PROCEEDINGS

Rangahau: Te Mana o te Mahi Kotahitanga

Research: The Power of Collaboration

UNITEC/MIT RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM 2022

December 8 and 9

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FOREWORD

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Associate Professor Marcus Williams
Research Director, Unitec | Te Pūkenga

It is a pleasure to introduce the proceedings of the second online research symposium collaboratively organised by Unitec and Manukau Institute of Technology. Held in December, the 2022 symposium was themed around collaboration and industry partnership, a critical point of difference for the sector.

Rangahau: Te Mana o te Mahi Kotahitanga / Research: The Power of Collaboration facilitated a high degree of engagement from Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics across the mōtu, and a highlight was the panel discussion, in which a dynamic, interactive online kōrero about the opportunities of industry partnership took place with Yvonne Kainuku (MIT), Professor David Tipene-Leach (EIT), Professor Jean Ross (Otago Polytech) and Professor Terri-Ann Berry (Unitec).

The Māori and Pacific research streams were richly populated with a wide array of topics. It was pleasing to see that the Research with Impact Award was won by a Kaupapa Māori research project led by Dr Hinekura Smith, *Growing Kaupapa Māori Research Confidence, Capability and Capacity Through a Summer Research Mentorship Programme*. The Pacific Research Excellence Award was won by Associate Professor Evangelia Papoutsaki, with her paper *Mapping Small Island Communicative Ecologies*.

There are nine papers published here in these proceedings, eight under the category of learning and teaching (with sub-categories of early childhood education and nursing), and one under the category of sustainable communities (a social practice paper). This emphasis on learning and teaching research aligns well with the priorities of Te Pūkenga, which place student success front and centre of the organisation.

It is critical that Unitec ePress can provide the opportunity to publish full, peer-reviewed papers emerging from oral presentations at the symposium, providing enduring access to the findings for the sector and the world at large.

Ngā mihi mahana ki a koutou.

CULTIVATING WHANAU-NGATANGA AND COLLAB-ORATION: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF INQUIRY-BASED PROJECT LEARNING ON KAIAKO AND TAMARIKI IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN AOTEAROA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of collaboration in inquiry-based project work in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. It draws upon findings from a research project exploring how inquiry-based project learning has been interpreted and undertaken in early childhood settings in this context. Inquiry-based project learning is a collaborative approach, underpinned by sociocultural theories, that supports a democratic view. The study is positioned in an interpretivist qualitative paradigm and is informed by sociocultural theories. A narrative inquiry approach informed the study design. Phase One of the project, which comprised a national questionnaire sent to all early childhood centres registered on the national ECE data base was completed in 2021. Phase Two, underway at the time of writing this paper, has involved a small number of purposively selected early childhood settings. At each of these settings, data collection has comprised an interview with the teaching team about their pedagogical frameworks, key influences and teaching practices, and a period of classroom observations focused on a current inquiry.

Analysis of the data suggests that collaboration is cultivated when kaiako (teachers) prioritise whanaungatanga (sustaining connections and relationships) and have spent time developing pedagogical practices resulting in shared understandings surrounding inquiry-based project work. The impact of collaboration on the learning of tamariki (children) is demonstrated by a series of vignettes from the Phase Two data, demonstrating that developing a collaborative learning culture of inquiry fosters reciprocity, connection, theory making and problem solving.

KEYWORDS

Inquiry-based project learning, early childhood education, collaborative learning

INTRODUCTION

Life in the 21st century is becoming increasingly complex. As we navigate this environment, we have a chance to reimagine what education looks like for our youngest citizens and to consider what value it offers in today's fast-changing society. Developing the skills for navigating complexity and an unknown future are an important focus; however, there are other concepts that also merit attention. For example, the meaning of citizenship within this period of time. Aotearoa New Zealand is now characterised as super-diverse society (Chan & Ritchie, 2019; Ritchie, 2016); multiple perspectives must be carefully balanced with respect to the rights of Māori as the Indigenous people of this country. Arndt and Tesar (2015) assert that early childhood education is "a complex, relational, inter-subjective, material, moral and political practice" (p. 71). Similarly, Freire (1994) argues that education is not neutral, but rather functions as means to either promote conformity or, alternatively, to bring about transformation through teaching tamariki how to participate in a democracy through collaboration. McLeod (2019) explains that, for Freire, education is "a collaborative, problem-posing process of inquiry which starts by questioning assumptions that have been taken for granted and raises awareness of unequal power relationships as part of teaching and learning" (p. 56).

Inquiry-based project learning raises awareness of how privileging teacher knowledge perpetuates unequal relations of power. This approach rejects more traditional conformist approaches and instead empowers tamariki to lead their own learning as they explore and discover answers to their own questions through exploration

and dialogue with their peers and kaiako. Blank et al. (2014) refer to this approach as "negotiated curriculum" to highlight how both teachers and children determine what knowledge is valued. Tamariki work collaboratively, often utilising many aspects of the arts and other cultural tools to represent and adapt their ideas as they co-construct new understandings over time and their kaiako support them to think critically about the ideas they are exploring. Law (2020) argues that introducing critical thinking and critical literacy in early childhood education is a strategy that "prompts children to make connections to prior knowledge and experiences, share perspectives, reflect on ideas and explore possible responses" (p. 26). Taking a critical stance is a learned skill and one that can begin in early childhood, embedded in pedagogies of curiosity, listening and inquiry. In these ways, inquiry-based project learning is an empowering, collaborative approach that supports a democratic view (Chard et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2019; Lanphear & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2017; Murcia et al., 2020; Stacey, 2019).

In recent years, interest in inquiry-based project learning has gained traction, as more kaiako in both the early childhood and primary sectors recognise its potential to foster the curiosity of tamariki and engagement in their own learning. In Aotearoa New Zealand, interest in inquiry-based project learning burgeoned in the 1980s, when the infant and toddler centres and pre-schools of Reggio Emilia received international recognition (Mawson, 2010; Pohio, 2013). Their approach, along with the Project Approach, conceptualised in America by Katz and Chard (2000), became significant international influences, shaping many early childhood settings' practices with inquiry-based project learning in this context. The power of these international influences may, however, have overshadowed national imperatives and approaches to inquiry, for example, Māori perspectives of inquiry-based project learning (Alcock & Ritchie, 2018) and the work achieved during the Progressive Education movement by educators such as Elwyn Richardson (MacDonald, 2020). While research has been conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand examining the impact of Reggio Emilia on early childhood education in this context (Bayes, 2005; Haplin 2011; Probine 2015; 2020), little research has examined the approaches and practices of early childhood kaiako in the area of inquiry-based project learning in this country.

INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH

This paper examines the role of collaboration in inquiry-based project learning, drawing upon a current research project that aims to address this gap. The project is exploring how inquiry-based project learning has been interpreted and undertaken in early childhood settings in this context. The research has examined the pedagogical influences that have shaped kaiako thinking, the pedagogical processes for undertaking and progressing an inquiry that have been developed, and has considered how this approach impacts the learning of tamariki. Both the findings from Phase One, and initial analysis of the data collected at the first six settings involved in Phase Two suggest that collaboration is cultivated when kaiako prioritise whanaungatanga and have spent sustained time developing pedagogical practices resulting in shared understandings surrounding inquiry-based project work. The impact of collaboration on how tamariki learn, which is demonstrated by a series of vignettes from the Phase Two data, demonstrates that developing a collaborative learning culture of inquiry fosters reciprocity, connection, theory making and problem solving.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is inquiry-based learning and what is its value?

At its core, the roots of inquiry-based project approaches lie in social-constructivist and socio-cultural theories that argue that knowledge is subjective and contextual. In alignment with these theories, in inquiry-based project learning, childhood is viewed in a particular way where tamariki are seen as agents of their own learning, encouraged to be curious and ask questions (Stacey, 2019). Interactions and relationships with kaiako are built on listening, encouragement and questioning. Kaiako facilitate conversations that empower tamariki to find their own answers and create their own understanding of their environments. In doing so, tamariki develop agency as they develop the understanding that they have the skills and dispositions to solve their own problems and develop a

growing awareness of their individual identity and who they are as learners (Santin & Torreuella, 2017; Lev et al., 2020).

A key aspect of inquiry-based project learning is that it is collaborative in nature. Tamariki work in groups to form working theories, research, answer questions, discuss, debate and represent their thinking as they construct new understandings (Santin & Torreuella, 2017; Ministry of Education, 2017; Murphy et al., 2016). While Katz and Chard (2000) assert that this process promotes intellectual development, a further value of this approach is that it promotes relationship building. Nxumalo et al. (2020) assert that the collaborative nature of inquiry-based project learning supports children to "build relationships with one another, with their teachers, and with members of a wider community in which they play an important part" (p. xvii). Kokotsaki et al. (2016) argue that the emphasis on relationships and collaboration embedded within this approach fosters intersubjectivity. Nxumalo et al. (2020) support this view, arguing that this approach provides "critical entry points into contextual, creative, meaningful, and justice-oriented curriculum" (p. 1).

Inquiry-based project learning in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand

Te Whāriki. He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2017) guides the practices and priorities of all mainstream early childhood education settings in Aotearoa New Zealand. An important aspect of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) is that while it provides a framework for curriculum development, it also creates the space for each early childhood setting to build their own localised approach based on the values and priorities of their unique context. Within this framework, early childhood settings may choose to adopt an inquiry-based project approach but are not required to. This bicultural curriculum is underpinned by four key principles: Whakamana (Empowerment), Kotahitanga (Holistic Development), Whānau Tangata (Family and Community) and Ngā Hononga (Relationships). The curriculum positions relationships as a foundational aspect of any learning relationship, which is particularly significant for Māori. It states:

> It is through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things that children have opportunities to try out their ideas and refine their working theories. For this reason collaborative aspirations, ventures and achievements are valued. Connections to past, present and future are integral to a Māori perspective of relationships. This includes relationships to tīpuna who have passed on and connections through whakapapa to, for example, maunga, awa, moana, whenua and marae. (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 21)

Another overarching tenet of the curriculum is that it prioritises the development of knowledge, skills and dispositions. Both the principles and priorities of *Te Whāriki (*Ministry of Education, 2017) align closely with the core tenets of inquiry-based project learning.

Understanding whanaungatanga

Māori philosophical understandings are deeply embedded within *Te Whāriki* (2017). The process of maintaining connections to past, present and future sits at the heart of whanaungatanga. This provides an insight into Māori views of time, which are non-linear. It refers to maintaining a pattern of right relationships between people, place, space, materials and time. Thus, whanaungatanga does not just refer to relationships that occur for shared aspirations or collaborations in the current context. It is not a temporal or a time-bound practice, but an enduring – even lifelong – commitment. It also concerns relationships we foster and maintain with taiao, the living natural world. By incorporating it as intentional pedagogy, kaiako have an opportunity to draw on the essence of whanaungatanga to guide their approach to inquiry-based project learning that reaches into the potentialities of all tamariki as agentic learners, dynamically connected to te ao (the world).

An emphasis on whanaungatanga in inquiry-based project learning that recognises the aspirations of tamariki and whānau Māori can support culturally sustaining practices that benefit Māori. Whanaungatanga also enables kaiako to work at the cultural and political interface of intersubjectivities that exist within a bicultural country that is, and has always been, made up of culturally diverse communities. As a process, whanaungatanga actively interacts

with history through recognition of the genealogies that all people bring with them into their current contexts. Incorporating whanaungatanga as part of the pedagogical approach to inquiry-based project learning can re-centre localised curriculum and honour community knowledges, devolving unequal relationships of power from the kaiako to a power-sharing model (Bishop & Glynn, 1999) based on community aspirations that recognise Māori as tāngata whenua, acknowledges iwi and mana whenua, and supports community collaborations.

Pedagogical influences

For those early childhood settings in Aotearoa New Zealand that have chosen to engage in inquiry-based project learning, there have been a range of theoretical and pedagogical ideas that have influenced their pedagogical thinking. It is important to acknowledge that the story of inquiry in Aotearoa New Zealand begins with Māori, who were the first inquirers of this country. In alignment with this, *Te Whatu Pōkeka: Kaupapa Māori Assessment for Learning: Early childhood exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2009), which guides the assessment practices of early childhood kaiako in both full immersion and mainstream early childhood settings in this country, has strong correlations with the tenets of inquiry-based project learning.

While the principles of inquiry-based project learning align closely with national early childhood documents such as *Te Whatu Pōkeka* (Ministry of Education, 2009) and *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), many early childhood kaiako in this context have sought deeper understanding surrounding the pedagogical processes involved in initiating and maintaining collaborative inquiry-based projects, leading them to the international literature on this topic. One of the most significant international influences has been the Reggio Emilia approach. The infant and toddler centres and preschools of Reggio Emilia have received international recognition for their work developing the potential of this pedagogical approach. A core aspect of this is collaborative inquiry-based projects called 'progettazione', which translates as 'flexible planning'. In America, the evolution of the Project Approach, developed by Katz and Chard (2000), has been another impactful contribution to the development of inquiry-based learning in an international context. Many countries around the world have adopted and reconceptualised these pedagogical ideas (Gandini et al., 2005; Giamminuti, 2013; Moss, 2018).

McLeod and Giardiello (2019) assert that internationally renowned pedagogical ideas, such as these two examples, are often valued as exemplars of "socially just, participatory and democratic practice" (p. 1) and are used "as a provocation for stimulating critical discussions around the relevance of local ECE projects" (p. 3). Several authors, however, warn that transplanting pedagogical ideas from one very different context to another, without deep examination of what these ideas could mean for the new context, can create misunderstandings and cultural knots (Mawson, 2010; Miller & Pound, 2010; Pohio, 2009). Robertson (2006, quoted in Pohio, 2009) describes these as "the untidy complexities that emerge when differing cultural contexts intermingle" (p. 11). Alcock and Ritchie (2018) support these concerns and argue that looking further afield for pedagogical inspiration can overshadow localised theories and approaches. In Aotearoa New Zealand's context, these might include the commitment to bicultural practice that *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) so strongly advocates for, and the rich local kaupapa (principles and ideas) drawn from te ao Māori (the Māori worldview) and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge and understanding).

METHODOLOGY AND STUDY DESIGN

The study is positioned in an interpretivist qualitative paradigm and is informed by sociocultural and bioecological theories, which recognise knowledge is constructed and is influenced by a complex web of contextual perspectives and associated histories. In 1993, Bronfenbrenner and Ceci commented that "human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment" (p. 317). Later, Kahlke et al. (2018) suggested that "sociocultural theory attends more to the relationships between people and social practices" (p. 117). The interplay of both these theories focuses on the interactions and relationships

between the tamaiti (child) and kaiako, in this case in early childhood settings, and the influences they experience jointly and individually.

The methodological framework of the project draws upon narrative inquiry, which supports the value the research team members hold for the stories of the early childhood kaiako and communities collaborating in this research. Mertova and Webster (2020) support this idea when asserting: "Narrative allows researchers to present experience holistically in all its complexity and richness" (p. 2).

The research has been undertaken over two phases. Phase One comprised a qualitative questionnaire sent to all early childhood centres registered on the national database of ECE services. The findings here informed Phase Two, which involved working with a small number of purposively selected services across Aotearoa with the aim of capturing a diverse range of cultural and pedagogical perspectives across a range of geographic locations. Data has been collected at six centres. At each setting, focus-group conversations with kaiako and observations of a current inquiry have been completed, alongside reflections and initial analysis. There is also further scope to work with two to three settings in 2023.

Data analysis

Clandinin (2014) argues that because narrative inquiry is such a subjective and personalised approach, it is crucial that the researchers declare their own subjectivities and the impact this has on the analysis of data. Informed by this, the researchers acknowledge that their multi-faceted identities – which include being kaiako educators and early childhood kaiako – have shaped their interpretation of the data as they sought connections and patterns, and identified emerging themes and theories. The research team worked collaboratively to thematically analyse the questionnaire responses, and the data collected during Phase Two is currently being analysed through examination of temporal, social and place dimensions through reflective and theoretical lenses that align with the research questions and research paradigm (Clandinin, 2014).

Ethics

The lead researcher sought and was granted ethical permission to conduct this project. In Phase One, the design of the questionnaire meant that centres' and kaiako identities were protected, unless they chose to express interest in participating in Phase Two. In Phase Two, consent to participate in the research was sought and granted by all participants, and assent forms were issued to tamariki. Participants understood that they may be identifiable in photographic imagery included in the research reporting.

PHASE ONE FINDINGS

The impact of relationships and collaboration

Sixty-three early childhood settings that currently use inquiry-based approaches participated in Phase One. When asked about the benefits of using inquiry-based approaches, participants highlighted the building and fostering of relationships between tamariki and kaiako. Collegiality, working in a community of learners, collaboration, and opportunities for tuakana–teina (where the younger learns from the older) relationships were also valued by many participants. For example, one participant wrote:

> *"I have learned about children as social learners … the importance of engaging in rich dialogue with children, the importance of building trusting relationships with children, the idea that [we] are learning alongside the children as co-researchers."*

And another:

> *"Tuakana/teina relationships benefit both parties as tamariki observe, take part and assist others. This is also connected to the idea of ako, where the learning and teaching roles are exchanged between all members who participate."*

Based on the feedback from the survey and the settings that were purposively selected to participate further, Phase Two of the data collection provided an opportunity for a much more in-depth exploration of pedagogical approaches to inquiry-based project learning and the various influences that have shaped them.

PHASE TWO FINDINGS

Prioritising whanaungatanga

Initial analysis of the data collected in Phase Two suggests that collaboration is cultivated when kaiako prioritise whanaungatanga and take the time to celebrate every small event and the voice of every tamaiti. For example, at Little Doves, an early childhood setting in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, each new discovery a tamaiti makes is carefully documented and valued. Sonya, one of the Kaiako, explained:

> *"We've broken it down so that we can celebrate the tiny … we really need to be equipped, and ready to recognise and celebrate, and to share, and to respond to every single tiny something that happens along the way."*

Another example is Daisies early childhood centre in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington. Here, at the beginning of an inquiry, the teaching and pedagogical teams hold a full-day wānanga where the overarching inquiry is presented, and then teams discuss, theorise and research possibilities of directions the inquiry might travel in before beginning their work with tamariki.

At Toi Ohomai early childhood centre, in Tauranga, whanaungatanga is fostered through honouring and documenting moments of ako (teaching and learning). At this setting, their current inquiry is focused on ngā atua (the tamariki of Ranginui, the sky, and Papatūānuku, the Earth, who are also the guardians of their parents' domains). The tamariki and kaiako have created a waiata (song) together. Kim, one of the teachers at this setting, digitally documented a very special moment when one of the tamariki – who is a descendant from another country and speaks English as an additional language – taught their grandparent this song. The grandparent remarked that her grandchild talked about this song and the Māori atua often at home. When they came into the centre, this tamaiti spontaneously took the opportunity to share their knowledge. Kim reflected on how inquiry-based project leaning can also foster whanaungatanga beyond the context of the early childhood setting as tamariki are provoked to share the excitement of their learning with their whānau (family).

Sustained time spent developing pedagogical processes

The kaiako in each setting have spent sustained time developing their pedagogical practices. The impact of this is the development of shared understandings surrounding their work. At each setting there are core teaching teams that have been working together for some time. This has allowed for deep pedagogical discussions and for shared understandings to be established about the theoretical ideas underpinning their inquiry-based approaches and the pedagogical processes required to sustain an inquiry.

At the settings with larger teaching teams, clear frameworks that offer guidance on how to establish an inquiry and processes for progressing through the inquiry have been developed. These frameworks help newer members of the teaching team to become familiar with this approach and to ensure that there is consistency in their approaches with tamariki. For example, the teaching team at Little Doves early childhood centre shared how they had worked to establish a framework that makes explicit links with *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017). This has helped them utilise the curriculum as a tool to drive the inquiry. Sonya, one of the kaiako, explained their rationale for creating their own pedagogical framework:

> *"We teach what we know, so I think we began our journey initially bringing with us and teaching in a way where we had come from … I think that's probably what prompted us really investing and developing our own approach."*

It was particularly important to this learning community that *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) was strongly integrated in the framework. Sarah, the centre director, explained:

> *"We really wanted to draw on Te Whāriki to give kaiako a tool to … drive their inquiry, not leaving it to chance, not leaving it to a kind of instinct or 'know how', but to really provide a framework so that teachers could develop their expertise in inquiry."*

This careful work has enabled these teams to draw upon international approaches as inspiration, but to interpret these ideas in terms of the context of Aotearoa, the curriculum, and their local contexts.

The impact of a focus on whanaungatanga and collaboration on how tamariki learn

Initial analysis of Phase Two suggests that when teaching teams working with inquiry-based project approaches prioritise whanaungatanga and collaboration, this directly impacts the culture of learning in the setting. Through collaboration, these teams have developed established practices and processes that support a democratic classroom.

Collaboration is a key aspect of inquiry-based project approaches, which are underpinned by social constructivist and sociocultural theories. In Phase One, some participants expressed uncertainty about their roles within an inquiry; during Phase Two we found that the kaiako had developed this clarity. At all six settings, kaiako positioned themselves as co-constructors, collaborators and co-learners within the inquiries of tamariki. Sarah, the centre leader at Little Doves, explained that the values of curiosity and exploration are equally important for kaiako. She said we need to recognise:

> *"That teachers also want to stay curious, stay interested, be learning, be open to new ideas and new perspectives … rather than getting stuck and producing the same work day after day, year after year."*

For this setting, the focus of collaborative inquiry enables a culture of curiosity and research to also be fostered amongst the teaching teams.

The impact of these practices is that tamariki experience an environment of reciprocity and connection, a classroom culture where their theories are valued and creativity and problem solving are fostered. Further, it can be seen that inquiry-led learning and teaching aligns with Māori pedagogies, which facilitate non-hierarchical teaching and learning relationships of ako. 'Ako' means to teach and to learn.

