

**Success for all in higher education:  
Improving indigenous and minority student success in degree-level studies**

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While evidence has been gathered about lecture-based learning in higher education, little is known about non-lecture teaching activities that complement traditional en masse teaching & their impact on indigenous and minority student success. This paper describes initial findings from a two-year project investigating what teaching practices in non-lecture contexts (such as foundation education, academic support, studio/performance teaching and careers education services) help or hinder success in preparing for or completing degree-level study. The *Success for All* project commenced in 2007 in three Faculties and one organisation-wide programme in a University of more than 35,000 students. Researchers and educator-researchers work together over two years to better understand teaching and learning in non-lecture contexts, and to utilize evidence to enhance their practices and successful outcomes for Māori (indigenous people of New Zealand) and Pasifika peoples (people of Pacific nation heritage in New Zealand). This paper describes the project's research methodology, and initial findings from its first phase, namely 10 categories and 33 sub-categories of good practice.

## INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognised that detailed research is needed to uncover the complexities of teaching and learning in higher education settings. While some evidence has been gathered about lecture-based learning in higher education, little is known about non-lecture teaching activities that complement traditional en masse teaching. This might include induction programmes to support achievement at university, core practice activities in studio and performance-based classes; academic support activities such as one-to-one tutoring, and mentoring programmes; and teaching and learning through careers education services to encourage purpose, motivation and transition to higher learning or employment.

*Success for All* is a two-year evidence-based project that commenced in January 2007 in four different contexts in a University of more than 35,000 students. Researchers and educator-researchers work together over two years to better understand teaching and learning in non-lecture contexts, and to utilize evidence to enhance their practices. Of particular concern for the *Success for All* research is understanding what teaching practices in non-lecture contexts help or hinder indigenous and minority student success in preparing for or completing degree-level study. The modern university is the ideal environment to educate and inspire discovery and innovation. To continue to grow, universities must adapt to dramatic demographic shifts occurring as a result of

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<sup>1</sup> The *Success for All* team comprises staff from three Faculties (Faculty of Education, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries) and the Careers Centre at The University of Auckland. Team members and contact details are listed at the conclusion of this paper. We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Deans and Director at these sites. This project is funded by the New Zealand Government through the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative ([www.tlri.co.nz](http://www.tlri.co.nz)). The support of the TLRI Coordinators is respectfully acknowledged.

social mobility, migration and immigration. The long-term performance of the university system depends on its ability to provide learning to a broad cross-section of students. The *Success for All* project investigates links between teaching practices and student learning outcomes within the New Zealand context, focusing on what helps or hinders Māori and Pasifika success in preparing for or completing degree-level university study. Good practice will be identified.

In addition to increasing university responsiveness to an increasingly diverse student population, a focus on Māori and Pasifika student success in degree-level tertiary education is of national strategic relevance. Māori are the indigenous people of New Zealand. 'Pasifika' refers to peoples of Pacific nation heritage living in New Zealand. One in 7 people in New Zealand were of Maori ethnicity at the 2001 census. Pasifika peoples make up 16% of the national population and have the highest birth rate of all groups. Like many minority groups, Pasifika peoples could include those recently immigrated to New Zealand as well as New Zealand residents of several generations. Overall while there have been some educational successes, Māori and Pasifika peoples share bottom ranking on all national social indices including education. At all levels of education, Māori and Pasifika achievement has been prioritized by government policy and strategies, and operationalised on the basis of meeting identified need.

*Success for All* consists of three phases: the production of critical incidents narratives with first-year students and graduates (including 'graduates' of foundation education; and students who have used Careers services and gone on to graduate); a professional development intervention involving the analysis and interpretation of the narratives; and the production of critical incident narratives with a new cohort of first-year students. The three phases have been undertaken in four university 'sites' (see below).

This paper describes the project's research methodology, and initial findings from its first phase. Future papers will report on phases two and three. Phase one is characterized by identification of methodological commitments (Kaupapa Māori Research methodology and Pasifika Research Methodology), and the design and implementation of the research method (Critical Incident Technique).

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS & RESEARCH SITES**

This research has two main aims. Firstly, to identify factors in non-lecture teaching and learning that help and hinder Māori and Pasifika student success; secondly, to produce practical programmes for tertiary institutions on how to identify what helps and hinders Māori and Pasifika student success in preparing for or completing degree-level studies, and how to develop effective programmes to harness the strengths and address barriers. The research is a first step towards a Quality Tertiary Teaching (QTTe) Profile based on descriptions of good practice. Particular emphasis has been placed on the successful development of partnerships between educators, students, and their communities.

