocates for the privileging of Pacific knowledge systems and worldviews and the need for a more Pacific-centric focus when making decisions about Pacific health research. Although there are efforts currently to integrate Pacific paradigms and approaches within tertiary teaching, these often run the risk of being superficial and misleading of Pacific cultural systems and realities. Furthermore, academic institutions need to take the lead in challenging

tertiary institutions into changing processes and systems to meet the needs of Pacific students and staff. Within the PUBH810 Pacific Health Research and Design course, 70 per cent of the student body identified as Pacific. The high number of Pacific students within the course signalled the attractiveness and recognition Pacific research courses enjoy within tertiary institutions and especially amongst Pacific learners. Outside of these opportunities, Pacific learners are constrained by learning environments that are not Pacific friendly and do not provide Indigenous Pacific perspectives around research framing and teaching. Therefore, there is a need to continue investing in Pacific staff who create and maintain relationships and mentorship for Pacific students, strengthening the vā between students and staff and the vā between academic institutions and Pacific communities.

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