Fostering reciprocity and connection

A rich example of how inquiry can support a collaborative learning culture where reciprocity and connection are fostered is Rimu kindergarten in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. This teaching team is newer to inquiry. As they began this journey, they decided to focus on the local ngahere (bush). The group ventures out to the forest each week. The kaiako spent many weeks giving the tamariki time to explore and connect with the ngahere and with each other through visiting the same places each week. Over time, they recognised that the tamariki were deeply curious about the traps they had discovered. This became the focus of their inquiry, leading them to connect with the local primary school and environmental group, who had placed their own traps. The tamariki are now taking responsibility for refilling the ink traps that capture small creatures' footprints, and the group takes great pride in taking care of this space.

Developing a culture of theory making

A further impact of focusing on whanaungatanga and collaboration is the value kaiako hold for how tamariki develop working theories as a basis for developing emergent curriculum. At Lil Pumpkins, a semi-rural setting in Hamilton, the current overarching project is focused on outer space. One experience involved the tamariki exploring different materials that represented the moon, asteroids, moon dust and craters. One of the kaiako asked, "What happens if we drop this on the moon?" A tamaiti replied, "This is an asteroid, and it makes big holes." The kaiako drew on a range of open-ended questions to provoke the thinking of tamariki about their inquiry as well as supporting the tamariki to make connections to some complex conceptual and scientific ideas.

Fostering problem solving and creativity

The team at Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten have been inquiring into their local environment for several years. Tamariki have been theorising about the creatures that live in the water, and have been representing this through their artwork in the studio. More recently, the kaiako have shared a local legend of Te Moko Ika a Hikuwaru, an eight-limbed taniwha (guardian of water) who fell in love with Kaiahiku (now the Panmure Basin). One of the tamariki arrived at kindergarten one morning with a plan to create a taniwha. His kaiako, Jacqui, responded immediately, and after a small group of curious participants had gathered, they discussed and chose appropriate materials. They worked tirelessly throughout the morning to realise their plan, stopping regularly to discuss small challenges.

Over the following days, opportunities to decorate and then represent the taniwha were provided. This same tamaiti soon had another idea, and suggested they create a stop-motion movie of the legend. Again, his idea was immediately supported by his kaiako,

and the group set to work on creating a film set. Stop motion was a new medium for Jacqui. She and the tamariki worked collaboratively to figure it out. Later, she expressed the importance of making visible to tamariki that she too is a learner, and she intentionally role-models the strategies she uses when experiencing something new and challenging.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The impact of collaboration and whanaungatanga

Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017) defines whanaungatanga as "a relationship through shared experiences and working together that provides people with a sense of belonging" (p. 67). This research demonstrates that when whanaungatanga and collaboration are core values within ECE environments using inquiry-based project approaches, there are positive impacts for both kaiako and tamariki. For the kaiako who were participants in this research, they experienced a sense of collegiality and focus, and appreciated that they had a shared purpose in their daily work. This is particularly significant given the current statistics that indicate the wider early childhood sector in Aotearoa New Zealand is currently in crisis. Many teachers have reported on a lack of teacher resourcing, government and policy support, and a myriad of other issues resulting in teachers experiencing burnout (Office of Early Childhood Education, 2022). Returning to Freire's (1994) ideas about the purpose of education being to teach tamariki how to participate in a democracy, these young tamariki are learning, through collaboration, how to work in a group, listen to diverse points of view, share ideas, debate, and work collaboratively to solve problems. As they engage in this work, they are developing many of the skills the literature argues are critical for navigating life in the 21st century (Kim et al., 2019).

Developing a culture of theory making, problem solving and creativity

Kim et al.'s (2019) 21st-century skills framework lists 12 skills that will be needed in the workplace of the future, based on the idea that working with authentic, real-life tasks will teach skills such as theory development, problem solving, creativity, communication and more. Further, several authors argue that these kinds of learning experiences, that encourage intersubjectivity and critical thinking, are crucial in developing these skills (Krogh & Morehouse, 2020; Meier & Sisk-Hilton, 2020; Stacey, 2019).

Sustained time spent developing localised and culturally responsive pedagogical processes

We see that inquiry-based project learning has the potential to challenge kaiako working with tamariki in the early years to readdress their roles and to position themselves as co-researchers and collaborators alongside tamariki as they learn. Tzuo (2007) suggests that the role of the kaiako is a complex one, and that overly controlling children's

experiences can limit their participation and contribution. However, this author also recognises that kaiako do play crucial roles in guiding the learning of tamariki. The kaiako participating in this research have reflected deeply on the power relationships that can occur within teaching and learning, and strive to honour the ideas of tamariki, working theories, and interpretations as a core aspect of their shared inquiries.

Phase Two, in particular, has highlighted that inquiry-based project approaches have created space for kaiako to embody ako (where teaching and learning are reciprocal) as they have found ways to position themselves alongside tamariki, learning local histories and deepening their knowledge of te ao Māori together. The findings to date indicate that inquiry-based learning approaches can address some of the challenges of meeting the bicultural intent of *Te Whāriki* (2017) related to partnership with whānau, as raised by Ritchie (2016). Ritchie points out that past attempts to partner with whānau Māori have been hampered by a lack of understanding of te ao Māori – the Māori world, language and culture. A powerful aspect of inquiry-based project approaches is that they invite whānau collaboration in the building of knowledge.

We argue that this approach provides both a shared focus and sense of purpose that every member of the learning community can contribute to each day. This is significant given the complex challenges both families and the early childhood sector are currently navigating. We have discovered that the impact of prioritising whanaungatanga and collaboration within inquiry results in unhurried time for tamariki to explore and develop working theories together, and kaiako who observe closely in order to respond sensitively and pedagogically to the ideas of tamariki. As a result, both tamariki and kaiako experience an environment of sustained focus, wellbeing and empowerment.

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AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION LENS ON THE PRACTICE OF REFLECTION IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

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ABSTRACT

Reflection is a well-researched concept in the field of education. However, the authors find the book resources are limited in terms of current practice in early childhood education (ECE) within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. With the aim to develop a book chapter at a later stage, the authors conducted a literature review to understand the concept of reflection in teaching. The review has significance as it revealed unique concepts of reflection within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand for the sector of early childhood education. Informit was used and an advanced search was carried out between 2017 and 2022. About 40 peer-reviewed full-text articles were found. The articles were then reviewed to understand the nature and value of documented reflection. The themes that emerged from the literature search were related to 1) theories and professional development; 2) domain knowledge; 3) practice of kaiako (teachers); and 4) ECE settings. The findings from these four categories are discussed with a critical lens to indicate areas that could be important in the day-to-day practice of a kaiako, and to suggest including voices that may be missing in the current literature. The article also emphasises the importance of taking the reflections beyond an educational setting.

KEYWORDS

Practice reflection, early childhood education, teaching practice, self-analysis

BACKGROUND

"E kore au e ngaro, he kākano ahau i ruia mai i Rangiātea."
"I can never be lost. I am a seed sown from Rangiātea."
(Elder, 2020, p.105)

This whakataukī reminds us that all of us are growing, and kaiako potential is upheld in self-discovery. Their journey is grounded in their belonging. If kaiako are to grow from their present state, they must use reflection as a tool. Many highly regarded researchers have written about the need for kaiako to reflect on their thinking and practice (Brookfield, 1995; O'Connor & Diggins, 2002; Broadley & Fagan, 2010; Brock, 2015; McNaughton & Williams, 2009). Reflection can be seen as a process of self-analysis within the many contexts that we live in. As individuals, reflection can be a spontaneous process of looking back and thinking on events. For kaiako, it is more than that; they are directed to consider reflection as a tool for improvement.

Te Whāriki, the early childhood education bicultural curriculum, was developed in 1996, and has a section on reflection that continues in the second edition (Ministry of Education, 1996; 2017). Following the first publication of *Te Whāriki* there was discourse around quality in early childhood education (e.g., Dahlberg et al., 1999) that led to an emphasis on reflection to progress teaching practice. In addition, the emergence of a private sector in early childhood education in Aotearoa escalated the need for kaiako to be self-reflective. Furthermore, internal review from the Education Review Office (2020; 2021), the Ministry of Education (2009) and the Education Council (2017) compels early childhood kaiako to keep their practice current, purposeful and meaningful. This leads to the early childhood education sector engaging with the concept of intentional teaching, in which reflection is a tool of change.

As researchers and kaiako, we found a dearth of contextualised literature to support ourselves and student kaiako in the initial teacher education programme we teach on. We wanted to examine the perspectives of kaiako, researchers and students who are empowered by reflection within the special context of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. We believe they have the stories that can enhance our understanding about the living discourse on reflection in early childhood education.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is largely a kōrero (discussion) on a background search of the topic of reflection. The authors have conducted previous research on reflection within the teacher education context (Afrin, 2017; 2021; 2022; 2023). A deeper look into the cultural components of tertiary early childhood environments revealed significant data that is relevant to the current practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. Within the early childhood education settings, such information on using cultural knowledge acquired from the people and by the people can be collated in future research. With a plan to write a book chapter on reflection to yield a contextualised picture of current practice, the authors initiated their journey with a literature review. A literature review is a critical analysis of related literature that is relevant to a particular field of study (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). The aim of the literature review here is to integrate and summarise what is known (Mutch, 2013).

Amongst the many databases available, the authors chose Informit to explore the existing research. The rationale behind using this particular database was with the purpose of looking into studies on reflection conducted in the milieu of Aotearoa New Zealand. The aim of the literature review was:

- To identify the trends in research on reflection within the chosen context.
- To uncover any gaps in research on reflection.

Within the selected database, the researchers used three keywords to find articles. These were 'reflection', 'teaching' and 'early childhood'. The search was narrowed down to the period between 2017 and 2022. Only peer-reviewed full-text articles were selected. A total of 42 articles was found. Two of them were disregarded by the authors as they were from different disciplines, social work and English-language teaching. The chosen 40 articles were examined by the authors in line with the study aims mentioned above.

FINDINGS

The findings showed emerging themes that were categorised by the authors into two broad sections with a few subsections. These are:

1. Theories and practice:
    - Theories of reflection
    - Kaiako practice and professional development
2. Knowledge and learning:
    - Domain knowledge
    - ECE settings

One limitation of this literature review is that many articles are about the Australian context, and there remains a paucity of Aotearoa-context research into reflection in early childhood education.

THEORIES AND PRACTICE

This section summarises the commonly used theories in the existing literature of reflection and the practices that these reflections are linked to. Many of the articles show the common practice of using European-dominated theories to reflect. For example, Vygotsky's and Gardner's ideas are often referred to by the participating kaiako. Vygotsky suggests that knowledge is transmitted from more knowledgeable others to the individual in a social and cultural context (Berk, 2007). Gardner suggests that at least eight independent intelligences exist in the individual, which can be assessed through culturally valued activities (Berk, 2007). Both theorists see the child as an individual (Berk, 2007). Within the literature, an emerging counternarrative to these European theoretical frameworks is noted. Some literature places learning as a dynamic relationship between more knowledgeable others and the tamariki (children) (Werry et al., 2021). Werry et al. (2021) describe a multi-perspective approach to assessment known as tau utuutu. This is an Indigenous whaikorero (following the threads of the previous speaker) tikanga (Māori custom) allowing tamariki and whānau (extended family) voices to be included in the assessment process (Werry et al., 2021). This inclusion enables deeper critical reflection on tamariki learning and results in a profound shift in pedagogy (Werry et al., 2021). Professional dialogue between colleagues within the early childhood environment can follow the same process. This allows the development of a shared understanding, acknowledgement of multiple ideas, deeper self-assessment and more meaningful change. The practice of tau utuutu can illuminate these dialogues, suggesting a new theoretical lens for the practice of reflection. A real-life example emerged from a conversation between the authors in 2023:

> *A kaiako who asserted the 'no toys from home' policy without considering the tamaiti's emotional circumstances created a problem for the tamaiti. The whānau challenged the rule and explained the importance of her tamaiti having a particular toy from home. Applying the tau ututu process the kaiako reflected on her personal position and acknowledged that the tamaiti's circumstances required a more responsive and flexible policy. The policy was duly updated to allow tamaiti to bring emotionally important objects from home. Using traditional reflection methods might not have achieved this holistic response.*

Knowledge and learning

Reflective practice is seen as important, especially in the initial years of teaching (Ramjanh, 2022). Researchers suggest that philosophical thought allows us to view things less reactively and to balance our energy and manage stress (Ramjanh, 2022). This can occur by aligning our beliefs and our actions (Ramjanh, 2022). Reflection is a cycle that requires an intentional act and a deep look at one's values and beliefs behind pedagogy (O'Connor & Diggins, 2002). Pedagogy is analysed in relation to theory (Broadley & Fagan, 2010). The process of reflective practice enables the remaking of knowledge, and the shifting of understanding (Brock, 2015).

Considering the complexity of experiences involved in teaching, reflection on sensitive issues widens the kaiako's scope of practice (Brock, 2015). For example, whether kaiako should touch children, when is it appropriate and when is it not (Johansson et al., 2018).

In addition, play-based learning was investigated, looking at the dynamic relationship between kaiako and tamariki (Hesterman & Targowaska, 2020). This research identified several enablers and barriers to learning through critical reflection (Hesterman & Targowaska, 2020). The enablers to kaiako learning include supportive leadership, a shared philosophy, access to inspirational professional development, and participation in reflective practice. The barriers to kaiako learning are the rise of standardised testing, increased expectations of what children's achievement should be, focus on direct instruction, and lack of knowledge at the leadership level on the importance of play (Hesterman & Targowaska, 2020).

When an early childhood kaiako reflects, not only does it influence her or his pedagogy, but it influences the way domain knowledge is integrated in the curriculum. Reflection adds to the learning in dynamic relationships between the kaiako and the infants, toddlers and young children, and other members of the learning community. This dynamic relationship reveals the complex thoughts involved in the teaching–learning whāriki. Acknowledging barriers is integral to the success of this whāriki. A safe relationship enables risk taking and thought changing.

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

The gaps in the literature here do not represent real shortcomings in the study of reflection. We aim to suggest areas that are not currently evident and could be investigated further.

If we are considering the gaps in the research, then literature notes that domain knowledge for science and arts are reflected on (for example Wright, 2019), but social science also needs to be investigated and reflected on. One of the other areas of research could be to identify reflective practices in various settings with different philosophical paradigms. As the findings show, the relevant literature on reflection is conducted mostly in the early years of teaching, a gap here could be to investigate the reflective practice of experienced kaiako. While it is important in the early years to build the foundation of teaching, it is also important in the experienced years to challenge the pedagogy shift that may have occurred over the years.

The findings reveal how little has been investigated in terms of researching and portraying the local culture of reflection by ECE kaiako. There is scope to investigate further so that ECE kaiako in Aotearoa New Zealand can see that their voices are represented in the literature. While the study conducted here is based on secondary data only, this knowledge can be enriched with primary data that the authors plan to gather.

CRITICAL LENS KŌRERO

In the evolution of reflective practice in Aotearoa, the value of the local context has become more relevant. Initial teacher education providers are grappling with this complexity and are seeking resources and thoughts about the critical aspects of reflective practice. The authors hope to contribute to the use of critical lenses in early childhood education.

Despite the limitation of this study being a literature review only, it leads to several queries about kaiako practice that are thought provoking. The process of the review has led us to consider the emerging questions below.

Are we being reflective on our own hauora?

The purpose of reflection is to improve teaching. If we believe that we teach who we are (Palmer, 1998), we need to be reflective of our own hauora and wellbeing. Gibbons et al. (2021) show that kaiako and/or student teachers often place the least importance on their own hauora. Initial teacher education (ITE) providers need to be mindful of this and provide more responsive support for student teachers' hauora during their studies (Gibbons et al., 2021). The complexity of students and their situations adds another dimension previously not considered by ITE providers (Gibbons et al., 2021). This leads us back to the need for reflective practice that allows students to care for their own hauora.

What motivates reflection?

Reflection that is done because of internal motivation can have a long-term impact on the individual. However, if reflection occurs due to the requirements of a quality-assurance processes, or other external factors, it can be less meaningful. Every action is more effective with internal motivation; reflection, too, creates more impact when it is related to an individual's own aspiration to do things better or differently. As found under the section Knowledge and Learning in this paper, it can be implied that with the internally motivated reflection, kaiako can align their values, beliefs and actions.

Are we encouraging others to engage in reflective practice?

Early childhood education is a place where many individuals work together to create a group (Afrin, 2017). This collectivist idea of existence in which we work together to achieve a goal might be true for any social setting but is prominent in early childhood educational settings. Communication, sharing and having a kōrero based on one's

own critical thinking can support others to be reflective. An example of this can be a thought that carries on with individuals after listening to a kōrero.

After sharing our thoughts in the Unitec/MIT Research Symposium 2022, we received an email (dated 10 December 2022) from a fellow academic that is a great example of how talking about our practice motivates others too:

> Tēnā Koe Tahera,
>
> I wanted to say how much I enjoyed your and Pauline's presentation on Reflective Practice. This is a subject I am quite passionate about. One thing that I have been reflecting on from your presentation is the phrase "a tool to challenge and question." I have been thinking about how to strengthen the students' skills in reflective practice, especially about the changes in their thinking, and I think this phrase is the 'hook' I have been searching for. It certainly made some areas of the process easier to explain. I have been thinking/reflecting on this since you mentioned it.
>
> I hope next time we meet there will be a space for a chat about what you have been finding out.
>
> Ngā mihi,
> Jo

While we encourage the student teachers to set up provocations for learning, provocative thoughts amongst ourselves can lead to reflective thoughts and actions.

Are we open to accepting diverse opinions when reflecting?

Reflection sometimes tends to be limited by our own ways, thoughts and beliefs, and any evidence confirming these. We often purposefully ignore contradictory evidence. However, to get the benefit of reflective practice in achieving professional growth and development, it is important to be curious about the contradictory evidence pointing to others' beliefs, values and opinions. The new version of *Te Whāriki*, the ECE curriculum, emphasises the need for teachers to be 'intentional' (McLachlan, 2018). One of our intentions could be to find out what challenges us, alongside the experiences we provide for tamariki that extend their funds of knowledge. When our intentions are child led, we are already practicing accepting the opinions of others.

An anecdote (2 March 2022) from one of the authors is noted below to portray a reflective thought about current practice within the tertiary context of an early childhood teacher education classroom:

> *I had a class this morning, and as usual finished the class with a karakia timatanga. I showed the karakia on the slide and recited it. All the students stood up, but no one joined in. Once I had finished, the students asked, "Could you please do it slow next time so that we can join in?" I said, "Okay, let us do it again. Slow this time." Led by one of our Māori students, the class imbued the karakia coherently, in the most beautiful way that had a spiritually lifted echo.*
>
> *I have read a number of articles, completed several courses, and listened to a few podcasts (e.g., iheart, 2021) on te reo Māori. I always thought when others do the karakia, it sounds amazing. When I do it, even after learning it by heart, it does not sound spiritual at all! I assumed it was more of a connection issue. As an immigrant teacher educator in Aotearoa New Zealand, I probably do not have the required relatedness with this tikanga of karakia. After this class, when the students taught me to slow down and say it, I learnt it was the pace and speed that I used to say the karakia. The saying of it very fast was not fitting the purpose.*
>
> *For future practice, I will be aware of learning that comes with the right pace, tone and speed, to which I never paid any attention before.*

This example shows how reflection is a tool to include and apply other perspectives so that one can understand and internalise one's own learning.

Are we making cultural connections while reflecting?

Reflection on teaching can hardly be separated from the cultural components of teaching. However, if the cultural lenses are not purposefully explored, there is a possibility for us to be dominated by the existing hegemony. That is why it is important to consider and make an effort to reflect on the way lecturers present resources, assess and organise sessions for their student teachers (Afrin, 2017). Similarly, early childhood kaiako need to be reflecting on how, and also why, to engage with cultural components of the context they work in (Afrin, 2022).

Are we taking the time to think more about tamariki who need that bit extra?

The early childhood curriculum is a document that promotes the holistic wellbeing of tamariki. One of the features pointed out in the development of the newer version of *Te Whāriki* is to consider responsiveness of diverse tamariki and their varying learning needs (McLachlan, 2018). Tamariki with additional needs are included in the aspiration of *Te Whāriki* being "an inclusive curriculum – a curriculum for all children (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 13)." As kaiako, we need to ask ourselves if we are willing to do that extra to provide opportunities for tamariki who otherwise might not thrive. We can ask ourselves how much we are doing to celebrate that child and his or her resilience. As kaiako we are often busy managing behaviour rather than celebrating children's individuality. The resilience embedded in their survival can be observed and reflected on (Afrin, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Reflection is a tool to improve teaching, but it can also be a tool to challenge and bring changes to the conventional practices of early childhood education. Our commitment to the profession indicates that ako (teaching and learning) that goes on within the educational setting has an influence on society. "As teachers, we respect our trusted position in society and recognise the influence we have on learners, their understanding of the world and the future wellbeing of our society" (Education Council, 2017, p. 1).

The recognition of this influence must come from reflection on our society and must not be limited to reflection on learner engagement or learner success. Engaging in reflective practice may be seen as a journey that starts from the setting to improve outcomes in terms of teaching and learning but reaches maturity when it is a tool for challenging and bringing changes in society.

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"WE ARE NOT ALL THE SAME BUT THAT'S OKAY." CREATING UNDERSTANDING OF PEDAGOGICAL CHANGES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PRACTICUM THROUGH COLLABORATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines research examining the impact of a reconceptualised approach to practicum for the newly reaccredited Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Teaching) at Manukau Institute of Technology | Te Pūkenga. In alignment with the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand's (2019) requirements for initial teacher education providers, which emphasise the need for new graduates to be able to clearly articulate their practice, the ECE team at MIT developed a new approach that situates the student teacher more strongly at the centre of the practicum. This research aimed to examine first how the Visiting Lecturers on the BEd (ECT) teaching team interpreted this new approach in their practice, and second to examine the process of negotiating shared understandings for the whole team. Finally, it aimed to understand the impact of these changes on student teachers' learning and their ability to articulate their professional knowledge.