To achieve these aims, four core research questions guide the *Success for All* project:

- What teaching practices in non-lecture contexts help or hinder Māori and Pasifika success in degree-level study?
- How well are Māori students and Pasifika students achieving currently in degree level study, both nationally and at the research site organisation?
- What does 'success' mean in pre-degree and degree-level study – from mainstream, Māori, and Pasifika perspectives? What is the relationship between success and achievement? How might understandings of success enhance teaching practice with Māori students and with Pasifika students?

- How can the findings of research into non-lecture teaching and learning Māori and Pasifika degree-level students be best communicated to a wider audience of relevant professionals as well as academics and officials?

The research questions are investigated in four university sites, namely:

*Careers Centre:* Ways in which teaching and learning activities in university careers education (e.g. workshops, one-to-one guidance, seminars and information services) might help or hinder Māori students and Pasifika students success in degree level studies. Evidence suggests that quality careers education can positively influence many aspects of student retention and success including motivation and sense of purpose in their studies. Unique features of the Careers Centre are that they are in contact with students from across the University; and while Māori and Pasifika are present amongst their student clients, staffing at the Careers Centre does not yet include Māori and Pasifika peoples. This latter feature is common in many New Zealand university settings and therefore offers an important dimension to this project.

*Faculty of Education:* Teaching and learning practices in intensive academic support provided by specialists in Pasifika academic support, with one or more Pasifika students; and pastoral and academic mentoring with one Pasifika student or a small group of Pasifika students.

*Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences:* Teaching and learning practices in foundation education focused on ensuring Māori and Pasifika student are successful within a pre-degree level qualification (the Certificate in Health Sciences<sup>2</sup>) that prepares students for degree-level studies in the health professions. Pastoral and academic support practices associated with preparing Māori and Pasifika students for success include peer support, tutoring and mentoring at both an individual and group level.

*National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries<sup>3</sup>:* Teaching and learning to improve academic outcomes for Māori students and Pasifika students in studio and performance core-papers. This initiative examines the experiences of Māori students and Pasifika students enrolled in these papers as taught in Architecture and Planning (studio), Fine Arts (studio), Music (performance) and Dance (performance), which are all schools and programmes of NICA. Although pass rates are good for Māori and Pasifika Creative Arts and Industries students when compared to lecture-based majors, achievement is markedly lower when compared to other cultural and ethnic groups within the Faculty.

In total, the range of initiatives provide a rare opportunity for in-depth teaching practice studies in a wide-range of university settings which add substantially to the existing (and limited) knowledge on what is quality teaching in non-lecture contexts.

## **RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS**

Four core assumptions drive the design and implementation of the *Success for All* research project.

*Success is more than we think:* 'Success' includes movement towards and achievement of pass grades or higher, a sense of accomplishment and fulfilling personally important goals, and participation in ways that provide opportunities for a

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<sup>2</sup> The Certificate in Health Sciences is a one-year programme which prepares Maori and Pacific students for degree-level tertiary study in the health professions. The programme is designed to enable students to bridge the gap between secondary school studies and university. Students are introduced to concepts in physics, chemistry, social science, human biology, Maori health, Pacific health, and personal and professional development.

<sup>3</sup> The National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries is one of the 8 Faculties of the University of Auckland.

student to explore and sustain their holistic growth. In practice ‘success’ may include incremental progress in career planning for a successful transition to work, and the achievement of personal and/ or collective academic goals that a student has set out to accomplish. Success may also mean the ability to demonstrate understanding of subject-specific skills and knowledge through creative practice. The concept of ‘success’ is a broad one that links with individual and community notions of potential, effort, and achievement.

*Non-lecture teaching happens and is important:* Teaching and learning in degree-level studies happens in mass lectures to 50 or more students, and in complementary non-lecture settings that can be as small as one-to-one. Adult education teaching can require new kinds of relationships between educator and learning, and new attitudes to teaching. Teaching can be provided by a lecturer who presents a knowledge expert, and can also be provided by the tertiary educator who is a resource person and facilitator (Monks, Conway and Ni Dhuigheain (2006), by academic support staff (Airini and Sauni, 2004), and by careers consultants concerned as much with personal, educational and career motivations as with specific careers content (see Bright and Pryor, 2005).

*Professional development happens best through an ethic of partnerships for informed practice:* Māori students’ and Pasifika students’ success needs professional development that places university educators in non-confrontational situations where, by means of engaging with authentic experiences of others, they can critically reflect on their own theorizing and its impact on Māori students’ and Pasifika students’ success. Changes to teaching and learning practices can be progressively adopted to ensure deep levels of understanding and quality practices. In addition, the professional development must provide situations where educators are shown and are able to practice in an on-going supportive manner, strategies that will change classroom interactions (Bishop et al, 2003).