The research took a sociocultural, ethnographic methodological approach. The Visiting Lecturers were invited to two focus-group conversations and the student teachers were invited to respond to an anonymous online survey. The findings from the focus groups revealed that the team have diverse understandings of their roles and how to approach the assessment of students' practice. The need for further development of shared language and understandings surrounding this new approach was made apparent. Interestingly, whilst the focus groups revealed a need for further clarity, the student teachers' survey responses revealed that this new approach has empowered and supported them to better understand the assessment of practice criteria and articulate their pedagogical decisions to others. The research is ongoing; however, the findings from 2022 demonstrate that making shifts in practice and developing new pedagogical approaches in collaborative contexts is a complex, tangled process that needs time to develop. The findings also show that, through repositioning the student at the centre of the practicum, students are much better equipped to take ownership for the development of their professional knowledge.

KEYWORDS

Student teaching practicum, initial teacher education

BACKGROUND

Practicum is at the core of field-based initial teacher education programmes (ITPs). Aspden (2017) suggests that it represents the interface between the theory taught in classrooms and the practical skills learned in working with children. Stenberg et al. (2016) support this view and highlight that "practicum studies during teacher education are considered as particularly important in enhancing theory–practice reflection" (p. 471). Creating a strong link between theory and practice means, as Coombes and Downey (2014) assert, that student teachers have the opportunity to experience the messy and complex nature of early childhood teaching out of which they create their practice with children. Gibbons et al. (2018) suggest that practicum is one of the most influential aspects in determining the quality of initial teacher education. Stover (2019), however, goes further, by saying "student teaching practicum is a key aspect of initial teacher education (ITE) and is pivotal in determining progress towards the status of qualified professional teacher" (p. 14).

This paper outlines research examining the impact of a reconceptualised approach to practicum for the newly reaccredited Bachelor of Education (ECT) at Manukau Institute of Technology | Te Pūkenga (MIT) in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. In alignment with the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand's (2019) requirements for initial teacher education providers, which emphasise the need for new graduates to be able to clearly articulate their practice in terms of their understanding and commitment to the Standards and Code for the Profession (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2017), the ECE team at MIT developed a new approach that situates the student teacher more strongly at the centre of the practicum. As part of this, a set of Key Teaching Tasks (KTTs) was also developed. Key teaching tasks are fundamental tasks that graduating teachers should be equipped to perform independently on graduating. A selection of KTTs became the criteria for each practicum. These are organised in such a way that each KTT is assessed multiple times over the three-year span of the degree programme.

Throughout the programme, students experience a series of placements in a range of different centres. During these placements, students are supported to develop new knowledge and to increase their experience with children. Throughout the duration of each placement, the Associate Teacher (AT) (or mentor, placement teacher) supports the student in their learning journey. Near the conclusion of the placement, their institution-based Visiting Lecturer (VL) observes their practice and then a conversation takes place between the VL, AT and student, known as the 'triadic'. It is at this meeting that it is decided whether the student has sufficiently demonstrated their ability to meet each assessment of practice criterion. Whilst the intent of this approach is to empower all three parties to play equal roles, the interplay of the complex system of relationships and the variables that can occur in each unique placement mean that this is not always the case.

At MIT, previous research (Perry & Probine, 2020) resulted in a reconceptualisation and realignment of this approach into a stronger sociocultural framework of co-constructed learning. This framework has three underpinning ideas. First, the class teacher of the practicum class begins teaching the practicum requirements earlier in the semester to focus the student on the relevant areas of their practice and co-constructs understanding with the student. This includes relating their reflections to multiple elements of the Standards and Code documents by the culmination of their programme of study (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2017). Second, a pre-visit between the student and the Visiting Lecturer before the practicum starts means relationships can begin as well as support be given in setting goals for the practicum. Third, the team developed a reflective framework document (the Assessment of Practice Framework) that the student can use before the triadic to reflect and record what they know about each of the assessment of practice criteria. This includes examples of how they demonstrate each criterion in their practice, and what has been significant for them in relation to each. For example: have they experienced challenges, do they have questions, are there goals they would like to set in the future to grow this area of practice? This strong sociocultural framework means the student teacher continues to be repositioned to lead the triadic assessment meeting by explaining how they feel they have met the practicum criteria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions

Practicum is the part of initial teacher education where theory and practice come together to support the development of professional, practical knowledge (Aspden, 2014; 2017; Coombes & Downey, 2014; Russell, 2017). As the student teacher's knowledge and experience increase, the interface between theory in the classroom and practice in early childhood centres should become more seamless, as they are connected and reconnected in the professional communities in which they work with children and other teachers (Guevara, 2020). Nguyen (2020) describes the practicum as a place where theoretical, academic knowledge and practical knowledge are drawn together in the student's practice. His research suggests that when the institution-based lecturer plays a bigger part in the practicum the two sets of knowledge are blended more easily as the institution-based lecturers act as 'connectors' (p. 34) for students. Shabani (2016) supports this view. He discusses the implications of Vygotsky's theory of development being situated in the interactions between more and less knowledgeable others. These ideas are situated in the notion that learning is co-constructed socially. In other words, learning is a social event

situated in what Guevara (2020) calls "arenas of struggle" (p. 446) as students develop their understanding of what it means to be a professional teacher.

Learning from others and the environment: Personal efficacy

In practicum placements, the Associate Teacher (AT) (or mentor, placement teacher) supports the student in developing new knowledge through a series of placements in a range of different centres to increase their experience with children. Johnson et al. (2017) suggest that students' experience of practice with children influences their ideas about their own efficacy as a teacher. This makes their understanding of their relationship with their AT crucial, as this relationship can change the way they see themselves as teachers. McConnell (2011) suggests that this emphasis on personal teaching and learning gives the AT and student teacher, both individually and in teams, the opportunity to continuously improve their approaches to working with children. This focus empowers students to experience the complexity and messiness of teaching in rich, real-world experiences (Havlik et al., 2019).

The complex role of the visiting lecturer

Learning on practicum is, at its core, a relational experience where the student receives an interpretation of their practice not just from their AT, but also from their Visiting Lecturer (VL). Whilst both these parties draw upon their professional knowledge and experience of teaching to guide the student, this is important to note that this is a subjective process where "knowledge, attitudes, values and reflective ability … are inferred not seen" (Ortlipp, 2009, p. 158).

The role of the VL is particularly complex (Aspden, 2014). Sigley et al. (2017) argue that the VL must have sufficient theoretical knowledge, understanding of the assessment of practice criteria, the capacity to promote cultural competency, and an understanding of the student themselves. Bradbury and Koballa (2008) view the VL as a mediator, whose role is to create a bridge between the expectations of the institution and the early childhood setting. McDonald (2014) supports this view, arguing that it is the VL that supports all three parties to form productive relationships. Aspden (2014) highlights that this is particularly important during the triadic discussion, where the VL must negotiate the potential challenges that may arise when not all parties agree.

Given the multifaceted nature of the VL's role, it is surprising that often VLs receive little training on this aspect of their role. VLs may be working in the field of teacher education or can be experts working in the field who conduct student visits via a contract basis. Dayan (2008) points out that VLs are often former teachers themselves, so may lack experience working in a mentoring role with adult learners. He further argues that "the practicum supervisory role is not well defined by educational institutions, and that new supervisors receive insufficient instruction in their duties" (p. 155). A lack of training can result in VLs being left to conceptualise their own roles.

Aspden (2014) argues that little research has interrogated the practices of VLs. Dayan's (2008) research is a unique example. He identified three differing orientations that VLs lean towards when assessing a student's practice, noting that they can be activity oriented, child oriented, or student oriented. When there is not a clearly articulated framework for practice, underpinned by theory, the VL's practice is based on individual ideas, experiences, and philosophy (Dayan, 2008).

Developing professional knowledge of the VL: Collaborative reflection as a tool to develop shared understandings

Dayan (2008) argues that there is need for better clarity around the role of the VL. He developed a framework for VLs to interrogate their practice, arguing that VLs need to engage in "ongoing reflection on one's actions … promoting democratic relationships" and "constructing new knowledge for practice" (p. 156). Dayan, who takes a humanistic–democratic stance, believes these three foci can enable VLs to reflect on the potential power imbalances that can occur as they negotiate the complexities of being both mentor and assessor of a student's practice. Both Grudnoff and Williams (2010) and Sigley et al. (2017) also highlight the importance of ongoing

reflection surrounding the VL's role. Grudnoff and Williams (2010) suggest that all parties within practicum should assume the position of co-learners alongside the student teacher.

Sigley et al. (2017) found, through engaging in their research, that the act of reflective dialogue as a group of VLs became an important space for new conceptions and meanings around the role of the VL to be generated. These authors argue that "visiting lecturers' work is complex and utilises specialised knowledge and skills. Creating more opportunities for professional discussion and reflective learning cycles amongst lecturers could focus and strengthen lecturers' intentions and strategies, resulting in enhanced practice experiences for students" (Sigley et al., 2017, p. 6). A recommendation resulting from this research is a need for further opportunities for VLs to form communities of learning and to engage in continuous reflective cycles.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

As the ECE team at MIT began to socialise the newly designed practicum, the researchers were curious to hear the stories of the experiences of the VLs and students on practicum. The theoretical framework underpinning the study was informed by sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1962). These theories position knowledge as subjective and contextualised, situated in place and time. In a sociocultural paradigm, knowledge is co-constructed through a complex series of social interactions (Jordan, 2009). Both the student and the teacher (in this case, the VL) in this process are recognised for the knowledge and skills they have developed through their prior experiences and, as such, can each learn from each other. Knight (2008) describes this positioning as "a shift from the teacher as the sole repository of knowledge, to a position that acknowledges individual and cultural identity" (p. 39). These ideas aligned with the new framework for practice, and informed the researchers' interest in the way the participants learned from each other, and their interest in the impact culture and language have on the practicum process across time.

At the same time, to be able to cast a wide net for data about this, ethnography was deemed an appropriate methodology. Coffey (2018) describes ethnography as a way "to understand social and cultural worlds" (p. 2). The study involved two focus-group discussions with the teaching team and one anonymous survey for student teachers as they completed practicum. The focus groups were partly online and partly face to face as workloads precluded everyone being in the same place at the same time. Each discussion was recorded and transcribed, and then thematically analysed to look for similarities and differences. VLs' responses were also anonymised, and each teacher was given a numerical identifier (Teachers 1–8).

The student survey consisted of four questions:

- What are your thoughts about the practicum you have just completed?
- What are your thoughts about the triadic meeting in that practicum?
- What are your thoughts on the Assessment of Practice Framework document?
- How prepared for the practicum, in terms of classroom teaching, understanding of the criteria and the assessment, did you feel?

The anonymous surveys were also thematically analysed to identify similarities and unexpected responses, as well as noting the depth and comprehensive nature of a participant's responses to particular questions (Eckerdal & Hagström, 2017).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity recognises the need to explain the personal values, beliefs and assumptions of researchers who are also participants. In this project it was important to acknowledge that both researchers had experiences of practicum and triadic visits. These previous experiences and understanding of what practicum is and how it should

be approached coloured their views, how they described their experiences in the new practicum and how they interpreted what others said in the focus-group meetings.

FINDINGS

The Visiting Lecturers

Diverse understandings about the role of the Visiting Lecturer

The findings from both focus groups revealed that the team have diverse understandings of their roles. Each had their own perspectives on how to approach the assessment of students' practice and described the diverse ways they adapt their practice to better support the students' needs at the time. The wide variety of interpretations of their roles was evident from their descriptions of the triadic and through the questions they asked each other. For example, Teacher 8 commented on how differently others had described their experiences compared to her approach:

> *"I was thinking about how I facilitate the triadic and it's so interesting, as it's so different from what everyone else was describing."* (FG 2, Teacher 8)

Whereas Teacher 1 asked for clarification about the student focus and what others thought:

> *"So, the whole purpose is that at the end they are able to stand up and articulate their practice, is that right?"* (FG 1, Teacher 1)

Teacher 2 offered explanation of the way the triadic was organised during their visits:

> *"I guess I'm sort of fairly similar between the two. I usually start off again with sort of explaining that this is the chance for the student to … share their voice basically first. I invite the Associate Teacher to contribute at any stage, but I don't actually bring them in right at the start."* (FG 2, Teacher 2)

The need for shared language

A second finding that arose from the focus-group discussions is that there was a need for further development of a shared language to describe each of the new elements of the practicum. This was particularly evident in Focus Group One. It was clear that there was a desire from the teaching team for clarification surrounding the rituals and routines of practicum. Some of these practices were well established; however, some were new. For example, the process of the visit, which now included an initial meeting with the student, how the triadic was managed, and the evolving role of each of the participants were all new elements. Each of these rituals and routines includes ways of doing things, creating a particular tone for these events. As the VLs discussed these different elements, the conversation became focused on creating agreements about what each new element would be called. Whilst the VLs acknowledged that they each had a unique approach to their role, a desire for shared understandings also became apparent. For example, Teacher 3 said:

> *"However, we need to consider the languaging we are using. Obviously, we are being quite clear about the key teaching tasks, but it's different to what we have used in the past, which is the Assessment of Practice. I have noticed this, doing visits, either we need to be more explicit and intentional drawing on the KTTs as the assessment of practice criteria or we need to be clear about the language we are using with students. I don't know if anyone else has found the same?"* (FG 1, Teacher 3)

The student survey

The student survey comprised four questions, which were designed to ascertain the impact of each of the new elements of the reconceptualised approach. Students were invited to comment on their impressions of the overall experience of practicum, the triadic discussion, the assessment of practice framework and finally, how prepared they felt prior to practicum.

Question One: The overall practicum experience

Interestingly, whilst the focus groups revealed a need for further clarity, the student teachers' survey responses reported that this new approach has empowered and supported them to better understand the assessment of practice criteria and articulate their pedagogical decisions to others. For example, one student wrote:

> *"It was a great experience that allowed me to be in an environment that was completely new. This practicum definitely got me thinking about my philosophy, my beliefs and what I believe children need in order to maximise their learning."*

Another commented on the value of the Assessment of Practice Framework:

> *"It was awesome having the Assessment of Practice Framework, I was able to prepare for the triadic meeting well for it."*

Students also noted how the practicum experience supported the interaction between theoretical and practical learning, one noting:

> *"I found it really valuable, and I felt it gave me the opportunity to apply my course learning to my practice."*

Question Two: The triadic

The student responses indicated that the new approach to the triadic discussion had been valuable for their learning and growth. For example, one student commented:

> *"I was very confident in my triadic, I had a lot of deep discussion with my AT and my VL regarding the teaching criteria and the practice framework prior to the meeting, because I have formed a relationship with both of them; therefore, the meeting was a safe place for me to reflect on my practice and unpack things I didn't see or know before. I think it was important for me, to have a VL that respects me and my practice. Being able to lead the meeting was very empowering and fun."*

Another noted:

> *"Again, I found this very valuable, as it opens up my eyes to many positive and quality parts of my practice that my VL and AT observe in my practice, which I don't realise I'm doing. It really is a positive opportunity."*

One student commented on the value of receiving an external point of view:

> *"I thought it gave me more of an idea of receiving feedback from someone outside of my centre on how I am in my teaching practice. I was able to get a view on what I did well and what I needed to work on."*

Question Three: The Assessment of Practice Framework

This question focused on the Assessment of Practice Framework, which was developed to support students to reflect on their practice both prior to and during their practicum. The framework encourages students to reflect on and record what they already know about each of the assessment of practice criteria, stories from practice that demonstrate their understanding and growth, and finally to think about what they have learned and what they would like to focus on next.

Similar to questions one and two, the feedback was very positive. For example, one student noted:

> *"Highly valued! I used it from day one. I also used it to guide my discussion during my evidence presentation. Definitely helped me to strengthen my understanding of the Codes and Standards."*

And another wrote:

> *"I believe it is useful for evaluating your own practice and the practice of others, and then making positive changes to it for the future."*

Students also noted the value of the framework to support their triadic discussion. For example, one student wrote:

> *"I used the Practice Framework in my meeting, it allowed me to talk about the criteria that the VL didn't see during the observation. I attached pictures as evidence for her to see, it was very helpful."*

Question Four: Preparation for practicum

This final question invited students to give feedback on how prepared they felt they were for practicum in terms of classroom teaching, understanding of the criteria and the assessment. Corresponding to the responses to the first three questions, again, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. For example, one student commented on their theoretical knowledge supporting them to recognise children's working theories:

> *"Very prepared. The knowledge and theories helped me to understand why the children do what they do. Understanding their working theories."*

And another commented on how classroom activities supported them to understand the criteria:

> *"I was well prepared for the practicum because my lecturer explained by giving us group work, where we students did our part, but because of my lecturer's explanations, I came to better understand."*

DISCUSSION

Making space for collaborative dialogue and reflection

The VL focus-group conversations revealed that the VLs were drawing from their previous experiences of practicum as they made sense of the new approach. Drawing only from previous experiences can create some challenges, particularly when there are new elements and practices that need to be comprehended. The focus-group discussions also revealed that there is a need to agree on some of the language of the new approach in order to be more consistent.

In alignment with the literature, the focus groups revealed the complexity of the VL's role (Aspden, 2014; Bradbury & Koballa, 2008; Dayan, 2008; McDonald, 2014; Sigley et al., 2017). It also became evident, in alignment with Dayan's (2008) research, that each VL's approach to practicum and the assessment of students' practice was strongly grounded in their own philosophy, beliefs and values. In this, they had each individually, in some cases over many years, spent time developing, reflecting on, and refining their approaches. The focus group-discussions, in alignment with Sigley et al.'s (2017) research, were therefore particularly helpful as they provided as space to listen and tell stories of practice, and, in doing so, make better sense of some of the new ideas. They created a space for collaborative dialogue, reflection and discussion. Dayan (2008) argues that:

> The meaning of being professional in practicum supervision is to find the best way in which students, teachers and supervisors can engage in a democratic process of deliberation and discussion, aimed at advancing professionalism in early childhood education … Understanding the complexity of professional knowledge and practice is an important step for all practitioners wishing to improve the quality of their practice. (p. 156)

Dayan's (2008) words are a reminder that the VL is also a reflective practitioner, and that collaborative dialogue and reflection is an important means of co-constructing new understandings about this role, and developing professional knowledge and practice. These ideas align with the theoretical foundation of the new practicum, which

is more strongly grounded in socio-cultural theory that asserts that people learn from each other and from the shared language they develop (Christiansen et al., 2021; Huann-shyang et al., 2013).

The interplay between shared understandings and differing interpretations of the new approach

Aspden (2014) argues that "responses to practicum assessment are challenging as they must attend to the institutional and regulatory context, the participants' core beliefs and identity, and the interpersonal relationships that are unique to each triad" (p. 322). A question that arose from the focus-group conversations was: What level of consistency is required in the VL's interpretations of the new approach? These conversations revealed that the practices and processes of practicum are quite different for each VL. These practices reflected their different experiences and world views, as well as responding to the particular context and individual student. Whilst at first this created a degree of uncertainty and uneasiness within the group, as the conversations progressed, it became clear that the new approach itself, which is strongly grounded in socio-cultural theories, provides a framework and each VL can position themselves somewhere on the continuum within that framework, continuously adapting their practices in order to better meet the needs of the student at the time and to support their learning.

An effective approach – Deepening students' pedagogical understanding

The student survey was overwhelmingly positive in its responses. The student responses indicated that the new approach supported them to develop a better relationship with their VL. The development of the Assessment of Practice Framework, and the work undertaken prior to practicum, particularly in unpacking the criteria, allowed students to better understand both what was expected of them and their own practice. This finding aligns with Nguyen (2020) and Shabani (2016), who assert that greater input from the institution-based lecturer can deepen students' knowledge and understanding of practice. Again, in alignment with the literature, students valued the way practicum allowed them to think more deeply about how their theoretical and content knowledge applied to their practice, as well as to make new connections (Aspden, 2017; Nguyen, 2020; Stenberg et al., 2016). Whilst during the focus-group conversations VLs voiced their surprise about the diversity in approaches within the group, the findings derived from the student survey indicate that they do not view this as an issue. They understand that they are all unique individuals, and that their VLs also have differing ways of helping to meet the students' needs. The survey brought to the fore the discrepancy between the uncertainty the VLs were feeling and the positive experiences the students were reporting on.

CONCLUSION

At the heart of the changes made to practicum in the newest iteration of the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Teaching) was a clear image of the student teachers. They were seen as confident, knowledgeable and able to recognise and articulate their practice and how it connects to the Teaching Standards and Code of Responsibility for teachers in Aotearoa. In alignment with Rorrison's (2010) view, this new approach aims to strengthen the notion that "practicum is viewed not as a testing ground but as a learning experience" (p. 516). Rorrison argues that this is more likely to occur if "it is carefully designed and the learning is not left to chance" (2010, p. 516). The findings derived from the first year of this research indicate that the newly designed approach to practicum is indeed enabling student teachers to develop and deepen their professional knowledge and practice. Through repositioning the student at the centre of the practicum, they are much better equipped to take ownership for the development of their professional knowledge. The findings demonstrate that they can see their growth in understanding their practice with children and their ability to articulate their practice to others.

This research has also demonstrated the value in creating the time and space for Visiting Lecturers to make sense of their practice. We have come to understand that making sense of this new approach, which may require making shifts in practice and developing new pedagogical approaches, is a complex, tangled process that needs time to be developed. Aspden (2014) draws upon Dayan's (2008) research, which asserts that, just as we expect student

teachers to reflect, teacher educators also need to take time to "reflect on and evaluate their approach to determine their pedagogy" (p. 34). In engaging in these self-reflective and collegial interactions, both VLs and student teachers "move beyond simple questions about whether or not their practice is working to understanding how it is working and for whom" (Jay & Johnson, 2002, p. 76).