*To teach to a broad section of students, higher education providers must understand their students:* Māori peoples and Pasifika peoples are distinct population groups with both overlapping and unique educational priorities. Māori and Pasifika students enter degree-level study as school-leavers, as graduates of foundation education programmes and as mature-age adults. Research needs to address indigenous and minority groups as taking different routes with different accompanying issues at both the individual student and group levels.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES**

A key distinguishing element in this research is the integration of Kaupapa Māori Research and Pasifika Research methodologies and analytical frameworks.

### **Māori Research Protocols**

‘Kaupapa Māori Research’ (KMR) is now a well-established academic discipline and research methodology (Smith, 1999). KMR locates Māori at the centre of enquiry. It has of necessity an understanding of the social and economic and political influences on Māori outcomes and is able to use a wide variety of research methods as tools. It is about understanding those power dynamics that create and maintain the unequal position of Māori in New Zealand society including the role that the education system plays in expanding or limiting Māori student success (Taipapaki, 2007).

The commitment to Māori Research Protocols means ensuring that KMR practice is embedded in the research design, implementation, analysis, report writing and dissemination. In practice this means the research process:

- seeks and utilises Māori input at all stages of the research and use consultative and

participatory processes. A Reference Group has been established that includes Māori community and research expertise;

- proceeds in a manner appropriate to the cultural contexts concerned and ensure that language is not a barrier to participation;
- ensures that members in the research team acknowledge cultural limitations, and work in culturally safe ways;
- ensures that all aspects of the research are monitored closely for safety and relevance, both by our researchers, and community-based interviewers; and
- ensures that researchers with Māori research expertise in KMR and Māori education are engaged in research interfaces with Māori participants.

### **Pasifika Research Protocols**

‘Pasifika research’ is a recognised, yet evolving construct (Ministry of Education, 2002; Health Research Council, 2004) concerned with the well-being and empowerment of Pasifika peoples within New Zealand. Consequently, fundamental to Pasifika Research is an acknowledgement of the tangata whenua (‘people of the land’; first nation) status of Māori and an affirmation of the teina-tuakana (kinship with certain roles) relationship of Pasifika and Māori within the Aotearoa New Zealand context. In addition there is an affirmation of the ancient whanaungatanga (extended family relationship), of tuakana-teina within the Pacific region (HRC, 2004).

Ethnic-specific differences within the grouping ‘Pasifika’ are honoured, recognizing both the possibilities and limitations of the term. In common across all is the central importance of principled relationships to all ethical research practice. This is a perspective that requires using Pasifika world-views as the reference points. The development of relationships with Pasifika peoples in the research context can be expressed in ‘guiding principles’ (HRC, 2004, p.2) – respect, cultural competency, meaningful engagement, reciprocity, capacity building. In practical terms, the integration of Pasifika Research protocols means undertaking research that:

- seeks and utilises Pasifika input at all stages of the research and use consultative and participatory processes.
- proceeds in a manner appropriate to the cultural contexts concerned and ensures that language is not a barrier to participation;
- ensures that members in the research team acknowledge cultural limitations, and work in culturally safe ways;
- ensures that all aspects of the research are monitored closely for safety and relevance, both by our researchers, and community-based interviewers; and
- ensures that researchers with Pasifika research expertise are in engaged in research interfaces with Pasifika participants.

### **RESEARCH METHOD: CRITICAL INCIDENTS TECHNIQUE**

As an established form<sup>4</sup> of narrative inquiry, the Critical Incident Technique is used in this project to reveal and chronicle the lived experience of Māori and Pasifika students preparing for or completing degree-level studies. As Bishop and Glynn (1999) have shown, narrative inquiry provides a means for higher levels of authenticity and accuracy in the representation of Māori and Pasifika student experiences through being grounded in a participatory design. The students are able to

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.apa.org/psycINFO/special/cit-intro.pdf> regarding the bibliography of Critical Incidents Technique research. This database covers more than 50 years of research on the development and use of the Critical Incidents Technique.

“talk their truths rather than present the ‘official’ versions” (Bishop, 1998; Stucki, Kahu, Jenkins, Bruce-Ferguson, and Kane, 2004).

The Critical Incident Technique is a form of interview research in which participants provide descriptive accounts of events that facilitated or hindered a particular aim. The resultant student ‘stories’ are collaboratively grouped by similarity into categories that can encompass the events and which can guide the co-construction of professional development initiatives and the Quality Tertiary Teaching (QTTe) Profile to improve teaching and learning practices.

Participants are asked:

- Can you describe a time when the teaching and learning practices in a particular context (that is, mentoring (FoEdn), studio and performance (NICAI), pre-degree studies (FMHS), careers advice (Careers Centre)) has helped (or hindered) your success in degree-level studies?