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INDIGENISATION OF THE NURSING CURRICULUM: PEELING BACK TO REVEAL THE UNSPOKEN

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TUHINGA WHAKARĀPOPOTO / ABSTRACT

Globally, there is an underrepresentation of Indigenous populations in higher education (United Nations, n.d.). The Aotearoa experience by Māori and tagata Pasifika of marginalisation in education is a consequence of a plethora of challenges, hegemonic ideation and strategic assimilation authorised by the government of the day (Smith, 2003). A move in tertiary education, including nursing education, towards indigenised curricula heralds an opportunity to address inequity and structures that have oppressed education experiences for Indigenous peoples. This article prefaces a research project that will investigate how Whitireia | Te Pūkenga has successfully indigenised nursing curricula over the last 17 years. The Bachelor of Nursing Māori (BNM) and Bachelor of Nursing Pacific (BNP) programmes offer unique indigenised curricula with the Bachelor of Nursing (BN) running alongside these programmes to assimilate this new indigenised nursing curriculum approach.

This article focuses on the scoping phase of this research that seeks to demystify, unpack and clarify how the indigenisation of a national nursing curriculum is relational at the local level. Ngāti Toarangatira and hāpori Māori were involved as co-designers, having kuia koroua as consultants in all aspects of the programme life, from decision making, to complaints to marketing to engaging on marae, and the services provided by iwi and hapori Māori. Working in partnership has been successfully achieved, with each programme retaining its autonomy. The heads of each programme are the researchers, who also founded Te Kawenata Tapuhi, which has at its core principles that govern our working relationships that are mana animating. The researchers share the path thus far as part of their poutama, the weaving of a whāriki.

This article and research are a deliberate attempt to provide evidence to support successful indigenisation and to counter the recent ferocious debate that has resulted from this process. This debate has resulted in exposing an underbelly of white fragility (DiAngelo, 2011) and entrenched institutional racism within the leadership and structures of nursing education. This reaction (which lacked any informed discourse nationally or with tāngata whenua and tagata Pasifika[1]) seems to directly oppose the urgency and opportunity for nursing education to lead the way in indigenisation, instead presenting a polarising public debate. The researchers will offer some insights from their experiences of Kawenata that may support the transformation needed throughout all health provision to better meet the health outcomes of their communities. Working under the leadership of tāngata whenua, tagata Pasifika and their allies is critical to success.

"Kua tawhiti kē tō haerenga mai kia kore e haere tonu. He nui rawa ō mahi kia kore e mahi nui tonu."
(Henare, quoted by Kiro, 2022)

KEYWORDS

Bachelor of Nursing Māori, Bachelor of Nursing Pacific, Whitireia | Te Pūkenga, Kawa Whakaruruhau, cultural safety, nursing education

1 Tagata Pasifika is used to describe people of Pacific heritage who live in Aotearoa.

WHAKATAKINGA / INTRODUCTION

"You have come too far not to go further, you have done too much not to do more" is a translation of the above whakatauākī by Sir James Henare, a rangatira of his people from the northern tribes of Ngāti Whātua, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine, Te Rarawa, Ngāti Kahu and Te Aupōuri. This whakatauākī typifies the journey taken by a community college located in a predominately Māori and Pacific community under the kaitiaki (guardianship) of Ngāti Toarangatira, to deliver not one but two Indigenous undergraduate nursing programmes, Bachelor of Nursing Māori and Bachelor of Nursing Pacific. This article is a result of a presentation by the three authors at the Unitec/MIT Research Symposium 2022, which provided some initial insights into three undergraduate nursing programmes co-existing in one institution using a Te Kawenata/Tiriti-based relationship. Te Kawenata Tapuhi was established as the mechanism of governance for addressing managerial accountability, interprofessional relationships, cultural capital and equity. This article covers three areas to reveal the three cornerstones of Te Kawenata: I Mua, I Nāianei and Ā Mua.

- I Mua (past), where we came from, makes the connections related to the sociopolitical context in which the institution evolved; in particular, the two Bachelor of Nursing Indigenous programmes and Te Kawenata.
- I Nāianei (present), where we are now, the mechanism of mauri ki Te Kawenata (essence of Te Kawenata), that connects the three Bachelor of Nursing programmes at an operational and governance level.
- Ā Mua (future), where we are going in education and research as Te Kawenata. Ā Mua also speaks briefly into the space of rangahau (Māori engagement with research), the next stage of this journey of Te Kawenata. Research will reveal the experiences from the indigenisation of a nursing curriculum through the voice of ākonga (students) and kaiako (tutors), in a longitudinal study with the view of what success looks like in an institution, delivering two Indigenous nursing curricula in the spaces of Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) and Pacific.

This research is undertaken within the context of the merging of 16 Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs), including industry and apprenticeship training, into one new system, Te Pūkenga. Te Pūkenga caters to and is driven by the needs of industry, providing more support for their employees as a response to the merger, and ensuring greater consistency in vocational education nationally. One of the key mechanisms to bring about greater consistency in the vocational arena is the process of unification. The undergraduate nursing education arena is one of the professional groups to undergo the transformation. The three new curricula (BNM, BNP and BN) are modelled on the two existing indigenised nursing programmes that have collectively been operating for 33 years, and have been successful in addressing equity and success for tāngata whenua and tagata Pasifika in becoming registered nurses, with an average of 15 tāngata whenua and 25 tagata Pasifika graduates each year. Much can be learned about this success by looking back to demystify where the programmes have come from. Te Kawenata – "You have done too much not to do more."

I Mua (past): Where we came from. Te Kawenata rārangi wā (timeline)

1986 Parumoana College, later renamed Whitireia Community Polytechnic, opens its doors on reclaimed land gifted by Ngāti Toa, to serve the education needs of the community.

1986 The Diploma in Nursing was one of the foundation programmes, led by Jeanette Page.

1992 The Bachelor of Nursing, with a programme philosophy based on Te Tiriti o Waitangi, was approved at Whitireia.

1992 The Nursing Council of New Zealand formally adapted cultural safety as a compulsory component of nursing and nursing education.

2003 The Bachelor of Nursing Pacific was approved.

2009 The Bachelor of Nursing Māori was approved.

2020 The Bachelor of Nursing Māori moved from the School of Health and Social Services to Te Wānanga Māori.

2021 The Bachelor of Nursing Pacific moved from the School of Health and Social Services to Pacific Strategy Group.

2021 Te Kawanata Tapuhi provides a framework for the relationship and way of working between Te Wānanga Māori, Pacific Strategy Group and the School of Health and Social Services.

Parumoana College, later renamed Whitireia Community Polytechnic, was established in the Porirua community in 1986, based on a kawenata between the Crown, local iwi Ngāti Toarangatira and the local community. The community and iwi leaders came together with a shared vision for the establishment of a local polytechnic that would meet the unique needs of their community. Turoa Royal (Ngāti Whanaunga, Ngāti Tamaterā, Ngāti Raukawa) was the founding leader and the first chief executive of a polytechnic who identified as Māori or Indigenous. His philosophy and leadership were focused on ensuring that Whitireia did things "differently but" (Jansen & Scadden, 1996, p. 56). The nursing programme was one of the foundation programmes and was started under the leadership of Māori nursing academic Jeanette Page (Ngāti Mutunga). With these two Māori leaders, the polytechnic was immediately recognised as being unique.

However, in the early 1990s the polytechnic sector was faced with socio-political pressures of managing the competing demands of valuing the cultural capital in the organisation gained from the unique partnership with Manu Whenua and local Pacific community against the economic-capital demands of neoliberalism. The adoption of a neoliberal approach to tertiary education in response to the Todd Report (1994) (McLaughlin, 2003) moved the sector to a user-pays approach, with students contributing up to 50% of course costs. The adoption of neoliberalism and its emphasis on individualism and economic growth resulted in a focus on preparing graduates for the labour market (Bruce et al., 2014). This position was in conflict with the nursing programme's graduate profile outcomes that were preparing graduates who valued collectivism and were able to work in diverse socio-cultural contexts. The neoliberal focus on work-ready graduate preparation created an anti-intellectual rift, with clinicians in industry settings valuing pragmatic skills-based knowledge over the abstract thinking that is favoured in the academic environment.

At the same time, polytechnics were given the same authority as universities to offer nursing degrees. The acceptance of this move was still being challenged by university academics, who were the decision-makers sitting on the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) approval panel. The Whitireia-proposed Bachelor of Nursing programme was initially declined approval for degree status. The degree-approval process was a traumatic experience for the staff involved, who found their capability as educators being questioned. Only two of the teaching team held completed master's qualifications at the time, and they were interrogated in relation to the credibility of their qualifications and educational expertise, on the basis of having studied overseas. The curriculum and its philosophy were challenged on the grounds of purported lack of academic rigour. Ironically, even though the philosophy was moving nursing education away from the binary view that valued scientific knowledge over humanist knowledge and relational learning, the panel expected the nurse educators to write the curriculum in academic language that privileged scientific knowledge (Pool, 2021).

Globally and in Aotearoa New Zealand, how we think about and understand the knowledge of people, science, health and education has been dominated by Western, Eurocentric cultural views. Nursing education has inherited and adopted this understanding of nursing as it has developed through colonisation. The impact of colonisation worldwide has resulted in the privileging of the Western European paradigms while, at the same time, the non-dominant culture views of the Indigenous peoples have been marginalised and devalued. This methodological positioning in society, named as 'Whiteness', is still prevalent in academic practices today (Stewart et al., 2020, p. 2).

A strong group of nurse educators at Whitireia presented the vision for an Indigenous approach to the curriculum philosophy based on Te Tiriti o Waitangi. With encouragement from health and education expert Mason Durie,

the curriculum document was strengthened with an emphasis on the importance of Indigenous knowledge and concepts such as equity, power, marginalisation, social justice and the emancipatory role of education in people's lives and therefore in the wider community (Southwick, 1994).

Developing cultural awareness and an understanding of cultural safety is part of nursing education's journey and part of the journey that Aotearoa New Zealand is on in response to and in recognition of breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. In 1990, the country acknowledged 150 years since the historic signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand society. The 1988 Royal Commission Report introduced the principles of partnership, protection and participation as a way of making Te Tiriti o Waitangi current and applicable to all Aotearoa New Zealand citizens (Richardson, 2010).

Kawa Whakaruruhau, internationally known as cultural safety, was developed based on the research of Irihapeti Ramsden to educate nurses and address the need for attitude change and an awareness of power in health relationships with Māori (Richardson, 2010). The intention of Kawa Whakaruruhau focuses on culturally safe practice for Māori patients their whānau, hapū and iwi, and acknowledges the interaction between physical, mental, spiritual and whānau wellbeing. It reinforces that Māori concepts and epistemologies of healthcare matter and have a place in today's health system (Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2020b). The Nursing Council of New Zealand (NCNZ) commissioned Ramsden to develop guidelines for nurses in working in a culturally safe manner (Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2005/2011). The guidelines became incorporated into NCNZ regulations as part of the competencies that all nurses must meet to be fit and safe to practice as registered nurses. Nursing education curricula across the country were revised to include these guidelines and the teaching of concepts of cultural safety, social justice, equity and disparity, particularly in relation to Māori health outcomes.

Whitireia New Zealand again took a leading role in trying to address these issues. In 2003, the Bachelor of Nursing Pacific programme was launched based on the doctoral work of Dr Margaret Southwick. Dr Southwick was one of the pioneering members of the original nursing staff and her research was undertaken in recognition of the lack of success for Pacific graduates in the nursing curriculum and programmes that were structured and taught based on Western cultural views. Her research identified the need to teach and support Pacific nurses to walk in two worlds: their own Indigenous culture and Western culture.

In 2009, the Bachelor of Nursing Māori programme began, six years after the BN Pacific programme. Ngāti Toarangatira were not ready to support a kaupapa Māori nursing programme until it had the necessary resources in place, e.g., human resources, infrastructure to support an Indigenous kaupapa etc. Whitireia is one of three institutions to offer these Indigenous programmes; we are, however, the only one whose programme is taught solely to ākonga whakapapa tāngata whenua. The structure of this programme is wholly based on Te Ao Māori. It was not until several years after the establishment of these programmes that a national approach to building a nursing workforce that matches the population was envisaged (National Nursing Organisations, 2014). This strategy reported that culturally specific Māori and Pacific undergraduate programmes have proven a successful strategy for recruitment, retention and success for growing this workforce (National Nursing Organisations, 2014). An increase in the employment of Māori and Pacific nurse educators, currently registered as 1.3% for Māori and 1% for Pacific (Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2020a) is needed to support these programmes and to support the development of an organisational culture that fosters a more culturally diverse workforce (Pool, 2021).

In 2016, the New Zealand Productivity Commission reviewed new models of tertiary education and identified a number of issues. This review prompted a government review of vocational training, alongside a proposal to reform how vocational education is provided in the tertiary sector (Ministry of Education, 2019). This reform proposed the establishment of a single entity for providing vocational education across Aotearoa New Zealand, and Te Pūkenga was created. This government-led review resulted in a new tertiary education strategy that would seek to substantially change the organisational culture of the polytechnic sector. With a unified system for learners, the vision is to create a vocational education system that is more responsive to the unique needs of all learners, including those who have been marginalised, such as tāngata whenua and tagata Pasifika. A more upfront focus

on upholding and enhancing Māori–Crown partnerships is part of the organisational culture-change proposed (Hipkins, 2020).

With these structures and changes being implemented in nursing education over the past 30 years, the expectation might be that we have now developed sufficient cultural capital that Te Ao Māori is normalised as part of Aotearoa New Zealand society, including in nursing education. The reality is that society is just beginning to acknowledge the ongoing impact of institutional racism, discrimination and inequities that impact on the health and education systems with a profound impact on Indigenous peoples. Māori nurse educators are still under-represented in the nursing education workforce. While three Indigenous nursing curricula have been developed and approved for preparing Māori and Pacific nurses, the majority of nursing education curricula are still structured around Western cultural views. Nursing education has been formed by dominant Western European cultural worldviews which afford nurse educators from the dominant culture a higher cultural capital (Pool, 2021). Culture can be viewed as a source of domination that serves to reproduce institutional hierarchies or positioning. The cultural capital associated with the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand has yet to be recognised and valued in society and in the fields of nursing education practice. This research seeks to provide evidence of the cultural capital gains from Indigenous curricula. Te Kawenata – "You have done too much not to do more."

I Nāianei (present): Where we are now. Te Kawenata mauri (essence of Te Kawenata)

At a local level delivering nursing education, Whitireia is known for having radical, innovative ideas, and challenging convention when it comes to delivering education in nursing. Delivering one Indigenous nursing curriculum is radical, two Indigenous nursing curricula is innovative, and to have these programmes sit alongside their peer, Bachelor of Nursing (BN), contributes to reciprocity in knowledge, skills, values, cultural capital and equity. In the Indigenous education space, there are thought-provoking discussions of the positioning of Indigenous education, educators' experiences, indigenising curricula, and contesting 'space' through the authors' divergent lenses that are understood against the backdrop of colonisation, cultural and social context (Battiste, 2013; Graveline, 1998; Moeke-Pikering, 2010; Smith, 2012; Styres, 2017; Styres & Zinga, 2013). The BN Māori and BN Pacific Indigenous curricula are a conscious decision of decolonisation, a resistance to the imperialist colonising processes of what constitutes knowledge, where Indigenous peoples have been excluded from access to knowledge outside of the established Eurocentric education system.

These two Indigenous nursing programmes sit outside of the conventional managerial nursing system, including the traditional schools and faculties of Nursing and Health. The BN Māori kaiako, since the programme's genesis, have physically located themselves in the space of Te Wānanga Māori while under the Faculty of Health, as Indigenous peoples in a Māori environment with management accountabilities across two faculties, Te Wānanga Māori and the Health faculty. Initially, the programme enjoyed a harmony of security and thrived in these two environments in the academy. During a period of restructuring, the safety net was taken away from what was a healthy, striving learning community for two Indigenous programmes, and was replaced with trepidation and destabilising behaviours. Ākonga in their final year of study mobilised and petitioned in direct and indirect spaces to be heard at the regulatory level, a presentation at a national professional conference, internal management levels of the institution, and in an article published in a national nursing journal. Their concerns highlighted the destabilising impact of institutional structural reforms dominated by Eurocentric hegemonic attitudes on the integrity of the programme, and the absolute regard they held for their kaiako of the programme. The BN Pacific programme had similar experiences to the BN Māori programme, with ākonga and kaiako feeling numb, angry and helpless.

Indigenous peoples are exposed and vulnerable to the hegemonic systems that disempower, marginalise and demean their integrity and their mana, as can be found in the analysis of the works by Indigenous academics (Durie, 2009; Maaka, 2004; Smith, 1997; 2000; Smith, 2012). In late 2019, three core changes occurred: changes in management structure; improved relationships with tāngata whenua and key tagata Pasifika in the institution; and the Nursing Council of New Zealand approving the two Indigenous programmes to sit outside of a Nursing or Health faculty, with the condition that the Heads of Nursing Māori and Pacific have the appropriate credentials to lead these two indigenised programmes. A shift in the power dynamics was evidenced, where hope and confidence

were returned; this could be seen at the management level with the inclusion of mana whenua and the Pacific Strategy manager actively participating in the decision-making process. Te Kawenata was ignited to support the three Bachelor of Nursing programmes to move towards a Tiriti-based relationship. The future of the Bachelor of Nursing Māori – with regards to where it could be positioned after the restructuring that is currently occurring in Te Pūkenga – is in an environment that is whānau, hapū and iwi centric, regional and fluent in Te Ao Māori. Is it in the Ako Network Mātauranga Māori, the conventional system, or somewhere else? Watch this space.

Te Kawenata is a covenant, a promise, a Tiriti-based relationship, a strategic alliance for three divergent programmes founded on three core pou (metaphoric posts). The pou of te Tiriti o Waitangi are expressed through three values, as described to follow.

Mana Taurite / Equity and Mahi Ngātahi ā mua mean working collaboratively in a way that is tika (fair) and pono (honest). This value is universal and represents nothing new when establishing rules of engagement. Exclude the words in Māori and the alliance could be with any group. However, when working with Indigenous cultures, the language is wairua (spirit) and connects us to our tīpuna (ancestors) and atua (gods), as can be seen in the work by Valentine (2009), who concludes that spirituality is a fundamental attribute to a Māori worldview:

> … an intuitive consciousness … an avenue through which Māori identity is expressed and maintained, relationships are forged, balance is maintained, restrictions and safety adhered to, healing is transmitted, and the mechanism through which the tūpuna and atua remain connected to the living. (p. 134)

The pou of Kotahitanga – collective action – benefits the three programmes' shared goal of equity, better educational outcomes for Māori, Pacific and the growing under-represented communities in nursing education, where success is the norm for ākonga, for their whānau, and for their communities. Kotahitanga is linked to the wellbeing of people. Collective action requires all parties to be engaged, all working together and not in isolation from each other; its about strengthening relationships, identity and self-determination (Gall et al., 2021).

The third pou, Tino Rangatiratanga / Autonomy, is an acknowledgement of the stewardship and the autonomy of each curriculum – these programmes that are culturally, clinically and academically responsive to the ākonga. Rangatiratanga is often associated with sovereignty, leadership and autonomy to make decisions (Royal, 2003). Here is a famous whakatauākī from a prominent leader of Ngāti Whakaue, Ngāti Pikiao and Ngāti Rangitihi, Bishop Manuhuia Bishop: "Ko te kai a te rangatira he kōrero, ko te tohu o te rangatira he manaaki, ko te mahi a te rangatira hei whakatira i te iwi. The whakatauākī identifies three attributes of a rangatira: 1. The thirst for knowledge, the desire to engage in discussion, debate and participate in wānanga. 2. [They are] known for their generosity. 3. [They have the] ability to bring people together" (Whitireia Weltec | Te Pūkenga, 2023, p. 7). Rangatiratanga reminds us, as leaders, as stewards in each of these programmes, to uphold the mana (delegated authority) to lead with integrity, to actively engage in mana-enhancing practices that elevate Māori and tagata Pasifika to be successful, and to do everything in our power to champion against oppressive imperialist attitudes and behaviours. Te Kawenata – "You have come too far not to go further" (Henare, quoted by Kiro, 2022).

Ā Mua (future): Where we are going with Te Kawenata. Hāpori whānui (wider communities) and rangahau kotahitanga (sharing the research space)

The arrival of Te Pūkenga has heralded a new approach to tertiary education, by utilising the collective knowledge and experience of 16 Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics to deliver high-quality learning nationally that reflects the needs of communities at a local level (Te Pūkenga, 2023). A key initiative to deliver high-quality learning nationally was the drive to unifiy existing nursing programmes, which included the Bachelor of Nursing Māori, the Bachelor of Nursing Pacific and the Bachelor of Nursing. By drawing on the strong foundation of existing approved and accredited Bachelor of Nursing programmes already delivered throughout Te Pūkenga network by 13 ITPs, the unification process was initiated in 2022. The unification of these programme ensures Te Pūkenga responds to the nursing workforce requirements and aligns with the recent health reforms that have established Te Whatu Ora and Te Aka Whai Ora to better meet the needs of Māori and tagata Pasifika populations (Te Pūkenga, 2023).

This unification process in Te Pūkenga been has challenged by the established nursing leaders in education, causing friction and tensions, especially with those who support this bold approach to the Indigenisation of nursing education in Aotearoa. The three respective Heads of Nursing at Whitireia, where this unification of three unique nursing programmes was modelled, were supportive from the start . As outlined above, this model has been highly successful in addressing equity, and allowing Māori and Pacific students to successfully become registered nurses. To formally capture how Whitireia has been able to successfully address equity, a research project will commence this year to hear the voices of ākonga from the three unique programmes, including those in the Cook Islands, as to why they choose their respective programme of study and what benefits they gained from doing so. Additionally, the kaiako of the three respective programmes will also be asked why they think their programmes of study are important to address equity and how they are doing this. This longitudinal study will continue for four years and include the roll-out of the new, unified Te Pūkenga curriculum. This purpose of this approach is to enable data not only from different programmes, different years and different countries to be compared and contrasted, but also from old to new curriculum, giving a rich Indigenous source of information. This research project will aim to contribute to how the indigenisation of curriculum is contributing positively to the academic success of Māori and Pacific, specifically in the nursing education domain. Te Kawenata – "Kua tawhiti kē tō haerenga mai kia kore e haere tonu he nui rawa ō mahi kia kore e mahi nui tonu. You have come too far not to go further, you have done too much not to do more."