A complete incident story comprises three parts: trigger (the source of the incident), associated action, and outcome. Identification of each component part facilitates the grouping of the incidents into ‘categories’ of incidents that seem similar. Each identified incident meets the following criteria:

- (1) Is there a trigger for the incident? An associated action? An outcome?
- (2) Can the story be stated with reasonable completeness?
- (3) Was there an outcome bearing on the aim of the study?

At the conclusion of the scrutinising processes (which the research team undertake collaboratively and independently), categories emerge that accommodate the incidents described in the sample group of interviews.

The following validation questions test the soundness and trustworthiness of the category system:

- Can the researchers working independently of each other use the categories in a consistent way?
- Are the categories comprehensive?
- To what extent and in what ways are the categories consistent with expert commentary on good practice in non-lecture teaching and learning in tertiary settings?
- To what extent and what ways are the categories consistent with previous research on best practice in non-lecture teaching and learning in tertiary settings?

### **IMPLEMENTATION: PARTICIPANTS**

Interviews are undertaken with cohorts of up to 12 participants at each of the research sites, as follows:

	2007: Māori Graduates	2007: Pasifika graduates	2007: Māori Yr 1	2007: Pasifika Yr 1	2008: Māori Yr 1	2008: Pasifika Yr 1
Career Services	12	12	12	12	12	12
FoEd	-	12	-	12	-	12
FMHS	12	12	12	12	12	12
NICAI	12	12	12	12	12	12

As indicated by Smith (2006), meta-analysis of narrative research methods suggests that after 8 participants, some repetition of story types can be anticipated. Researchers

in indigenous and general education using the Critical Incident Technique with underrepresented groups have tended however to interview and report on between 10-32 participants (McCormick, 1994; Airini & Brooker, 1999), to ensure highest possible levels of validity and reliability. *Success for All* is based on interviews of cohorts of 12 participants. This increase on the lower end of the range allows for the possibility of the need to exclude interview material due to voluntary withdrawal by the participant, invalid interview responses or other reasons that occur from time to time with narrative based research.

A maximum of 252 participants will take part in this project. Each participant is interviewed for 40 minutes (allowing for additional time to establish rapport and complete the interview appropriately), This results in approximately 5 complete critical incident stories per participant, and at least 1100 critical incidents in total.

## **RESULTS**

This paper reports on initial findings from interviews with students with experience in studio teaching and learning (NICAI), and Pasifika academic support services (Pasifika Student Success unit, (PaSS), Faculty of Education). From eight transcripts, 93 incidents were reported by the participants in relation to what helps or hinders their success in degree-level studies. Analysis of the incidents produced 4 categories and 8 sub-categories in NICAI; and 6 categories and 25 sub-categories in PaSS. In total, 10 categories and 33 sub-categories were identified.

Each incident was classified in one category only. In some cases the sub-categories were reported by more than one incident. However, a single incident could generate a sub-category where a participant reported it in part at least. Therefore in deciding whether to place such an incident in another sub-category the decision would be made to preserve its distinctiveness. Table 1 lists the categories and subcategories, and an analysis of the frequency of category and incident reports.

As Table 1 shows, the highest proportion of reported incidents in PaSS and overall was in the category of 'Services' (39%), with the provision of 'For-Pasifika-by-Pasifika services' being the most frequently reported sub-category of that same field (15% of all incidents), and 'Holistic service' being next most frequent (12% of all incidents). In NICAI, the category of 'Tutor Support' was most frequently reported (4% of all incidents) by students for its impact on success in degree-level studies. 12% of the incidents reported in this paper are from Māori participants, 88% are from Pasifika participants. No category was reported by all participants.

## **DESCRIPTION OF CATEGORIES**

Forthcoming papers will describe each of the categories along with their subcategories. Within the scope of this paper a description of two categories, one each from NICAI and PaSS is provided with associated outcomes, and examples of the incidents in the category showing the range or variation within each category. All of the incidents describe what has helped and hindered success in degree-level studies, as reported by students and graduates of Māori or Pasifika ethnicity.