OTINGA / CONCLUSION

Te Kawenata is woven into the whakapapa of Whitireia's journey of growth and development, culturally, spiritually, socio-politically, as it walks confidently into the new education environment as Te Pūkenga, armed with the knowledge, experience and skill to deliver three national, unified Indigenous nursing curricula. The confidence comes from having over 33 years between two programmes of delivering Indigenous nursing curricula with success; and paramount to this success is maintaining the students' identity and integrity as Māori and tagata Pasifika. There was a time in the journey of these two Indigenous programmes when the management system mobilised ākonga to take action. It took time, personal and professional commitments to the kaupapa, and a change in management to heal the breach for these two programmes. It was from this upheaval that Te Kawenata was reignited as a covenant, a promise that articulates the rules (values) of engagement between the three Bachelor of Nursing programmes at both governance and operational levels to ensure sustainability, equity and building the capacity and capability of our Māori and Pacific nursing workforce. Finally, drawing upon the shared spaces of the three Bachelor of Nursing programmes in the Indigenous learning environment, a longitudinal study is to be undertaken alongside ākonga and kaiako with the purpose of building a body of rich Indigenous knowledges, experiences and expressions of what it means to be a Māori or tagata Pasifika in an Indigenous nursing programme.

> "E kore e taea te aukati I a koe ... chase what excites you not what holds you back, are you sure, then go and get it."
> (Apiata, 2010, p. 1)

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ENHANCING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFE SPACES IN MENTAL HEALTH: TEACHING UNDERGRADUATE NURSES RECOVERY-ORIENTED PRACTICE SKILLS TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE USERS

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ABSTRACT

Recovery-orientated practice is a challenge for nurses working within acute mental health wards (McKenna et al., 2014). Although the experience and meaning of recovery-focused care varied, there were common elements in the practice accounts. The undergraduate nurse's role in creating different therapeutic spaces to promote safety, relational commitment, and healing for service users was paramount to supporting the service user's recovery journey (Waldemar et al, 2016). The importance of building safe, committed and healing relationships to ensure the psychological safety of service users was highlighted within this study, and how worthwhile it is for nurses to let go, to a certain extent, of the traditional boundaries that may create barriers to building recovery. There has been growing concern that people accessing mental health services are not receiving an inclusive, recovery-focused service due to barriers that include health professionals' attitudes, skills and knowledge in practice. By exploring the experience and meaning of recovery-oriented practice for ten nurses working with service users in an acute mental health inpatient service in Aotearoa New Zealand, this study aimed to understand how nurses experience practising recovery in clinical practice, and to transfer the outcomes of the findings to enable lecturers to teach undergraduate nurses recovery-oriented practice skills to support mental health service users. Individual interviews were undertaken with participants and data analysed through a phenomenological and hermeneutic lens. The study findings could be used to inform best practice and changes to the nursing curriculum to inform and provide a platform to enable integrating recovery-orientated practice into the core mental health undergraduate curriculum (Haywood et al., 2020). This is conducive not only to recovery, but, essentially, to building a future nursing workforce that is appropriately skilled, equipped, supported and resourced for recovery-oriented practice (Solomon et al., 2021). Building safe, committed or shared space and healing relationships, and creating psychological safety, are crucial determinants of safe and effective care in mental health; and have implications for how nurses learn to manage new ways of working alongside service users and integrate recovery-oriented practice within the reality and challenges of practice (Jackson-Blott et al., 2019). Highlighted within the research is the importance of education for both post- and undergraduate nurses regarding providing therapeutic safe spaces as an integral part of the service user's recovery journey and undergraduate nurses' learning. This study contributes key insights that are encapsulated in three core elements within relational space provision; these include safe, shared and healing spaces. This provides the key steps for providing a therapeutic safe space, as well as the tools and skills that should be integrated into education for undergraduate nurses. It is important that psychological and therapeutic safety is taught and woven through the entire three-year nursing degree course, as it has significant implications for mental health recovery-focused education in undergraduate student nurses. It can inform practice and support nursing students within clinical placement to more effectively work with mental health service-users.

KEYWORDS

Mental health, teaching, recovery, nursing, health, psychological safety, therapeutic safety

INTRODUCTION

This study sought to understand how nurses experience and find meaning in recovery-orientated practice while working in acute mental health settings. The emphasis was on the collection of rich narratives from ten nurse participants to uncover their lived experience of working alongside service users within a busy inpatient mental health service. It is anticipated that the findings will equip nurses, and other mental health professionals, with emphasis on teaching undergraduate nurses improved awareness about recovery-oriented practice within acute mental health settings. The insights gained highlight particular barriers and facilitators to working in a recovery-orientated manner and inform the implementation of specific practices, knowledge, training and leadership. A hermeneutic phenomenological lens was used in the study, which will hopefully create more depth of understanding for undergraduate nursing programmes (by connecting to the nurses' stories) in educational settings (Solomon et al., 2021).

Mental health conditions currently account for about 13% of the global disease burden, with the World Health Organization (WHO) (2013) estimating that around 450 million people worldwide have a mental health issue. Recent studies have indicated that the prevalence of mental health problems is growing. Mental health problems are defined as being "characterized by clinically significant behavioural or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs in an individual, and is associated with present distress" and is considered a manifestation of a "behavioural, psychological, or biological dysfunction in the individual" (Stein et al., 2010, p. 1760).

The most common mental health conditions reported by people living with these are anxiety and depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and alcohol and substance disorders, with the WHO (2013) noting that depression alone accounts for 4.4% of the global burden of disease. People with mental health conditions often face severe and painful experiences, as well as disproportionately higher rates of physical disability and mortality (World Health Organization, 2013). For example, people with a diagnosis of schizophrenia and major depression are at 40–60% increased risk of dying prematurely compared to the general population; usually due to associated physical health issues that have been neglected.

Mental health conditions are common in Aotearoa New Zealand. The key findings of Te Rau Hinengaro: The New Zealand Mental Health Survey (Ministry of Health, 2006) highlight that around 46.6% of the entire population will experience mental health issues at some time during their lives. The survey raised concern about the prevalence of mental disorder in Aotearoa New Zealand (over a 12-month period, excluding a diagnosis of psychosis or schizophrenia), which is approximately 20.7% (Ministry of Health, 2006). This survey also raised awareness around higher prevalence of mental health issues amongst Māori and Pasifika persons. This was supported by the more recent inquiry into mental health by the New Zealand Government, Te Ara Oranga (Te Ara Oranga, 2018), that concurred with Te Rau Hinengaro's findings, and found that 50–80% of New Zealanders will experience some form of mental distress or addiction issues in their lifetime. In addition, it highlighted that social determinants played a large part as risk factors in those individuals' declining levels of mental health wellness. In particular, poor housing, low wages, lack of opportunities, trauma and neglect, and social isolation (especially for those who are Māori) had a significant negative effect on their health outcomes (Te Ara Oranga, 2018).

This study sought to understand how nurses experience and find meaning in recovery-orientated practice while working in acute mental health settings. The narratives from ten nurse participants uncovered their lived experience of working alongside service users within a busy inpatient service. The findings are crucial to integrate into the undergraduate teaching curriculum to emphasise and improve awareness about recovery-oriented practice within acute mental health settings. The insights from this study highlight barriers and facilitators to working in a recovery-orientated manner and inform the implementation of specific practices, knowledge, training, and leadership. A hermeneutic phenomenological lens was used to analyse the data, and offers more depth of understanding for undergraduate nursing student programmes (by connecting to the nurses' stories) in educational settings.

RECOVERY FROM MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Recent conceptualisations of recovery in mental health services differ greatly from the traditional medical model as applied in psychiatry (Anthony, 1993; Davidson et al., 2005; Solomon et al., 2021). The medical model focuses on reducing and eliminating symptoms, and has been described as 'clinical recovery' (Slade, 2009). This perspective lacks recognition that the person may resume a full or 'normal' life once diagnosed, with or without the presence of ongoing symptoms. That said, persons who are acutely unwell with mental health issues often display behavioural and emotional responses, which may affect their interactions with the everyday world, prove disruptive in their social interactions, and affect their inner wellness. It is increasingly recognised that supporting people with mental health problems requires more than the reduction or elimination of symptoms. A focus on broader wellbeing and social participation is required to support recovery (Mental Health Commission, 2012; Ramon, 2018; Te Ara Oranga, 2018).

Over the past three decades, people affected by mental health issues have become more empowered and vocal in their views about the reality of living with these, and what recovery involves. Their narratives contain many variants and definitions of the term 'recovery'; however, common themes emphasise the view that hope, personal responsibility, identity and meaning all play an important part in each person's journey (Slade, 2009). The most widely cited definition states that recovery is:

> A deeply personal, unique process of changing one's attitudes, feelings, goals, skills, and or/roles. It is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful, and contributing life even within the limitations caused by illness. Recovery involves the development of new meaning and purpose in one's life as one grows beyond the catastrophic effects of mental illness. (Anthony, 1993, p. 12)

This conceptualisation of recovery differs from that of 'clinical' recovery and has been described as 'personal recovery' (Slade, 2009), a notion that broadens the sense of what is possible. Personal recovery includes the belief that people can recover from mental health challenges in the presence or absence of symptoms and that the process is an active participatory event. Further, it highlights the individual's strengths, hopes and self-responsibility within the process (Mental Health Commission, 1998; Te Ara Oranga, 2018). Arguably, it makes sense that services should listen to the voices of the people accessing care and draw on expertise gained through experience, thereby broadening the focus of services to support personal recovery, rather than solely clinical recovery, which has a narrow focus on the management and 'cure' of symptoms (Te Ara Oranga, 2018). In addition, the Kia Manawanui report (Ministry of Health, 2023), a transformative long-term approach for Aotearoa, supports mental wellbeing and recovery for whānau and individuals, providing a ten-year strategy with clear plans and actions sequenced across the short-, medium- and long-term focus for those with mental health issues.

The strategy informs and provides a clear framework, which is population-based to help support mental health and wellbeing across the individual's entire lifespan. The focus is on change, and it's working to create better services, and provide safe recovery-focused environments that are inclusive, support empowerment, address the current inequities, and provide access to service within the population to enhance better mental health outcomes.

What is recovery-orientated practice?

According to Davidson et al. (2009), recovery-oriented practice involves offering individuals with mental health issues a "range of effective and culturally responsive interventions from which they may choose those services and supports they find useful in promoting or protecting their own recovery" (p. 89). The core value of recovery-oriented practice is for nurses and other health professionals to recognise that people who experience severe mental health issues are simply people (Anthony, 2004); that is, to see the service user as the whole, unique person that they are, rather than as an illness (Deegan, 1996). The literature also suggests that such an approach requires clinicians (including student nurses) to have the ability to hold hope for the individual, and by sharing their deeply personal experiences, through their narratives, it will bring about change (Te Ara Oranga, 2018). The stories of hope and recovery within these narratives supported the services users' voices, by not only recognising and highlighting their

resourcefulness, but also providing a platform that highlighted their strengths and gave them a voice through their recovery journey (Deegan, 1996). Being present for the person and supporting their best life, as they define it, can reap positive rewards for all concerned (Slade, 2009).

Working in a recovery-oriented manner involves a shift in power and responsibility for nurses and other clinicians. The concept of the nurse being the 'expert' within the relationship is diminished as the person using services takes increasing control of their own recovery. Reflection, balancing safety and the need to take risks, and awareness of roles are helpful in supporting service users throughout all stages of recovery (Slade, 2009). However, recovery-oriented practice cannot be implemented using any one standardised approach, and is influenced by the practice context and the relational dynamics between individual staff and service users (Slade, 2009). Hence, the aim of this study was to explore nurses' experiences of working in recovery-oriented practices, which will translate and develop into a teaching package for undergraduate nursing students to enable them to understand and gain the necessary skills in how to work in a hopeful and recovery-focused manner with service users in the future.

METHODS

A phenomenological approach was used to guide the study design, which allowed for a deeper exploration and understanding of taken-for-granted practice experiences (van Manen, 1997). The methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to uncover the meaning and essence of lived experience in relation to a specific phenomenon, as well as the contextual influences that shape it (Neubauer et al., 2019). The phenomenon of interest in the present study was nurses' practice of recovery-oriented care in Aotearoa New Zealand inpatient mental health services.

The protection of the nurse participants was a key ethical consideration in this study. Nurses who are employed in small acute inpatient services and work in close-knit teams and communities are open to the risk of privacy being breached if ethical considerations and processes are not followed carefully. During the study, the researcher held positions as a mental health clinical nurse educator and academic lecturer. The participants were nurses who worked in the inpatient mental health setting. The researcher maintained a neutral relationship with the participants, lacking any power or managerial influence over them. In addition, there was potential for emotional or sensitive experiences and information to emerge for the nurses as they reflected on their work with service users and the impact of inpatient team culture and other pressures.

Face-to-face interviews, lasting up to an hour, were initiated with ten nurses. Open and closed questions were used in a conversational approach to create a space for 'opening up' and to reveal a depth of meaning when telling their stories of practice (Solomon et al., 2021). In-depth interviews were conducted in a private, quiet room within the unit, as a way of meaningfully exploring each nurse's unique lived experience. It is common in phenomenological research to use a 'conversational' style of interview to remain as close to the participant and their experience as possible (Grant & Giddings, 2002). Ten participants took part in the study, all were registered nurses from the same inpatient service, and all consented to share their stories. Eight of the participants were women and two were male, with ages ranging from their late 20s to 50s. Three of the participants identified as being Māori, with the rest being of European descent. Seven of the participants had nursing experience of 20-plus years, some with over 30 years as nurses. Overall, the majority had vast experience of working in acute mental health settings. The three remaining nurses were relatively new, having completed their new graduate nurse training in the previous year. The mix of ages, gender and ethnicity of the nurse participants provided a rich range of experience, reflections and viewpoints regarding recovery-oriented practice within the acute mental health setting (Solomon et al., 2021).

The six steps of van Manen's (1997) thematic analysis framework were utilised in the data analysis to investigate the lived experience of the nurses. Initially the process involved examining and listening to the interviews to develop an early understanding of the phenomena. Then began the formation of thematic groupings and analysis to communicate the phenomenological–ontological understanding of the nurse participants' lived experience. Interpretation of the transcribed interviews was conducted through an iterative process of careful reading, reflection and writing to uncover key aspects of the nurses' experience. This included data immersion,

which involved a deeper exploration, looking at 'meanings' through reading and re-reading of the data, and the emerging themes from each nurse's account and across the conversations with different participants, and cross checking of themes. Trustworthiness was ensured with inclusion of an audit trail, which involved member checking within the research team. A reflective research diary, inter-rater peer-review and supervision were undertaken, and interpretations were discussed and compared to ensure the data analysis was robust. The introduction of a hermeneutic lens shifted the research beyond descriptions of lived experience to the interpretation of meaning within that experience, using philosophical notions (Bynum & Varpio, 2018).

Ethics approval was gained through Auckland University of Technology (AUTEC), and participation was voluntary and based on an informed decision. A snowball convenience sampling method was used to recruit participants. An intermediary colleague (the ward manager) distributed posters and gave potential participants verbal and written information about the study. Written informed consent was obtained. Although snowball convenience sampling is the preferred strategy in the hard-to-reach populations, ethical considerations may arise. These may include voluntary participation and informed consent. Therefore, the author (BS) ensured information was provided and understood prior to and during the study, hence ensuring informed and written consent, anonymity and confidentiality (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). According to Drummond (2021), phenomenological research, including this study, describes the structures of intentionality at work in the different types of experiences and structures that make the experience, and can therefore influence the phenomenological process during the study. Therefore, the research needs to consider the nature of intentionality, perception and awareness. Ethical issues that may be encountered are the protection and privacy of research data, and these had been confirmed prior to and during the interview process (Newman et al., 2021).

RESULTS

At the of heart nurses' experiences of engaging in recovery-oriented care within the inpatient setting was the practice of creating safe, relational and healing spaces. Van Manen (1997) describes how 'lived' space can be difficult to capture in words as, unlike dimensional space, it is something that is felt and relational but not usually reflected on. The three forms of therapeutic space are depicted visually within Figure 1, showing a visualisation of the themes that emerged from the participant interviews and their narratives of initiating recovery-oriented practice. These narratives are underpinned by the core elements of recovery-oriented practice, including working collaboratively, knowing the person, looking beyond labels, focusing on strengths, finding meaning and instilling hope. The findings show how important the three spaces – safe space, shared space and healing space – are in working in a recovery-focused manner, and creating positive experiences for the service users.

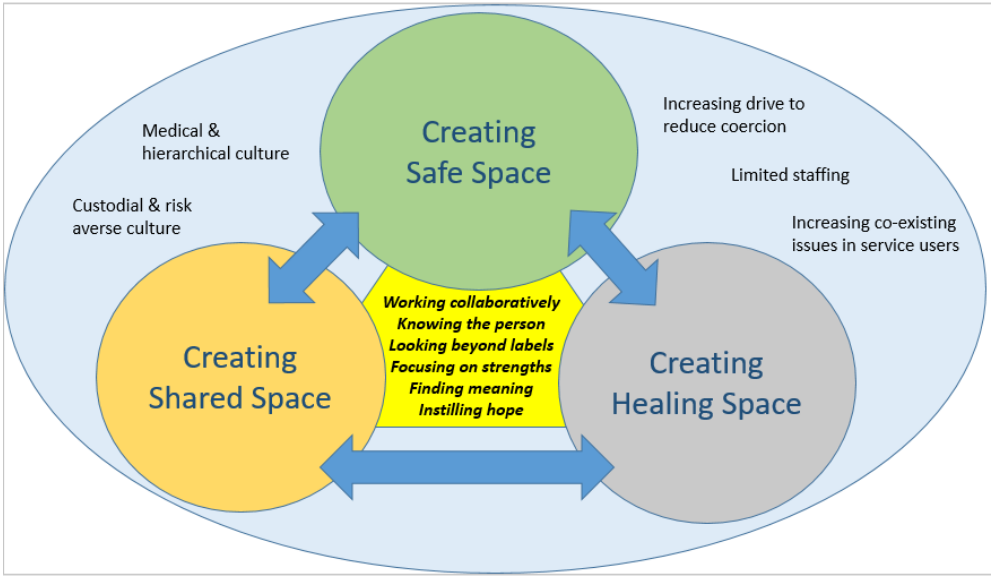

Figure 1. Three dimensions of space that capture nurses' experiences of recovery-oriented practice

Creating safe space: Managing crisis and distress

Inpatient nurses work with people who are often at their most vulnerable, highly distressed, and at times struggling with the challenges of symptoms of deep distress, when they are acutely experiencing mental health issues (McKenna et al., 2014). Therefore, working within an acute mental health setting is demanding, and frequently requires nurses to use their ability to connect, and manage crisis and distress. In the following accounts, nurses each describe one scenario of how they work alongside service users and create a sense of safety when faced with challenging situations.

Matt describes his engagement with a young man who was picked up by the police after an urgent call from the public, where he was described as being "disorientated and psychotic" and walking on a busy highway. The crisis team felt he needed to be formally assessed, given that he was presenting as a danger to himself and others:

> *[I said to the police officers] "Please take the handcuffs off." I was quite relaxed with him and suggested that we have a cup of tea and a chat and see how I can help. I sort of was able to then take him off and we completed the paperwork, taking him out into the ward and introducing him to one or two of the other patients, and just started showing him the general environment and made him feel relaxed.*

Matt describes a situation of supporting a young man on admission, in which he recognises the service user's hyper-vigilance and potential vulnerability. Matt works to facilitate a sense of safety and trust by shifting from a custodial orientation (requesting the removal of handcuffs) to offering a warm drink, and by 'being-with' the distressed service user in a calm and relaxed manner. He also uses the distraction of completing paperwork and then orientates the young man to the ward environment. The account suggests that Matt attempts to communicate some understanding of the lived space of the service user. His actions and tone also communicate that the ward is a safe and supportive place.

Creating shared space: Opening relational space to create a shared commitment

The nurses' accounts suggest that their relationships with service users grow through connecting to each other in various ways. This involves active participation of both parties to build and maintain a shared commitment to the relationship and to recovery. In her account, Carole describes a personal 'shift' in her thinking around how she sees being-with and supporting service users within her practice:

> *[Now I am] … actually focusing on the relationship, because before it was more about me being nice, and being a nice person, being gentle and being caring, and I saw that as building a good relationship. Where actually now with the model of care [a new model introduced to the DHB] to sit down and look at the model with the patient in front of me and say this is a commitment between the two of us, and this is about our relationship …. Because then I am taking more responsibility that I am going to work with them.*

Here Carole describes a change in the way she develops commitment within relationships. The importance of taking time to work collaboratively shows a willingness to let go of traditional medical and nursing roles. This highlights a shift from taking responsibility for the service user and caring for them to taking responsibility for facilitating a partnership. This approach forms the foundation of opening a relational space that supports equality and working together as a choice, rather than the nurse having all the power. This is important for creating a shared space that allows the rhythm and pace of the relationship to evolve in a way that supports recovery.

Creating healing space: Providing a healing space for processing meaning and loss

While sharing elements such as interests, humour, activities and love opens up relational space, the participants also recognised that recovery from mental health issues often involves addressing loss and trauma, and trying to find meaning in personal experience. Service users may feel that they have lost a part of who they previously were, or feel stigmatised by society and others due to their mental health issues. Individuals may also find it very hard to

find professionals to trust, if there is no one with whom they can identify or have a sense of shared experience. The nurses' accounts indicate that the formation of both safe space and a shared relational commitment are important foundations for opening up healing space where meaning making and processing grief and loss can occur. A story from Anna illustrates the importance of recognising how loss and trauma affects individuals, in this instance a young man who reacted violently when distressed.

> *He was quite scared; his antisocial behaviours were quite extreme at times. He assaulted his parents and then the only person that would always stand in his corner passed away while he was on the ward. That spiralled him out of control again for a few more months and he became even harder to manage, because he was grieving, but because of his diagnosis he grieved in such a, what is the word I'm looking for, an antisocial way. You see he couldn't express his grief. The only way he could express it was to really give the nurses a hard time, which was counterproductive because the people that didn't care, didn't care even more.*

Here Anna shows her ability to understand the service user's experience and his reaction to the loss of a loved one. She 'looks beyond the label' of his diagnosis and the associated symptoms to the underlying causes of his behaviour. She sees his struggle to process the grief, and the transference of his feelings of loss and fear into anger and rage towards others. Anna shows that, because of this understanding, she is able to open a dialogue to begin talking about the issues and lead to healing. She shows how this type of healing space cannot be developed by nurses using coercive or controlling behaviours when service users are distressed or displaying aggression.

The nurses' accounts indicate that recovery-orientated practice within the acute inpatient setting involves building relational space that is first and foremost safe. The nurses need to be able to figuratively, and sometimes literally, hold service users gently during crisis and distress. However, at times maintaining safe space also requires honesty, straight talking and setting boundaries about what is acceptable. The nurses' stories also show how opening up relational or shared space allows the development of a shared commitment. The bindings of commitment are created through sharing experiences, including going through challenging times, exploring common interests, humour, touch, engaging in practical activities, sharing cultural beliefs and practices, and platonic love. At times, there is a need to let go of traditional roles or stretch traditional boundaries to open up relational space. The relational connections thus became a healing space when there is real trust, and service users are able to share and make sense of their innermost thoughts and feelings. This supports the expression and processing of personal meaning, including painful emotions arising from trauma and loss.

The nurses also identify key contextual factors affecting their ability to maintain recovery-oriented practice, including the hierarchical team culture, hospital systems, poor staffing and resourcing issues, lack of training and education around recovery-oriented practices, and unrealistic expectations within the inpatient setting (Solomon et al., 2021).

DISCUSSION

Using a phenomenological and hermeneutic lens, this study explores the experience and meaning of recovery-oriented practice for ten nurses working in an acute inpatient mental health service. While phenomenological studies can indicate the essence of a phenomenon, any one study will never capture 'the' single essence. Understandings of recovery-oriented practice in acute mental health nursing will continue to develop – never arriving at a single 'truth'. Therefore, the findings reinforce some of what is already discussed in the literature regarding recovery-oriented practice, including the need to look beyond symptoms and diagnoses to work in partnership with people, instilling hope, and supporting the strengths and goals of the individual (Slade, 2009).

However, the study contributes new insights into the acute inpatient nurses' experiences of recovery-oriented practice, which are encapsulated in three core elements of relational space: (1) creating safe space; (2) creating shared space by building connectedness and shared commitment; and (3) creating a healing space by supporting service users through trauma and thus making space for healing (Figure 1). These core elements of practice may be taken for granted and overlooked when staff are under pressure to complete tasks, such as observing signs and

symptoms, managing risk, administering medication, completing notes, managing intake and discharge processes, and clearing beds (Waldemar et al., 2016). Thus, while the three elements of relational space appear simple and easy to communicate to nurses and other clinicians, the reality is complex – particularly when the physical, social and institutional environments are not conducive to recovery-oriented practice.

Element 1: Safe space

Creating safety for service users has been explored by Slade (2009), who advocates that a recovery-focused service should be geared towards preventing crisis, and then knowing how to respond well when crisis does occur. Slade outlines four principles: (1) prevent unnecessary crisis; (2) reduce the loss of personal responsibility; (3) maintain hope during crisis; and (4) support identity during and after the crisis. This was seen within the findings to include: being calm, moving away from coercive or institutionalised ward cultures and negative attitudes, simply 'being-with' a service user and letting them know that the nurse is not abandoning them during their distress (Figure 1).

Element 2: Shared space

Creating shared space through engagement and commitment to an ongoing relationship emerged as another key element of recovery-oriented practice. Participants recognised how their relationships developed when both they and the service user shared aspects of themselves and worked towards common goals (Figure 1). Here, nurses met the challenge of shifting from the role of the empowered nurse (in control and with no problems) to the mindset of two individuals both struggling to work out how best to support the service user's recovery.

Element 3: Healing space

This study further indicates the importance of nurses providing a healing space for service users to process and find meaning in their mental health problems (Figure 1). Grief and trauma may present in various guises; feelings of loss and vulnerability can translate into withdrawal and shutting down and, at times, into anger and rage (Resick et al., 2012). Herman (2002) identifies the initial stages of trauma recovery as securing safety and then processing the traumatic experience. While the current study reinforces the importance of creating a healing space for talking about trauma and grief, the findings clearly reveal that this space cannot be maintained through controlling distressed or aggressive behaviours by force. Rather, the nurse participants indicated that it was important to spend time calmly validating the service user's experiences.

The study findings offer insights into ways in which academic institutions may better teach and support undergraduate nurses regarding working in a recovery-oriented approach within acute inpatient mental health services.

Implications for education

The nurse participants articulated the characteristics of recovery-focused practice; however, at times, they struggled to identify how best to embed recovery-oriented care within the acute setting. Education for nurses regarding personal recovery and how to recognise and apply recovery concepts within acute mental health settings is required. Only four participants had any formal recovery training; an easily rectifiable situation given the availability of structured training specifically focused on recovery-oriented practice (Jackson-Blott et al., 2019). Dialogue between nurses in postgraduate training forums would enable role modelling to undergraduate student nurses and colleagues, and create a formal space that would enable nurses to strategise effectively on how to manage working in a recovery-oriented manner (Slade, 2009). In addition, this may translate into teaching the undergraduate nurses how to practically work, by example of the role models they would observe in a safe educational space. Some of the barriers associated with recovery-focused practice include stigma; consequently, nurses may not recognise the impact of stigmatising language, behaviour or communication. The debilitating notion of stigma discourages people with mental health problems from engaging in employment, relationships and education (Erondu &

McGraw, 2021). Furthermore, nurses and undergraduate nursing students need to be educated on the differences in definition surrounding the term 'recovery', as this has posed challenges for both healthcare services and education sectors and, thus, may lead to stigma due to misunderstandings (Groholm et al., 2017). The work of Le Boutiller et al. (2010) posits the need to inform a conceptual framework focusing on four key themes: promoting citizenship, organisational commitment, supporting personally defined recovery and working relationships. The promotion of providing therapeutic recovery spaces for a service users' journey informs undergraduate nurses' knowledge and understanding, and clinical practice and teaching.

Providing therapeutic safe spaces as an integral part of the service user's recovery journey is key knowledge required by undergraduate nursing students who are developing their mental health and recovery knowledge and skill sets.

Teaching the skill sets to undergraduate nurses

Undergraduate nurses need to understand how the recovery perspective is essential to providing care for those within a mental health setting. Nurses can support recovery with the client by understanding that recovery perspectives hold hope for the individual in the expectation of having a good life, supporting and encouraging the person's resourcefulness, and empowering and supporting autonomy through collaborative decision-making (Deegan, 1996), as well as by being mindful of each person's unique and evolving journey (Deegan, 1996).

The study highlighted that barriers exist for service users with mental health challenges, and in particular that stigma, discrimination and poor attitudes can lead to service users losing hope. This finding highlights the importance of undergraduate nurses being a guide or navigator, to help individuals recognise the possibilities that exist. Indeed, the skills that may be taught to undergraduate student nurses may mean having discussions around what hope means; e.g., understanding that things can get better, and this involves a shared commitment between the nurse and service user, focusing and working collaboratively in a trusting relationship. Instilling hope also involves supporting service users to be future-focused and using hopeful language. Ultimately, hope may fluctuate from time to time in service-users' lives. However, it was found that teaching undergraduate nurses to gain more awareness by learning how to create safe space, communicate effectively, and also have the ability to show hope (being collaborative, showing empathy and kindness) made a positive difference in helping service users, and supported the service user to keep on achieving in their pursuit of personal recovery (Cleary et al., 2016).

In addition, lecturers can enhance mental health knowledge and learning by incorporating recovery-orientated practices in the early stages of nursing education to support the progressive development of mental health skills. The key areas of recovery-orientated practice involve supporting the students to: understand that recovery is personal and unique to each individual; understand that each individual has a right to their own path and journey towards wellness; learn about diversity and cultural responsiveness; use positive language, and be aware about mental health stigmas and how this affects an individual's journey to recovery. Furthermore, the introduction of using the narratives or stories of the nurses in this study would support the undergraduate students to have a glimpse of the reality of being a mental health nurse and using recovery-oriented practice to enhance the service user's experience.

Psychological safety is a crucial determinant of safe and effective care in mental health. Nurses need to learn to manage new ways of working alongside service users, and how to integrate recovery-oriented practice within the reality and challenges of practice. Most programmes only dedicate four or six weeks to mental health and addiction teaching in the second year, with a focus on risk management and medication, rather than holistic approaches (Haywood et al., 2020). Psychological and therapeutic safety must be woven through the entire three-year nursing degree course. If undergraduate student nurses understand recovery, and realise the positive effects of recovery-focused educational programmes, this can help support the implementation of recovery-oriented practices (Hawsawi et al., 2021). Ultimately, these learning strategies may enhance and increase student nurses' knowledge base and compassion, thus informing practice and ultimately supporting mental health service-users within mental health clinical settings.

CONCLUSION

The importance of building safe, committed and healing relationships with service users was highlighted within this study, and how worthwhile it is for nurses to let go, to a certain extent, of the traditional boundaries that may create barriers to building recovery. Within the study, the nurses recognised the importance of creating safe and healing spaces, holding hope, being mindful of language and pace, and recognising service users as unique and self-determining in their own recovery process. This study shows the importance of undergraduate nurses working to support service users to not only cope in a crisis, but to also process their experiences and move towards broader wellbeing and full participation in life beyond services. Significantly, the study provides the key steps and considerations that focus on mental health nursing education and provides the tools and skills that should be integrated for undergraduate nurses, developing their understanding of recovery.

Highlighting the positive effects of recovery-focused educational strategies and resources will lead to the implementation of recovery-oriented practices. Therefore, it is important that psychological and therapeutic safety is taught within the entire three-year nursing degree course, and entwined throughout the undergraduate nursing curriculum, as it can inform practice and support mental health service users' health outcomes. In addition, the recovery concepts and frameworks equally inform nurses' clinical practice, which in turn updates and educates undergraduate nurses in the mental health field.

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ONLINE LEARNING AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

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ABSTRACT

By the end of 2019, Covid-19, a novel virulent and potentially lethal virus, had hit the world. The global population lacked natural immunity against the virus and the non-existence of efficient vaccines and treatments made isolation the preferred option. This was enforced by many governments. World-wide educational communities responded to these measures with online learning where possible. Online lectures and content and activities on learning management systems (LMS) (where available) became the new normal way of teaching and learning. Chandra (cited in Akpınar, 2021) estimates that up to 90% of the global student population was studying at home (many online) during the pandemic. This created a unique opportunity for researchers to investigate the effect not only of the Covid pandemic, but also of the online response, on students' mental health. Pre-Covid-19 research at the time expressed concerns about the use of certain online technologies and/or certain ways of using them as challenges to those vulnerable to mental health issues. Andreassen et al. (2016) describe single younger people, social networkers, addictive gamers, and those who are easily distracted and/or impulsive (including those with overt or covert attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder [ADHD], and OCD) as vulnerable. A flood of studies regarding the possible links between Covid-19, online learning and mental health were published during and soon after the 2020–2022 period. Rutkowska et al. (2021; 2022) found that all 3804 student participants in their two studies reported increased stress levels due to online studies, nearly half reporting depression and 18% of the 2022 study participants reporting suicidal thoughts. Fontes-Perryman and Spina (2021) report that excessive users of technology share characteristics with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) sufferers, such as fear of missing out on new information, poor inhibitory control and a strong urge to control. From these worrying findings a plethora of questions arise: Could the measures taken to curb the viral spread (and not online learning *per se*) have caused the reported negative mental health effects during the pandemic? Were there certain aspects of how online learning was rolled out during the pandemic that made it more stressful than it needs to be? If online learning *per se* affects students' mental health negatively, what aspects thereof have negative effects? Are some students more at risk, and, if so, who? If online learning exacerbates and/or precipitates mental health issues, what can be done to keep vulnerable students in this mode of education safe? Contrary to the negative effects mentioned above, there is some evidence that online learning may also have positive effects on students' mental health. For example, Bolatov et al. (2021) found improved mental health among the 619 senior medical students in their study after going online. This literature review will attempt to collate evidence on these and other findings regarding possible mental health effects of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Suggestions to ensure mentally safe online learning environments include: implementation of mental health support (individually and/or in groups) and avoiding poor course design features that may contribute to stress (an aspect that educators can control). The advice from Rutkowska et al. (2022), Placencia and Muljana (2019), Anderson (2003), Vygotsky (1978), Alberts (2020) and others regarding good course design is emphasised, while also reminding readers to take caution when applying the findings from global studies in local contexts.

KEYWORDS

Mental health disorders, stress, ADHD, OCD, Covid-19, course design, anxiety, suicide and depression, online/e-learning, quality instruction, course design

INTRODUCTION

The Aotearoa New Zealand 2020 academic year started as usual in mid-February, but with a strong awareness of Covid-19 sweeping across the world. Managers encouraged staff to get ready for online delivery on short notice. By 23 March (Unite Against Covid-19, n.d.), within a month of the start of the academic year, Aotearoa New Zealand went into Level 4 lockdown, suspending all face-to-face education delivery with 24 hours' notice. From then on, staff 'invented' as they delivered. This was a worldwide trend noted by Van Thuy et al. (2022) and also reported in Brazil (Camargo et al. 2020) and India (Mosleh et al., 2022).

Many courses were not designed for online delivery; they were adapted to suit online delivery. For example, at the institute where this researcher works, staff compiled online labs using self-made videos of dissections and experiments, and augmented those with YouTube videos to act as equivalents for on-campus labs. In order to have student–teacher interactions, they learned to use Zoom and Teams. To provide for student–student interactions, giving opportunities for social interaction and learning from one another, they used breakout rooms on the video platforms, LMS discussion boards and group assignments, including online presentations. Some resources were developed from scratch and most evolved from existing resources.

For students, the adaptation must have been huge. Some did not have the necessary infrastructure to study solely off-campus: they had to borrow laptops from the institute, and internet connections were sometimes only on their phones. The digital divide may have led to unequal access for the student population. For example, in Aotearoa New Zealand digital.govt.nz (2022a) reports that "Māori, Pasifika, those living in social housing, unemployed people, those not actively seeking work … are less likely to have internet access"(p. 1). By May 2021, Māori households were 16% less likely to have internet access compared to non-Māori households (digital.govt.nz, 2021). Similarly the digital literacy rates of Pacific people are reported to be lower than for non-Pacific populations, despite the fast rate at which banks, medical providers, and government institutions are moving online (digital.govt.nz, 2022b). Most students experienced the Covid-19-intense-online period as a stressful and overwhelming time. They reported that they missed the physical face-to-face encounters with lecturers and other students, felt demotivated, lost focus during lectures (even fell asleep), and some often felt like staying in bed the whole day. Procrastination was a common issue.

Anecdotal reports such as the ones mentioned above motivated the researcher to find out what recent research has discovered regarding the relationships between online learning interactions and mental health. Because a flood of research linking online learning and mental health issues became available during the pandemic, Covid-19 was brought into the research question. Disentangling the mental health issues due to Covid-19-awareness and restrictions, and mental health issues due to online learning *per se*, became a challenge.

On the one hand the Covid-19 pandemic was a huge stressor in itself, and on the other hand it necessitated online learning. The World Health Organization states that "the Covid-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on the mental health and wellbeing of people around the world while also raising concerns of increased suicidal behavior … no comprehensive summary of the current data on these impacts has until now been made widely available" (World Health Organization, 2022, March). Social isolation, a strategy taken by many governments to reduce the transmission of Covid-19, led, according to Chandra (cited in Akpınar, 2021), to up to 90% of the global student population studying at home, many online. Akpınar (2021) states that "online learning has been acknowledged to be a major source of mental health issues among tertiary level students" (p. 6). Also, Rutkowska et al., (2021; 2022) and Hamaideh et al. (2022) report links between online learning and mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation.

Since the beginning of 2020, the Covid pandemic made online lecture sessions and the tools of learning management systems (LMS, including Blackboard, Moodle and Canvas) the main and often only way for learning interactions to take place. According to Anderson's Equivalency Theorem, a successful learning environment promotes a mix of different interactions (cited in Meintjes et al., 2022) namely, students interacting with content, other students, and their teachers. Anderson (2003) states that at least one of these interactions has to take place at a high level to ensure deep and meaningful learning. Going online especially limited spontaneous student–student

and student–teacher interactions. Adapting to the Covid-19 situation, resources were adapted on the go, possibly also negatively influencing student–content interactions. There was little time to consider the implications of the exclusive and high-intensity use of online technologies on students' mental health.

Mental health issues in this article refer mainly to stress. Increased and chronic stress may be a factor in precipitating anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and even disorders including obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder and suicide. Stress will be described in detail in the Findings section. Anxiety, depression, suicide and OCD are defined and/or described in more detail here.

The World Health Organization (n.d.) defines depression as being characterised "by persistent sadness and a lack of interest or pleasure in previously rewarding or enjoyable activities" (Fact Sheet). Sleep and appetite can be disturbed and tiredness and poor concentration are common.

Excessive fear and worry and related behavioural disturbances are seen in anxiety disorders. The fear may be general or related to specific situations (such as social situations or separating from certain people), and may bring on panic attacks (World Health Organization, 2022, June).

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is characterised by a cycle of obsessions (unwanted, intrusive thoughts, images, or urges that trigger intensely distressing feelings and anxiety) and compulsions (behaviours an individual engages in to attempt to get rid of the obsessions and/or decrease distress) (International OCD Foundation, n.d.). The onset of OCD is usually gradual, following stressful events. Symptoms worsen when the individual experiences greater stress (Murayama et al., 2020). The disruptive effect of a crisis and trauma, including conflict and a sense of isolation, increases the risk of suicide for anyone. The risk of suicide is linked to mental disorders in high-income countries (Knipe et al., 2019).

The research question is: Did online learning *per se* negatively affect the mental health of students globally during the Covid-19 pandemic? If so, what aspects of online learning had negative effects? What is recommended to keep students in this mode of education mentally safe?

In this paper the researcher tries to get a clear picture of:

1. Any mental health issues caused by online learning *per se* versus those linked to other issues inherent in the Covid-19 situation.
2. How the educational community can minimise any negative mental health issues linked specifically to online learning.

METHOD

This study is a literature review. It aims to relate and collate the researcher's own experience and the findings from different published research studies about the relationships between the upsurge in mental health issues during the Covid-19 pandemic and online learning and teaching interactions. Relevant articles were found through online searches on databases (including Ebscohost, ERIC, Psychinfo, IEEE Xplore, www.irrodl.org, ejournals.bc.edu, doaj.org, Google Scholar, JSTOR and ResearchGate), and using keywords on their own and in combination. The keywords related to mental health disorders (for example stress, depression, anxiety, ADHD, OCD, depression and suicide), online/ e-learning, good teaching practice, quality instruction, course design and Covid-19.

One peer-reviewed conference paper was used (Placencia & Muljana, 2019). The following criteria were applied to journal-published English-language articles:

1. being published before the intense online learning period, explaining basic concepts regarding quality instruction, online learning, online course design, and mental health in a pre-Covid environment (up to 2019);
2. being published during or soon after the intense online learning period as a response to Covid-19, namely between 2020 and 2022;

3. reporting on responses to Covid-19 in different parts of the world (Table 1) and the effects of these responses on student mental health;
4. reporting on the effects on student mental health of going online in response to Covid-19;
5. representing the findings of a variety of types of studies (quantitative, qualitative, quasi-experimental and mixed method) as shown in Table 2.

Table 1. A selection of research papers reviewed for this study illustrating the global participation in studying possible relationships between Covid-19, online learning and mental health.

WEST EUROPE AND EAST EUROPE	MIDDLE EAST, SOUTH AND SOUTH EAST ASIA AND AFRICA	OCEANIA, THE AMERICAS AND THE FAR EAST
Kazakhstan Bolatov et al., 2021 *Poland* Rutkowska et al., 2021, 2022 Dyrek et al., 2022 *Spain* Sánchez-Cabrero et al., 2021 *The Netherlands* Koelen et al., 2022 *United Kingdom* Akpinar, 2021 *Italy* Moccia et al., 2020 Pedrosa et al., 2020	*Lebanon* Fawaz & Samaha, 2021 *Saudi Arabia* El Keshky et al., 2021 *Pakistan* Abbasi et al., 2020 Artani et al., 2019 *Malaysia* Van Thuy et al., 2022 Etajuril et al., 2022 *India* Chandra, 2020; 2022 *Bangladesh* Sultana et al., 2021 Saha et al., 2021	*Australia* Heim & Heim, 2021 Stanton et al., 2020 *USA* Lazarevic & Bentz, 2021 *Canada* Grubic, 2020 *Brazil* Camargo et al., 2020 *Japan* Sakai et al., 2022 *China* Gao et al., 2020

Studies of different types were also included, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. A selection of research papers reviewed for this study showing different approaches taken by researchers in studying possible relationships between Covid-19, online learning and mental health.