### **Category: Tutor Support (NICAI)**

The category 'Tutor support' refers to factors attributed to a range of tutors that students report to have affected their ability to effectively and successfully engage in-class in their studies. In the positive sense 'Tutor support' will include effective teaching, sufficient time to prepare and learn in class, the opportunity to develop a personal professional relationship with the tutor, support being readily accessible in

<b>TABLE 1: Initial category &amp; sub-category analysis of Phase 1 (n=93 incidents)</b>			<b>% as sub category</b>	<b>% as Category</b>
<b>PaSS</b>	<b>CLARITY &amp; ACTION</b>	The assignment task is broken down	6	
		A plan is developed for the assignment (with specific tasks for the student identified & timetabled; and regular, frequent, task-oriented meetings to monitor progress)	4	
		The assignment question is broken down	4	
		The meaning of lecturer's language is broken down	2	
		Pacific nation languages & metaphors are used	2	
		Student talk is recorded, to start assignment writing	2	
		Drafts are proof read and edited	2	
		After-hours support is provided	2	
		Help with presentations (group & individual) is provided	2	
		English language support is provided	1	29
	<b>SERVICE FOCUS</b>	By-Pasifika-for-Pasifika service is provided	15	
		A holistic service is provided	12	
		Efficient service is provided	5	
		Provide a service that meets need	2	
		Mental health & social work services are provided	1	
		24 hour access to study facilities is provided	1	
		Accessible, in-person, support is provided	1	
		The service exists & is known to be available, even if not used	1	39
	<b>INDEPENDENCE</b>	Independence as a learner is grown	8	
		Advice on career goals (and subsequent graduate studies) is provided	1	9
<b>INTERDEPENDENCE</b>	Students are involved in critical decisions about the service unit	1	1	
<b>PEERS</b>	Students are grouped & enabled to work as groups	5		
	Peer interaction that supports success is encouraged	<1	5	
<b>A PLACE TO BELONG &amp; THRIVE</b>	A culturally positive, practically supportive environment with key services & facilities is provided (including computers, communal meeting space, study spaces, telephone, kitchen)	5		
	A building is provided that is dedicated to Pasifika support & success & that people can easily find & get to.	<1	5	
<b>N=6 Categories</b>		<b>N=25 Sub-categories</b>		
<b>NICAI</b>	<b>TUTOR SUPPORT</b>	Enough time is provided to prepare for class & learn new skills through class.	2	
		There is more than one tutor in class, & to examine ways of filtering feedback, as well as to have a personal professional relationship with the tutor	2	4
	<b>STUDIO TEACHING &amp; LEARNING</b>	Classes comprise a small group size & activities	1	
		Understanding of the assignment is promoted	1	
		Learner-centred practices are used, including being able to work by yourself in studio time.	1	3
	<b>INDEPENDENCE</b>	Independent study is supported	1	
		Access to after-hours work onsite is provided	1	2
	<b>PEERS</b>	Small exercises are used in class with immediate feedback	1	
		Students are enabled to learn from each other	1	2
	<b>N=4 Categories</b>		<b>N=8 Sub-categories</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>N=10 Categories</b>	<b>N= 33 Sub-categories</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

class, and developing the skill to resolve variations in advice or feedback.

Examples are provided of ways in which learning was affected by the input of tutors. Outcomes of experiencing tutor support included determination & success in learning technical aspects of studies (such as computer programme competencies), student feels like it matters that they are there and are not “just one of a statistic”, and the development of critical thinking skills associated with examining ways of filtering challenging and differing feedback. In short, the absence or presence of effective tutor support affected the student’s ability to participate successfully in courses. Two sub-categories relating to tutor support are described: Timeliness of tutor support, and the number of tutors in class.

### **1. Timeliness of tutor support**

This sub-category refers to the student identifying success in studies with sufficiency of time to prepare for class and learn in class. In this case the sub-category was used for incidents that hindered learning initially, but were converted into successful learning outcomes. That is, certain student attributes, notably determination to succeed and a willingness to put in extra hours of self-directed study, arose from experiences of student-tutor engagement. The example below suggests consideration of professional development for staff engaged in adult education, and opportunities for student feedback on teaching and learning experiences.

Example:

*[Trigger: Technical aspects (computers & programmes)].*

*[Action] I find the technical aspects as in computers wise, as in programmes, software, a bit daunting. The technical expert, so to speak, gets to waltz in and out. They come in and they spurt on, flash through everything in ten minutes and then they’re gone (although they do leave their details)....Even if it’s like half an hour, actually to teach us how to use the software...I guess information would be great. If we knew, “Oh we’re going to learn this sort of software today,” you know, maybe we could read up on it or look at it prior on the computer and just get a little bit of a headstart...[Otherwise] that just goes over your head with all the other technical jargon. It’s kind of blurred, a blurred ten minutes.*

*[Outcome] Um any negatives, I sort of turned them into a positive. You know, if I didn’t know something or didn’t know how to do some sort of software I just hammered hard, did after hours a lot...and because I don’t have a computer at home I need to do all my work at uni. Sometimes I’ll stay ‘til maybe ten o’clock, especially first semester because everything was foreign to me.*

### **2. The number of tutors in class**

This sub-category refers to the student linking success in studies with the number of tutors in class. In this case the sub-category was used for incidents that helped learning, and included cognitive challenges that provided further learning through critical thinking and the resolution of challenging and differing feedback. This suggests that benefits associated with the number of tutors in class are both direct and indirect. The example below raises matters of professional development for staff engaged in adult education, and opportunities for student feedback on teaching and learning experiences.