LITERATURE REVIEWS	QUANTITATIVE CORRELATION STUDIES	MIXED METHOD	QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL	META-ANALYSES
Fawah & Samaha, 2020 Camargo et al., 2020 Heim & Heim, 2021 Akpinar, 2021	Data from surveys, questionnaires. Students' satisfaction levels, stress levels and perceived stress levels, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation. Bolatov et al., 2021 Sánchez-Cabrero et al., 2021 Rutkowska et al., 2021, 2022 Etajuril et al., 2022 Dyrek et al., 2022	Combining data from questionnaires and interviews. Saha, et al., 2021	Comparing the experience of stress in groups of students exposed to either an online or a face-to-face version of the same course. Lazarevic & Bentz, 2021	Using the PRISMA template to systematically narrow down the 1892 articles found via a keyword search to 25 studies. Van Thuy et al., 2022

Articles investigating specific aspects regarding increased stress, mental health, quality education and online learning from before the pandemic (Table 3) were purposefully selected for the light they could shed on these specific aspects.

Table 3. A selection of pre-pandemic research papers reviewed for this study investigating possible relationships between online learning and mental health.

ASPECTS REGARDING EDUCATION, STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH	WORKS CONSULTED
Quality education	Vygotsky, 1978; Anderson, 2003
Possible negative mental health effects of technology use	Andreassen et al., 2016
Students' risk for mental health issues and suicide	Reavley, et al., 2012; Masango et al., 2008
The effects of increased screen time on feelings	Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Stiglic & Viner, 2019
Stress and its effects and the difference between stress and perceptions of stress	Artani et al., 2019; Salmela et al., 2016; Peer et al., 2015; Mortagy & Boghikian-Whitby, 2010
Physiological changes in the body linked to high/ continuous stress	Ranabir & Reetu, 2011
The links between stress levels and academic performance	Oketch-Oboth & Okunya, 2018; Sohail, 2013
What happens if a person is subjected to numerous life changes (stressors)	Holmes & Rahe, 1967
Poor course design as a contributor to stress	Placencio & Muljana, 2019
Protective factors that can prevent high stress from developing into mental health issues	Uebelacker et al., 2013; Hunter et al., 2019

The answers found in the pre-Covid studies above were then integrated into and used to explain the phenomena observed during the Covid period. All the found information was sorted into categories: stress, positive effects of increased stress and negative effects of increased stress. The negative effects on mental health were further sorted into those issues related to the pandemic (such as social isolation) and those related directly to online learning *per se* (such as online course delivery). These two categories were then further expanded to the different factors. A broad study overview is given in Figure 1.

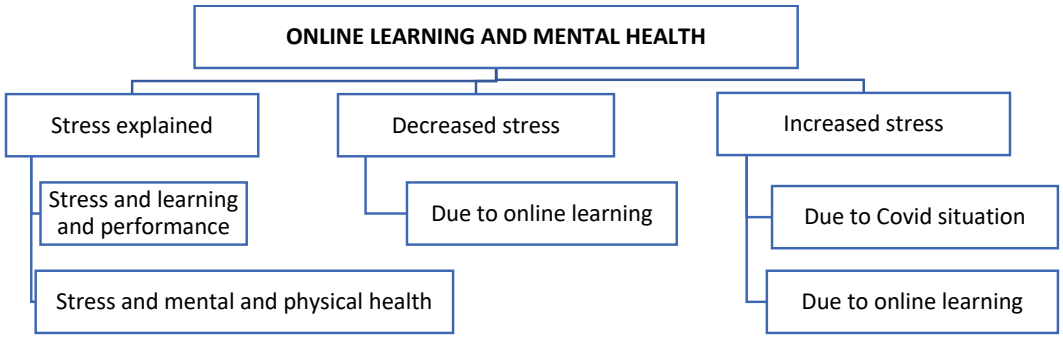

Figure 1. Outline of the study.

FINDINGS

Stress

While stress perceived as low to moderate helps people perform and protect themselves, too much, too long and overwhelming stress can lead to fight, flight or freeze responses. For a person's mental and physical wellbeing, it is important to learn how to cope with stress (World Health Organization, 2021).

Different factors are involved in causing and influencing stress and perception of stress:

1. *Change causes stress*: Stress is caused by "any type of change that causes physical, emotional or psychological strain" (Scott, 2022, para. 1).
2. *Perceived stress*: Stress is "emotional arousal experiences … when viewed by our bodies as threats to our homeostasis" and "the subjective perception of mental and emotional tension" caused by the change (Lazarevic & Bentz, 2021, pp. 1–3). It can, for example, be viewed as a threat or an opportunity. Artani et al. (2019) define stress as the "perceived loss of an individual's ability to adapt with evolving changes in life."
3. *Influencing capacity to adapt*: Stress influences the person's capacity to adapt to real or perceived life changes (Artani et al., 2019).
4. *Intensity and duration of change and response to it determine wellbeing*: The response to stress determines a person's overall physical and mental wellbeing. This differs from person to person. Common mental disorders become apparent when an individual fails to cope with chronic stress (Artani et al., 2019).
5. *Stress accumulates*: Stress from different changes in a person's life, even positive changes, accumulates. According to Holmes and Rahe (cited in Artani et al., 2019) the sum total of stresses can be used to predict the risk of physical and mental health issues. Artani et al. (2019) state that serious mental health conditions (including suicide) can be predicted with high accuracy, and more common ones (depression and anxiety) with moderate accuracy using the Recent Life Changes Questionnaire (RLCQ).

Stress, learning and performance

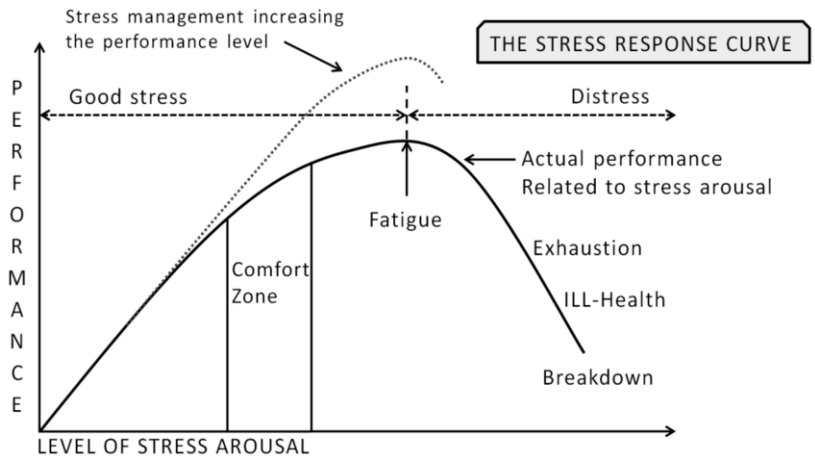

Figure 2. The stress response curve (Salmela et al., 2016).

Despite the negative connotations of the word 'stress', if seen as goal relevant and manageable (i.e., challenging), it may increase motivation, performance and wellbeing (Travis et al., 2020). Also, Deng et al. (2022) and Peer et al. (2015) found that students seeing stress as a motivational factor in their lives said that it drives them to excel. Physiologically, this makes sense, since the activation of the sympathetic nervous system, when in acute stress, gives a burst of energy with the release of the catecholamine hormones epinephrine and nor-epinephrine (Ranabir

& Reetu, 2011). Figure 2 illustrates the non-linear relationship between stress, motivation and performance as represented by Salmela et al. (2016). Moderate stress during the learning process is thought to enhance memory formation, while at the same time hindering memory retrieval. Higher stress levels are associated with poor academic performance (Sohail, 2013; Oketch-Oboth & Okunya, 2018; Sánchez-Cabrero et al., 2021).

In a learning situation, stress or perception of stress can be kept manageable if the learning environment is designed to promote learning interactions to take place in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Figure 3), just outside the comfort zone. Vygotsky (1978, p. 86) defines the ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers."

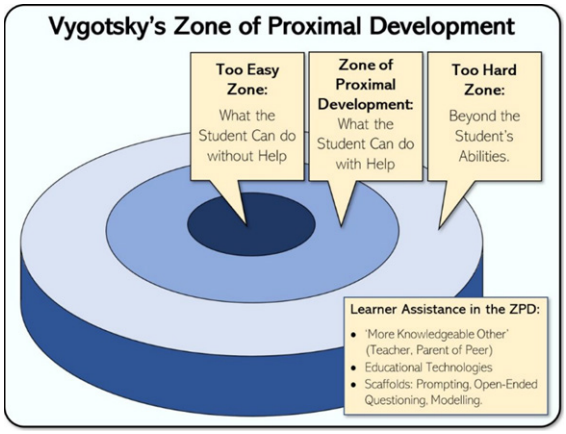

Figure 3. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Cornell & Drew, 2022).

In both face-to-face delivery and online learning, the presentation of the content, the activities, the lecturer and peers facilitate learning, making the outcomes reachable through staircasing (for example, by sequencing content from simple to more complex) and scaffolding (for example by breaking content down into smaller chunks) and thereby bringing learning into the ZPD. In face-to-face environments, student–student interactions are often spontaneous and unplanned. In online learning, planning of student–student interactions should (especially initially) be specifically planned, mediated and encouraged.

As could be predicted from the descriptions above about the effects of stress on mental health, both positive effects and negative effects as a result of online learning were found. Since the time when the Covid-19 pandemic started to influence learning at the beginning of 2020, Covid isolation and online learning became intertwined as factors affecting mental health.

Positive effects of stress

In a 2010 longitudinal study over eight years, Mortagy and Boghikian-Whitby (2010) found that students' perception of online learning became more positive over time, whereas the perception of face-to-face learning remained constant.

Bolatov et al. (2021) found an improvement in mental health among the 619 senior medical students that formed part of their quantitative study. Dyrek et al. (2022) report that senior medical students were highly accepting of lectures and seminars conducted online.

From the results of a quasi-experimental study, Lazarevic and Bentz (2021) deduced that different aspects of course delivery can modify students' *perception of stress*, which in turn can modify their results. They found that students *opting for* an online option of their course experienced less perceived stress than those enrolled in a face-to-face delivery of the course: the students found it easier to access learning materials, to find time to study, to meet

expectations from friends and family, and they experienced a reduction in social stress (situations endangering "relationships, self-esteem and sense of belonging" [p. 9]).

Sánchez-Cabrero et al. (2021) reported that students with high grades were very satisfied with the experience: possibly a sign that they adapted well to the new environment. In particular, students comfortable in digital technologies found it a less stressful experience and were overall very satisfied. Mortagy and Boghikian-Whitby (2010) found that more students dropped out early in online courses. Those that continued were satisfied, making the researchers believe that online education is not for everyone.

Negative effects of stress

A body of research has accumulated since 2020 showing links between the Covid-19 pandemic, online learning and increased stress in the majority of students leading to an increase in mental health issues. Sakai et al. (2022), and Heim and Heim (2021) concluded from Japanese, Swiss, Greek, Israeli and Chinese studies that mental health issues in university students, particularly anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts, increased worldwide during the Covid-19 pandemic. Rutkowska et al. (2021), in a quantitative correlation study on the links between online studies and mental health *per se*, found that all 3051 student participants reported increased stress levels, with 47% reporting depression in the online learning mode. In 2022 they found online learning to be related to increased levels of stress and depressive symptoms in more than 50% of the 753 study participants with 18% reporting suicidal thoughts.

The situation of being a student is stressful. One would not normally enrol in a programme that is not challenging and that does not put you under a certain amount of stress. Numerous reports about students experiencing increased stress due to all the changes brought on by the Covid-19 situation are to be expected, especially if students have just started their studies (a time of huge change). The high incidence of mental health issues (Rutkowska et al., 2021; 2022; Fawaz & Samaha, 2021; Van Thuy et al., 2022; Dyrek et al., 2022), including anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation, can be seen as a sign that stress became distress (Figure 2) for many: an increase in students experiencing an inability to cope with change due to its intensity and/or duration and insufficient/inappropriate preparation/support.

Contrary to the positive effects of stress described earlier, unmanageable stress levels may negatively affect both physical and mental health, bringing on endocrine dysfunction and psychological disorders including depression. Very high stress, in the distress zone in Figure 2 (driving epinephrine/nor-epinephrine release, causing depletion of the body's reserves) or chronic stress (activating the pituitary–adrenal axis and characterised by the release of cortisol), may inhibit performance and bring on maladaptive behaviours and health conditions (Travis et al., 2020). Adolescents and young adults are, because of their life stage and often being single (Masango et al., 2008), in a high-risk group for mental health issues (Fawaz & Samaha, 2021). Mental health conditions affect a student's ability and their motivation to study. Depression, for example, is characterised by sadness, hopelessness, powerlessness and feeling overwhelmed. Depressed students may leave tasks undone, lack attention and have difficulty reading (Van Thuy et al., 2022), which further exacerbates stress.

Deng et al. (2022) explain that when people cannot handle their inner and outer feelings due to stress, their morale is diminished. The students who perceived stress as a negative factor experienced "irritability/anger management difficulties, depressed mood, anxiousness/nervousness, hopelessness, concentration difficulties, and social isolation" (Peer et al., 2015, p. 5). Feeling overwhelmed, depressed and hopeless may be the signs of activation of the parasympathetic nervous system (giving up, preparing to 'shut down').

Increased stress due to the Covid-19 situation

Certain stressors may be linked to the Covid -19 situation itself and may not be related to online learning *per se*. A few of these Covid-19-related factors are discussed below.

The Covid-19 pandemic necessitating social isolation

Social isolation meant non-essential workers, students, school children and pre-schoolers stayed at home, often indoors, with less exposure to sunshine, increased screen time, boredom, isolation from friends and family, lack of physical contact, inability to participate in activities (like going to class, shops, church and gym), and an increase in alcohol consumption and smoking (Slurink et al., 2022). Further, this often led to physical inactivity (Fawaz & Samaha, 2021) and obesity (Sultana et al., 2021). Also, Stanton et al. (2020) found that changes in physical activity, sleep, tobacco and alcohol use may be blamed for depression, anxiety and stress during Covid-19.

Some students ended up with financial problems as they could not go to work (Van Thuy et al., 2022). Female students, according to Rutkowska et al. (2021), are more likely to be affected negatively by isolation than men. For parents, social isolation meant added responsibilities (such as supervising their children's studies and looking after pre-schoolers).

In the learning environment, social isolation meant lowering student–student interaction and student–lecturer interaction: isolation limited informal and formal talking to peers and lecturers (Akpınar, 2021). Opportunities to talk to peers about academic work as well as co-constructing knowledge with them were limited, as were opportunities to share concerns and fears with them.

Isolation may have made the use of social media more ubiquitous, bringing with it its own issues (as listed in the following section).

Social media, online gaming and technology addiction

Social media (outside of the LMS) may be one contributing factor exacerbating mental health issues: researchers in Wuhan, China, (Gao et al., 2020) blame the 'infodemic' for mental health issues, as social media platforms exposed people to an overload of information (often also misinformation) that may have led to fear, anxiety and even depression.

A meta-analysis study by Keles et al. (2020) links social media use to depression, anxiety and psychological distress in adolescents (10–19 years old). The time spent, the activity, investment and addiction correlated with depression, anxiety and psychological distress.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Andreassen et al. (2016) report that female students are more likely to become addicted to social media. Social networkers tend to become more anxious than depressed, and addictive gamers more depressed than anxious. Fear of missing out on new information, poor inhibitory control and a strong urge to control characterise both obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) sufferers and excessive technology users (Fontes-Perryman & Spina, 2021). Indications are that people who are easily distracted and/or impulsive (which may include those with overt or covert attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder [ADHD], and OCD) may use technology as a form of self-medication (Andreassen et al., 2016).

The abruptness of the change to online learning in response to Covid-19

Examples of how the abrupt changes contributed to stress are reported in recent research and are listed below:

- Van Thuy et al. (2022) are of the opinion that in Malaysia the swift, unprecedented and intensive switch to online learning due to Covid-19 caused feelings of powerlessness and loneliness, as well as time-management issues, for students.
- Students enrolled in a face-to-face degree programme were suddenly thrown into an online one. Understandably, they were concerned about whether an online degree would be acceptable when they started looking for jobs in a competitive market (Van Thuy et al., 2022). They may also not have been confident that what they were receiving in an online environment would be equivalent to what they would have received in a face-to-face environment. They may have looked forward to the increase in social contact, getting out of the house, and/or preparing for a practical career.
- Courses were not necessarily set up for online delivery. Some courses may therefore have included activities and ways of delivery that were unsuitable for online delivery.

- Students were not necessarily prepared for online learning. Some may have experienced technology and/or infrastructure problems (Fawaz & Samaha, 2021). In some cases, this may have excluded students for the duration of problem: often at the beginning of a course, when course and assessment procedures were explained. Special note should be taken of the digital divide that exacerbates inequality. Even in OECD countries such as Aotearoa New Zealand, equal access to technology is not yet achieved (digital.govt.nz, 2021; 2022). Globally, huge inequalities exist: Saha et al. (2021) report a high digital divide in Bangladesh, leading to a widening gap in learning inequality when learning went online in a country where only 37.5% of the family units had internet access at home in 2021.
- Some students may have experienced a lack of guidance and counselling (Akpınar, 2021).
- Some research suggests that online learning *per se* may present additional challenges to students.

Increased stress due to online learning

The introduction of online learning as a coping mechanism at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic may have led to specific issues, including those listed below.

Course presentation on learning platforms (limiting student–content, student–student and student–lecturer interactions)

As stated previously, many courses that were in use, especially at the start of the lockdown, were not designed for online delivery (Camargo et al., 2020). Many course set-ups may have served more as a repository of resources at the time than a properly designed online course. From personal experience, student reflections and some research reports, the researcher compiled the following list of possible issues that could have led to an increase in stress in students doing some courses:

- Improper balance between knowledge acquisition and participation
  - For knowledge acquisition (building), resources such as recorded lectures, online digital resources, and media such as e-books and videos are mostly placed on LMS platforms.
  - Participation entails learning through "inquiry, collaboration, and defending ideas against challenges" (Alberts, 2020, p. 8). It means engaging with the lecturer, other students and the content. In courses developed for face-to-face delivery, participatory activities would have taken place on a regular basis as part of the lessons without being explicitly included on the LMS. In face-to-face classes, synchronous class and group discussions, for example, are used often and both formally and informally. This gives students opportunities to raise their fears and concerns, and verbalise, adjust and correct their understandings. For second-language students, translation by peers contributes to their understanding. An LMS with fewer participation opportunities might therefore have been adequate in a face-to-face delivery mode. In an online environment there are fewer opportunities to promote participation, such as sharing the workload through working together, especially synchronously. Although LMS platforms and other platforms offer tools for collaboration, these could have been used sub-optimally due to unfamiliarity with these tools, especially initially, on both the lecturers' and the students' sides. Discussion tools on LMS platforms usually promote asynchronous communication. Alberts (2020) advises the allocation of a tutor to each team to provide guidance and support. For synchronous discussions, small-group use of video platforms, formally and informally, could be encouraged and mandated in the online environment. Still, responding to a screen may exacerbate feelings of isolation and make it hard to have constructive input (Twenge & Campbell, 2018).
- Increased cognitive load
  - Long, unbroken online lecture sessions with a low variety of activities could have led to struggles with paying attention.
  - Information overload, for example reading long passages on screen instead of in chunked, manageable sections.

- High levels of distraction (Akpınar, 2021), including unnecessary links, announcements and emails.
- Limited customised feedback and scaffolding opportunities, especially for those with insufficient background in the field.
- Unclear navigation patterns.

Unfamiliarity with the optimal use of online resources (limiting student–content interactions)

Some students may have experienced difficulty in using online platforms, such as navigating in the courses and finding materials (Akpınar, 2021). Some may have used unsuitable study techniques for high intensity use of online resources: for example, passively listening to lectures/lecture recordings without note-taking/discussion does not involve active learning, a prerequisite for successful learning (Meintjes et al., 2022). Fawaz and Samaha (2021) further report intensified procrastination (as was also reported by the author's students in their course reflections).

Worries about the future

Uncertainty about clinical/practical components in courses such as dentistry and medicine (Etajuril et al., 2022; Abbasi et al., 2020; Dyrek et al., 2022), and worries about acceptability of online qualifications in a competitive job market (Van Thuy et al., 2022) were further concerns listed in the research literature. In the online environment, practical competencies cannot be attained.

Students are described as a high-risk group *per se* for mental health issues (Reavley et al., 2012). One reason is that they are often young and single (Andreassen et al., 2016). Heightened psychological distress is prevalent in normal circumstances for young people. Glowacz and Schmits (2020, p. 2) describe young people as "the most psychologically troubled" because of "an overload of contact through social networks and a high intolerance to uncertainty."

From their own experience and course reflections, the researcher knows that studying (whether it is face to face or online) puts huge demands on student resilience and coping strategies regarding aspects such as time-management skills, social skills and a willingness to be open to change, new information and new paradigms. It challenges students to shift perspectives of themselves, others and the world around them, take new positions in their families, redefine themselves and make life-changing decisions (such as quitting a full-time job or being the first in the family to aspire to getting a degree). Social demands may challenge them when they work on group tasks with unfamiliar students. Studying may often lead them to points where they feel overwhelmed. Since studying in its very nature stretches a person, students can often feel out of their comfort zone. They may at times feel inadequately prepared to meet the course demands. This is where the more capable/experienced peer or lecturer/mentor comes in, as shown in the Zone of Proximal Development in Figure 3. Due to isolation, students may have felt alone, even abandoned in this situation.

DISCUSSION

Increased stress was one of the common complaints during the Covid-19 pandemic. The intensity and duration of stress are related to physical and mental health issues. From the literature it is clear that certain stressors came with the pandemic and affected the entire population. For students, there were the additional stresses of becoming and being a student and then, on top of that, the abrupt change in the mode of delivery from face-to-face to online.

From the findings reported as Positive Effects/Reduced Stress above (and summarised under A on Figure 4) one can deduce that students who were ready for online learning flourished in it: they chose it, they were digitally literate, they were resourced for it, and many were senior students who had already been through the adaptation of becoming a student. It is also important to note that where positive effects were experienced, online courses had not been thrust upon students as a solution to a situation: they were developed taking best practice into consideration.