Example:

*[Trigger: A personal professional relationship with the tutor(s)]*

*[Action] [The tutor] shows us what to do, how to do it, what needs to be done...[J]ust having that personal relationship with a tutor [helps]. You know you're not just one of a statistic, yeah...I find the hands on approach is more useful than sitting in a lecture and I'm thinking what do I need to know, what shall I write down... I guess being able to be open and ask questions of the tutor because there's two on hand which is great so you've got two tutors in the class so that's sort of been helpful and you can go to either or, or both of them (mm) but sometimes, what sometimes they have conflicting information sometimes and its like hang on, um ah but yeah I found it a positive experience for me.*

*[Outcome] Well I want to come every day and every night. Yeah it really pumps you up.*

### **Category: Clarity and Action (PaSS)**

The category 'Clarity and Action' refers to communication, competence, planning and supervision factors students report to have affected their ability to effectively and successfully understand course content and complete associated assignments. 'Clarity and Action' will include a skill that students frequently referred to as 'breaking it down'. That is 'breaking it down' or clarifying what a lecturer meant in class, what an assignment question means, what tasks need to be done to complete an assignment. In addition Clarity and Action will include 'start up' tactics, such as beginning with the student speaking about what they know in relation to an assignment (the oral response is recorded onto laptop or tape); and 'the notebook', this being a tactic in which the student carries a notebook and records assignment-related ideas and questions 'just in time', as they happen and wherever they happen. The 'start-ups' in turn become part of regular planning and preparation sessions with PaSS tutors, directly feeding into the assignment, and the completion of a plan for the completion of the assignment. 'Action', as described by students can be both their completion of set tasks associated with the assignment, and the times, places and ways in which PaSS tutors provide academic support.

The drive to support student success through Clarity and Action, is linked by students to factors described in other categories, particularly those of 'Service' and 'Independence'. Students connect experiences to do with Clarity and Action for assignments, to "people who believe in me", "people who believe in my dreams [for success as a student]", people who provide "a place of hope", and people who "understand me as Pasifika". Clarity and Action is also linked by students to the ability to learn skills that "make me independent". While Clarity and Action describes specific teaching and learning experiences, this category is associated with other experiences described by students as helping their success. Notably, several students described how they came to see that their own life experiences and culturally- and socially-imbedded theories could be directly relevant to successful study for a university degree. In this sense, students revised their own concepts of 'success' to include the possibility of achieving pass grades while retaining "a Pasifika heart" or identity.

Outcomes of Clarity and Action include passing assignments, increased independence to successfully complete later assignments (with an associated reduction in demand for intensive academic support), student retention, increased student action to support peers, and the inclusion of Pasifika experience, knowledge and theories in degree-

level studies. Two of the ten sub-categories of Clarity and Action are provided: (1) A plan is developed for the assignment; and (2) Pacific nation languages and metaphors are used.

### **1. *A plan is developed for the assignment***

This sub-category refers to students linking success in studies with clarification of what an assignment is about, key terms in an assignment, what needs to be done to successfully complete an assignment, establishing, implementing and monitoring a plan for the completion of the assignment, and increased self-esteem. In this case the sub-category was used for incidents that helped learning.

Benefits associated with the Clarity and Action as reported by students are both direct and indirect (successful completion of the assignment; personal esteem); both immediate and enduring (e.g. a three-week assignment timeline is completed; the same approach is used independently by the students in later assignments); and both practical and profoundly personal.

The example below is a student's description of the first time they had sought advice through a particular academic support service (PaSS, Tutor: 'M'). While it might appear that success in an assignment is attributed to linking with PaSS, it is also apparent that success happens in spite of that link; that is, through a personal desire to continue to try and to succeed. It indicates the importance of intensive, explicit, responsive, task-oriented support, for short-term and longer-term student success.

Example:

*[Trigger: Assignment management] I presented to M all assignments, all my assignment questions, my module booklets at the beginning of the second year.*

*[Action] I was basically just showing her what my assignments were going to be and if she could help me firstly sort out a timetable of prioritising which assignments were first to last, and set up a timetable where I could meet her to discuss those priority assignments, so that I know how to prepare myself for these assignments, what books or what research, what information I need to complete that assignment....One particular assignment that I was quite proud of...was a tough one for me...It was an Education paper and I had the question in front of me and because it was in the typical, you now, academic language I basically just presented it in front of M and went, "Hey M, I don't get this question. Can you please show me, help me, break it down, or simplify it so that it is easier for me to understand in simple English language; so that I know what materials or information I need to write about for the question?"...And she broke it down...and she would help me break down the question. She would say, "Work on your Introduction", for example. "And then come back to me in two days time and show me how it looks,"... and we did that with all three sections basically - introduction, body, and the conclusion...So over that whole 3 weeks we would meet maybe every 2 or 3 days for at least one hour.*

*[Outcomes] That sort of help made a big difference in my essay writing, a big difference in my preparations for getting the assignment sort of prepared...and made a dramatic change in my life, in my sense of belief and my acknowledgement of understanding what it means to be in at tertiary environment....Believe it or not I actually got an A for that [assignment]. I actually got an A for the whole course....And then I decided to use that strategy in my second semester and that whole particular semester I passed all my papers averaging Bs and Cs...That was six. So I actually passed one full semester since using PaSS....So overwhelmingly the*

*support through PaSS had made a dramatic change in my life, in my sense of belief and my acknowledgement of understanding what it meant to be in a tertiary environment....And that was evident in that second semester of my second year....Because of the introduction of the approach she had now taught me, it was actually her idea to just use it, have a go on my own. That is not to say that I didn't visit her as much but I tried it. It worked. And then the only time I would go and see M is when I gave her a big piece of cake or a bouquet of flowers or a box of chocolates to say Thank you. But yeah no the second year was again very defining because it made a transition in my life from my first year experiences from being negative and feeling down to a more positive enthusiastic, vibrant person who gained confidence...*

## **2. Pacific nation languages and metaphors are used**

An increasingly diverse general population is reflected in the student demographic in higher education. This sub-category refers to students linking success in studies with the use of non-English language and concepts in which the student has major expertise, but which most often are outside the language and knowledge bases of the university. Benefits associated with the use of Pacific nation languages and metaphors as reported by students are increased understanding of course content, student retention, and encouragement.

The following example is from a graduate for whom English is their second language. When asked what was the outcome of the use of Pacific nation languages and metaphors, the response was not their grade. Rather, the outcome of clarity and action was that the then-student was encouraged. The revelation was that learning need not mean leaving one's culture at the door of the university. Indeed, what has been learned earlier in one's life, in another country, culture or language, can be of direct relevance; in much the same way that lecturers in a New Zealand university might see the writing of Vygotsky to be of relevance to degree-level studies in the South Pacific in the twenty-first century. The use of Pacific nation languages and metaphors in academic support has both practical and personal outcomes, both of which contribute to student success. The following example raises matters to do with comprehension, as well as the inclusion of diverse knowledge bases, and the ways in which decisions about such inclusion impacts upon student success.

Example:

*[Trigger: They understand what I am feeling] For me as a Pasifika teacher and a Pasifika student, the relationship between us [PaSS and student] is a good one, because they understand what I am feeling. They understand our theories, ah?*

*[Action] [The PaSS Tutor] P and I use both languages in the same time: English and Samoan. Sometimes we are speaking Samoan, sometimes we are speaking in English. We use both languages. Sometimes I found some words I can't understand...And I ask him, "Oh, can you explain what this means?" And sometimes he says, "Okay, in Samoan you..." and he explains this one. And in Samoan he gives me the example in Samoan...Most of the time he refers to the Samoan culture, Samoan customs, Samoan way of life, to explain what it means...For example, for the theory, he said about Vygotsky's one, for example, the scaffolding; he explained that one for me...In Samoa it looks like, in Samoa the small kids - you start looking at your mum and how she did the cooking or things like that. Until he gets older, you will leave him alone; you can do that...He explained what Vygotsky said on this stage and this stage, referring to our custom and our culture, what to do at this time and this time when you are one*

*years old, two years, three years upwards. That's me. Until you stand alone, independent.*

*[Outcome] For me as a student, he encourages me; encourages me how to make success, how to work. Because sometimes in our, in Samoa they think if you are getting 30 it is not a good time for you to go to school, to learn. But in here, when he encourages me, learning is not ending. It is still going and going and going.*

## **DISCUSSION**

While evidence has been gathered about lecture-based learning in higher education, little is known about non-lecture teaching activities that complement traditional en masse teaching & their impact on indigenous and minority student success. This paper describes initial findings from the two-year *Success for All* project investigating what teaching practices in non-lecture contexts help or hinder success in preparing for or completing degree-level study. Two sets of observations can be made at this stage in the research process – one about the research method itself, and the second about the emerging findings.

### **The research method**

#### *Putting Māori and Pasifika realities at the centre of research*

The integration of KMR and Pasifika Research protocols means explicitly advocating research from Māori and Pasifika realities. As a research method, the Critical Incidents Technique is proving to be effective in enabling indigenous and minority group perspectives to be elicited. This is important as *Success for All* is directly connected to Māori and Pasifika philosophies and principles. It assumes the validity of Māori and Pasifika peoples and knowledge, the importance of Māori and Pasifika languages and cultures; and the importance of the pursuit of leadership by Māori and Pasifika peoples for one's own cultural well being. This is leading to new research processes and new findings.

As indicated by Taipapaki Curtis (2007), the traditional positivist approach to research, where dispassionate objectivity is paramount, is not the only 'true' way to make sense of the world. Other approaches to research are not only appropriate but desirable and represent valid ways in which one can structure one's world and hence one's study of it. The integration of KMR and Pasifika research protocols directly challenges Western notions of what does, and does not, constitute appropriate research. Māori and Pasifika are brought from the margin to the centre; centralising Māori and Pasifika concerns and approaches, so that Māori and Pasifika ways of knowing and therefore researching may be validated.

A key challenge is communicating new findings that are potentially culture- and site-specific. The team is challenged to produce information that can be useful in improving teaching practices by all educators working with indigenous and minority students. At the same time, there may be findings that are particular to Māori and Pasifika realities and interventions. For the *Success for All* findings to be applied to greatest effect ways need to be found to communicate culturally imbedded findings widely and also to Māori and Pasifika specifically. This project will comment on how to research in culturally responsive and relevant ways for innovative outcomes.

#### *Learning from extracts, themes, and linkages*

It is difficult to know how well an interview extract can do in communicating the full

experience of a student. The reporting of the research requires the cutting of small elements from an overall story. This helps in deriving categories essential to developing professional development programmes. The team's intention is that this practice is to be continued; the principle being that the extracts are the medium towards improved practice and not the message. What is also apparent however is that a single category may not fully describe the nature of the student experience or outcomes. Students link outcomes in one category (such as Clarity and Action) with outcomes in another (such as Independence). The team is interested in ways to communicate overarching themes from individual student interviews, which necessarily means publishing larger sections of the transcript; and the communication of linkages between categories. Early thinking is that student accounts of what help and hinder success are more akin to an orchestral score than a solo item.

### **The emerging findings**

#### *Researching to improve higher education practices and outcomes*

The emerging findings illustrate the positive influence of non-lecture based teaching and learning on student outcomes. They also indicate areas in which students can see (and suggest) room for improvement. Each participant has confirmed the importance of non-lecture based teaching for their success and can describe helpful or unhelpful features and experiences in these contexts. A key task for this project is to explore the relevance of this information to all aspects of teaching in higher education and necessary changes. In addition to enhancing professional practice through describing a Quality Tertiary Teaching Profile and associated professional development, there may be a role for this information in decision-making about resourcing at an organizational level and in national education policy development (see Alton-Lee, 2007).

#### *Rethinking definitions of 'academic support'*

Finally, the findings to-date clearly signal that student success is about more than the grade. This is not new to many, however what is emerging from the findings is that consideration of the wider concepts of success may be significantly important in the achievement of grades-based success. While some may think of academic support as being distinct from 'pastoral' support, these findings suggest that there is no clear distinction. Indeed, attempts to do so could eliminate the very essence of the approaches students have identified as being crucial to their ability to pass, stay on for more courses, and ultimately, to graduate. The early findings suggest that a new vocabulary for academic support, arising from student understandings of success is needed.

### **CONCLUSION**

The range of initiatives in *Success for All* is an opportunity for in-depth teaching practice research into what is quality teaching in non-lecture based contexts.

The research method has been affirmed as capable of revealing stories within and between population groups' experiences in tertiary education. Some challenges have been identified which the research team will address. Already further research possibilities are emerging. For example the potential for an international comparative studies into student accounts of what teaching practices in non-lecture contexts help or hinder success in preparing for or completing degree-level study; and comparative study into quality teaching in non-lecture and lecture based settings. Similarly, there is a potential need for gender-based research into student accounts of what teaching

practices in higher education help or hinder success in degree-level study. For example, over many decades the role of women in social reform, especially through education, has been recorded and commented upon (see hooks, 1998; Alipia et al. 2005). We are yet to fully understand or recognise the role of gender in the reform of higher education practices.

Arguably, it is deceptively 'simple' to work out how to best teach in higher education to support indigenous and migrant student success. Students can be exceptional advisors to educators. This results in an investigation that is explicit, evidential, and potentially inspirational about what makes a difference in education. It is also of an applied nature that supports enhanced professional practices through partnership between researchers and practitioners. In total the research process is both simple and intricate, clear and nuanced. Initial findings from *Success for All* show the critical importance of dynamic, culturally relevant and innovative processes for exploring and constructing descriptions of good teaching practice in higher education.

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