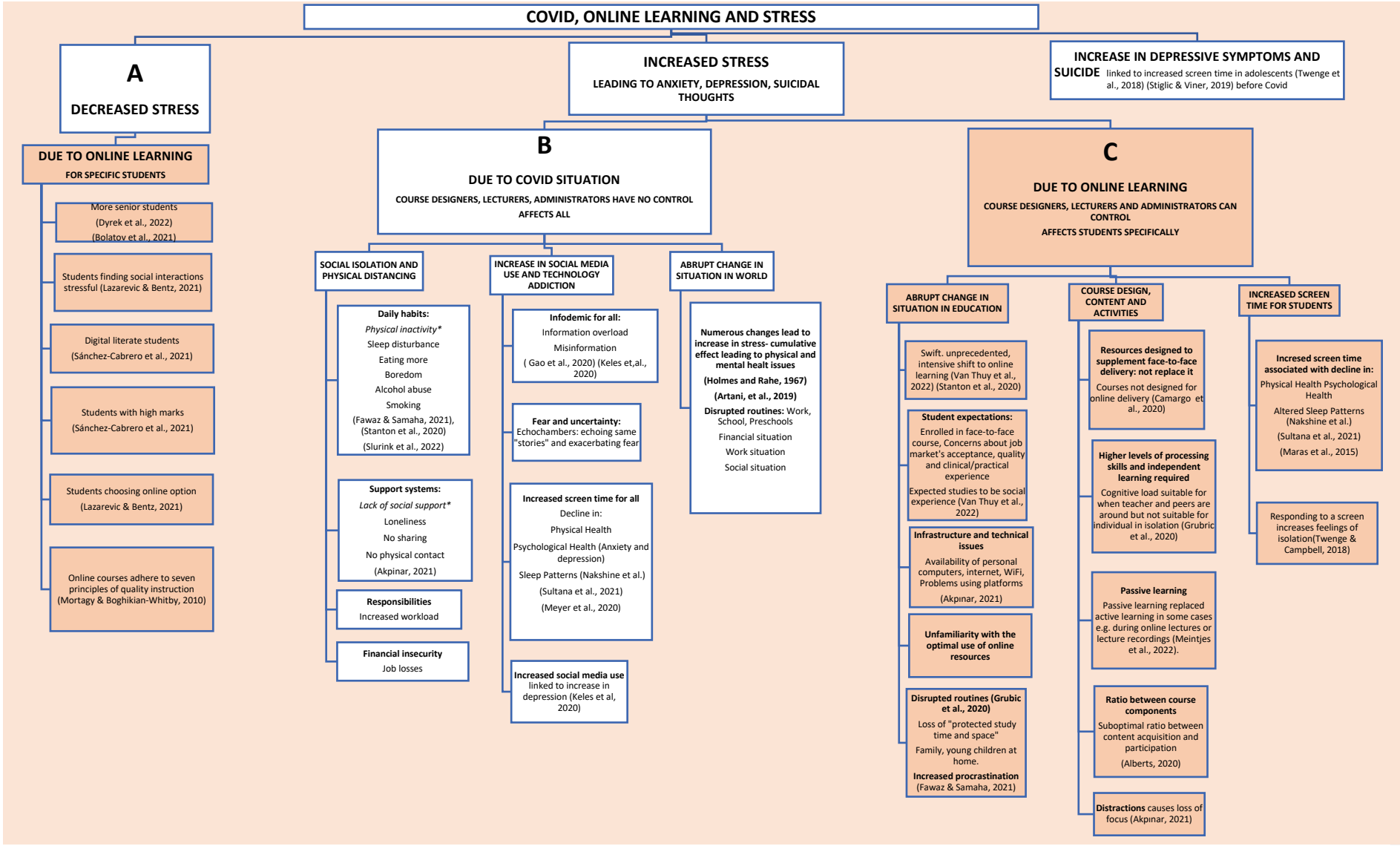

Figure 4. A selection of factors related to decreased and increased stress before and during the Covid-19 pandemic.

From the findings reported as Negative Effects/Increased Stress (summarised under B and C in Figure 4) one can deduce that the cumulative effects (Holmes & Rahe, cited in Artani et al., 2019), such as abruptly introduced online courses, prepared to supplement face-to-face delivery to students who had opted for face-to-face, the huge increase in screen time (Twenge & Campbell, 2018), the decrease in social interaction and time to *participate* in the course (versus *acquiring* the content during student–content interactions), a decrease in physical activity, and/or being under-resourced in relation to equipment, data and internet access (such as some Māori, Pacific and unemployed students) (digital.govt.nz, 2022) may have pushed student stress levels into the distress region (Figure 2).

The pandemic was a time of great uncertainty, with an unknown virus and an inability to predict the short- and long-term duration and consequences. Fear was ubiquitous: a potentially lethal virus was on the loose. This created ideal circumstances for fearmongering on social media and the spread of misinformation. Many students and family members caught Covid-19. The increase in sickness and death all around and the soaring case numbers reported daily increased the general awareness of a serious threat, affecting peoples' sense of safety and trust.

Social isolation, in itself, during lockdown periods (or when studying full-time from home) could lead to feelings of loneliness and intensified feelings of worthlessness (Van Thuy et al., 2022). Social support and physical activity could have reduced stress; these were found in a longitudinal study with 91,912 female participants by Uebelacker et al. (2013) to be moderating factors in the relationship between high stress developing into depression. The positive effects of social support and physical activity are supported by other research (Stiglic & Viner, 2019; Meyer et al., 2020; Akpınar, 2021).

The risk of mental health issues under changing conditions is greater in some people than in others. For example, young, single people, females, and people with anxious, cyclothymic and/or depressive temperaments are more likely to suffer psychological distress (Moccia et al., 2020).

RECOMMENDATIONS

What could an institute, lecturers and course designers do to ensure that stress levels stay manageable and do not become distress? Rutkowska et al. (2022) suggest the implementation of mental health support, for example individual and/or group sessions with psychologists/counsellors.

If students miss part of the course (for example, due to late enrolment or infrastructure problems) there should be alternatives to enable them to catch up with missed opportunities around, for example, procedures such as introductory modules to unlock courses to prepare students. Fears about the quality of online courses in comparison to face-to-face courses should be explicitly addressed and expectations clarified.

When setting up courses, the need of especially younger students to belong and to get to know their peers must be considered. Get-togethers and working together (online and physically) (Koelen et al., 2022) could help in this regard. The research by Lazarevic and Bentz (2021) points to the advisability of providing choice between online or face-to-face if possible. Camargo et al. (2020) suggest the division of lectures into mini-lectures (20 minutes) with one-minute questions or exercises between them to help students to stay focused. Short breaks during online periods, for example with prompts to walk around the house – recording time it took/plants seen (Hunter et al., 2019) – and/or shorter periods and/or variety of activities, including break-out rooms. To reduce stress due to the LMS set-up, Placencia and Muljana (2019) recommend that online course navigation should be logical. Unambiguous, specific and clear labels should be used, as these affect the findability of course materials. Information should not be buried under layers of links, and scheduled announcements could be used to improve students' time-management skills. Using long pages with information, requiring scrolling, may reduce reader understanding.

Fundamental to all this is the advice from Mortagy and Boghikian-Whitby (2010, p. 1), stating that "the success of an online course depends on effective course design using a student-centred model, delivery, and assessment." They emphasise that "research-based validated frameworks and benchmarks" should be followed "during the planning, designing, delivering, and assessing of online education."

This study is a wide exploration of the findings of numerous studies across the world investigating links between the following four aspects: the independent variable – online learning; the dependent variable – mental health; the population – students globally; and the time frame – a specific period (the first two years of the Covid-19 pandemic). Research findings from studies before the period within the time frame were used to clarify findings of studies during the period.

The study was limited by being a literature review. No new data were collected. It was further limited by choosing recency (post-2019) as a criterion for selecting most of the research reports: a wealth of research about pre-Covid online student experience is available. Including these would have made the study very large, but a comparison between pre-, during and post-Covid online learning would have given a clearer picture of the effects of online studies *per se* on mental health. (One must realise that the Covid period presented a unique set of circumstances that will hopefully not be repeated.)

Very few qualitative/mixed method studies were included. Further research could focus more on descriptions of how students experienced their online journey before, during the pandemic and/or thereafter, whether and how their perceptions of online studies changed over time (as was done by Abbasi et al., 2020), and what external and or internal factors helped them to survive the journey.

This article looks at research from all over the world. It tries to report on the effects of the use of online learning on the mental health of the global student population. There are risks associated with transferring and applying global findings to local settings. The issues that are important in one setting may be of no significance in another (Burchett et al., 2013), and therefore decisions based on global findings may be ineffective in local settings. Munthe-Kaas, et al. (2020) mention the use of specific tools including TRANSFER (which includes collaboration with the original researchers) to ensure that systematic reviews, especially regarding medication and medical procedures, are relevant to and useful for decision making in local settings. Remedies for the situation discussed in this article may fall into the categories of: 1) increasing access to internet and devices for students, 2) support with digital literacy, and 3) appropriate mental health support; 4) improving online course design to improve student–content interactions (for example making navigation and use easier), and 5) creating sensible student–student online interactions; and 6) appealing to local communities. These six categories could all be research topics with the aim of finding out how best to serve local student communities in this regard.

In selecting quantitative studies, more attention could be given to inclusion of studies that meet certain criteria regarding, for example, ecological validity (generalisations of the findings to predict behaviours in real-world settings) and effect sizes (the magnitude of the difference between groups). Full-scale meta-analysis studies could be done.

It is envisaged that many studies can be done using this study as a starting point: comparative studies, as well as more detailed studies about the research questions and the research methods used in the published articles (such as choice of target populations and samples, data collection and analytical methods used; details of how research themes, aims, questions, methods and analysis were summarised; generalisations across countries [ecological validity] and the implications of the answers to the above questions for each study and how these findings should be viewed). Methodologies and findings could be compared in detail. From this article's global general perspective local issues could be explored: for example, the digital divide that exists between many communities within wealthy nations and its effects on access to online learning and the mental health of students from these communities. The findings could then be compared to the worldwide or national picture. More systematic literature searches using tools (as was done by Van Thuy et al. [2022], who used the PRISMA tool to narrow down sources) could be used to find literature linking the three concepts: namely, mental health (increased stress), Covid-19 and online learning; or just mental health and online learning.

CONCLUSION

This study explored, using a wide lens, the literature related to mental health issues in student populations across the globe during social isolation periods, mandated to curb the spread of Covid-19, and the necessitated online learning. It is envisaged that many studies could be done using this study as a starting point.

Students are generally at a high risk of mental health issues because of their life stage (19–30 years of age) (Glowacz & Schmits, 2020), often being single and because of being students. The lockdown and isolation periods would have especially affected them: even without online learning, the pandemic could have led to mental health issues for students, perhaps even more than it did with online learning. (At least the online classes kept students to a schedule, focused them on a goal and brought some contact with others.) Technology addiction and excessive social media use can increase their chances of mental health issues.

It seems, from research, that online learning *per se* could have helped to reduce stress for digitally literate students, senior students, those who find social interactions stressful and those with internal loci of control (Oketch-Oboth & Okunya, 2018). One must consider that adopting new technologies is a stressor in itself, making it harder for less digitally literate students.

Online learning could have increased stress for students who felt overwhelmed by the demands of studying, who lacked peer support, and those who looked forward to teacher–student and student–student interactions in the form of learning together and shared experiences and had to do without those. Students in courses where practical components were included may have been stressed due to the lack of chances to practise practical skills to reach competence. Where practical work needs to be done and practical skills acquired, online work should preferably not replace face-to-face sessions. Taking note of the recommendations made by researchers could help educational stakeholders to keep stress within manageable levels, especially in online courses.

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LEARNER ENGAGEMENT WITH WHERE-TO-NEXT FEEDBACK IN EARLY TERTIARY STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

Learners on the New Zealand Diploma in Business are early tertiary learners and do not perform as well as it is believed that they should. In addition, there is a disparity between ethnicities and age groups. This study researched the use of where-to-next (WTN) feedback as a possible tool to address this disparity and prepare learners better for future study and employment. WTN uses focused feedback directing students to specific areas of improvement and is therefore effective (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). It also enables rich and motivational dialogue between faculty and learner (Elbra-Ramsay, 2022), which is especially effective in respectful classroom environments (Zhou et al., 2021). The qualitative phenomenological study proved that WTN is a useful tool; however, due to environmental demands on some learners' time, some learners did not take up the opportunity to engage with the feedback.

KEYWORDS

Where-to-next feedback, academic feedback, feedback, successful course completion, formative feedback

INTRODUCTION

A New Zealand Diploma in Business (NZDB) cohort at a polytechnic in Aotearoa New Zealand often includes learners who do not have university entrance, school leavers who may not have had good educational outcomes, people in work who need formal qualifications for career progression, or people who have been out of work for a variety of reasons and are returning to study to gain employment. From our experience, a significant proportion of learners in this cohort enter this qualification with undeveloped academic skills and, importantly, need to develop critical-thinking skills to prepare them for further study and to achieve career goals.

Tertiary education institutions acknowledge that the transition from secondary to tertiary education, as well as a return or late start to tertiary education, is a stressful period for learners (Baik et al., 2019). In addition, tertiary institutions are also attempting to comply with the Ministry of Education's ten-year plan, announced in 2021, to reach parity in successful course completion between Māori, Pacific and Under-25 learners with all others, since these three priority groups are not achieving on par with the overall successful course completion rates (Gerritsen, 2021; Lourie, 2016; Parr & Timperley, 2015). However, despite various interventions to support these learners, the desired course completion rate remains low, compared to the overall cohort completion rate (Parr & Timperley, 2015). Table 1 shows the successful course completion (SCC) differences between the various groups within the first-year NZDB cohort at our institution. In addition, the table compares overall programme SCC with first-semester SCC, which is much lower for all categories measured.

Table 1. Successful course completion rates NZDB (2019–2021) by priority groupings.

	Successful course completion – all NZDB courses (%) (2019–2021 average)	Successful course completion – 1st Semester courses only (%) (2019–2021 average)
Overall	74.0	69.0
Māori	60.8	57.9
Pacific	55.6	54.3
International	89.4	83.7
Under 25 years	69.5	64.3

(Created by the authors from institutional data.)

We wanted to try a different approach to support new learners, and identified assessment feedback as a potential key point where positive change could be initiated. The decision was made to try a different, learner-focused form of assessment feedback, as this could possibly improve the course completion rate of a cohort of 47 learners in their first semester of study, and lead to ongoing successful course completion for the students throughout their academic careers.

CHOOSING AN EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK TOOL

The notion that feedback is a learning tool is now undisputed and embedded in educational practice. Research findings indicate that the focus of developing and using feedback should be on providing feedback that engages learners (Espasa, et al., 2022; Jorgenson, 2019; Naylor et al., 2014), while McGinness et al. (2020) regard effective feedback as feedback that is learner centred. Following these findings, we wanted to use a tool with proven success in engaging learners that may also result in improving their academic skills. Several theories and studies highlight the factors affecting successful and sustained engagement with feedback and supported us to select a tool.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY

This study fits into a social constructivist theory context, and the working definition for this study, based on the work of Davis and Sumara (2002), and Quay (2003), explains the approach followed to enhance the responsiveness to feedback. The social constructivist context is defined as an approach that includes the continuous acknowledgement of the multi-dimensional social factors affecting learning, a positive classroom experience, open classroom culture, acknowledging cultural backgrounds of individuals, and the open and different levels of communication in the classroom as the foundation for learner success.

Furthermore, social constructivist theory underpins engagement with feedback, as learners are constructing new ways of learning in an academic context as well as engaging with critical thinking in a different manner, facilitated by conversation with the lecturer. Jorgenson (2019) supports the social constructivist viewpoint that feedback is useful and effective when it improves learners' tangible work or their learning strategies. This is a process that includes dialogue between the lecturer and learner, regarding expectations, interpretation and negotiating meaning (Jorgensen, 2019). Zhou et al. (2021) consider effective and engaging feedback as aligned with the social constructivist theory because they perceive it as an interdependent communication process in which collaboration between faculty and learners to solve a problem (in this case something in an assignment that may need improvement) leads to academic growth.

Feedback is thus meaningful when it results in learners effectively and objectively evaluating their work themselves, and enabling them to embed this self-regulation for future academic and employment situations (Jorgenson, 2019).

EDUCATIONAL ALLIANCE

Telio et al. (2015) observed that learners more easily accept and implement feedback when there is an 'educational alliance' between faculty and learner. This alliance, initially established in the medical and psychology fields, is now being used in educational contexts and is defined as an ongoing process, or cycle, of interactive communication (as opposed to linear communication from lecturer to learner) that contributes to building a relationship with learners while considering the academic context and their social environment. The aim of the educational alliance approach is more than merely imparting and improving knowledge, as it also aims to develop the self-efficacy and behaviour of learners.

This approach views feedback as a rich process that includes negotiation and dialogue between faculty and learners (Espasa et al., 2022; Telio et al., 2015), relationships that are based on commitment and authenticity, and providing opportunities to use feedback (Telio et al., 2015). Cohen and Singh (2020) maintain a similar view and describe effective feedback as a "process of engagement" (p. 153) between faculty and learners, and emphasise that one party is not superior to the other. Elbra-Ramsay (2022) posits that a trusting relationship and feeling among learners that faculty 'know' them (Elbra-Ramsay, 2022) are prerequisites to learners accepting and valuing feedback.

INDIVIDUAL LEARNER ATTRIBUTES

Individual learner attributes affect the effectiveness of, and engagement with, feedback. McGinness et al. (2020) observed that although the aim of feedback is to develop learners' ability to evaluate their own work efficiently, they acknowledge that personal attributes influence to what extent this will be possible and/or effective. Elbra-Ramsay (2022) and Espasa et al. (2022) warn that emotional reactions to feedback may result in defensive and negative feelings and an unwillingness to accept and apply feedback, and that a good relationship between faculty and leaner is necessary to negotiate these into positive learning experiences.

Learners need to perceive themselves as active participants in feedback, and have to accept, apply and implement it (McGinness et al., 2020). This receptiveness may be influenced negatively where there is a significant discrepancy between the learner's perspective on a topic or their own abilities, and the content of faculty feedback (Eva & Regehr, 2013). Another observation (Mann et al., 2011, cited in Telio et al., 2015) was that although learners accepted constructive feedback, they accepted praise more easily than criticism, irrespective of the tone of the feedback. Eva and Regehr (2013) ascribe this behaviour to learners' need for reassurance, especially when they are still developing academic confidence.

Cohen and Singh (2020) emphasise learners' ability and willingness to reflect on feedback as significant attributes in support of engagement and subsequent internalisation, which affects future behaviour. Positive future behaviour includes a belief in their own capabilities and the confidence and motivation to actively grow academically. Carless (2022) refers to a similar notion, calling it "internal feedback" (p. 44), which implies that learners will actively and positively respond to feedback. However, Carless asserts that this skill is part of feedback literacy.

FEEDBACK LITERACY

Carless (2022) states that learners often do not understand the meaning of faculty feedback, and therefore the feedback is ineffective. Hattie and Timperley (2007) argue that a key factor in learners' understanding and use of feedback is their level of feedback literacy, which they define as the technical and emotional ability to use constructive criticism.

Developed feedback literacy implies that the learner will be able to positively receive feedback and implement it as intended on a continuous basis (Carless, 2022). Carless and Boud (2018) describe this ability as a process consisting of four learner-based reactions. Well-developed feedback literacy has at its foundation an understanding of the purpose of the feedback and why it is given. The level of appreciation determines how learners will manage feedback; either being open to it or becoming defensive. Learners open to feedback are able to make judgements and evaluate their own and peers' work. Judgement allows learners to act in response to feedback, and it implies that they will know which action is an appropriate action for the feedback given.

Various authors, including Cohen and Singh (2020) and Naylor et al. (2014) support the notion that feedback is an ongoing, core, and embedded activity that includes feedback in the classroom during lectures, and discussions, as well as formative and summative feedback. For the purpose of this study, feedback literacy will be discussed in the context of assessments only. Cohen and Singh (2020) argue that formative and summative assessment feedback, in particular, motivates further learning.

The role of faculty in developing feedback literacy is maintained in different studies. Zhou et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of respect as the foundation of feedback literacy and define respect in relation to feedback literacy as the learner knowledge about what a respectful feedback process entails and how to act respectfully in feedback interactions.

Naylor et al. (2012) elaborate on the role of faculty in supporting feedback literacy. Learners need to be prepared to receive feedback, and they need to understand the purpose of the feedback. Furthermore, Naylor et al. (2012) argue that learners need to be shown where they went wrong or could improve, using highly focused feedback, with enough and clear detail to ensure that learners can easily grasp actions for improvement. Breslin (2021) observes that even critical feedback, if it is targeted and clear, has the potential to lead to learning, self-reflection, and improved academic performance. Importantly, feedback has to be timely to ensure that it can be internalised and addressed in time for summative work (Carless, 2022; Naylor et al., 2012; Zhou et al., 2021). Underpinning the success of this approach is a clear understanding among learners of the learning outcomes in each assessment (Cohen & Singh, 2020).

CONTEXT AND ENVIRONMENT

Various authors/studies acknowledge the wider, lived situation of learners and a positive, nurturing atmosphere in the classroom as factors significantly affecting engagement with learning and feedback. Two terms are inconsistently used in academia to discuss this: 'environment' and 'context'. For the purpose of this study, and to put our findings in a clear perspective, this study uses the term 'context' for the behaviours, communication and attitudes of, and relationships between, lecturers and learners, and peer relationships between learners, in the classroom. In contrast, the term 'environment' refers to all factors outside of the classroom that influence a learner's engagement with their studies and, by extension, feedback, and includes personal circumstances, ethnicity, culture, family life, employment, etc.

Zhou et al. (2021) place respect at the core of a positive context and assert that engagement depends on a safe and mutually respectful context and relationship between lecturer and learners, and between learners themselves. They define different forms of respect required for engagement with feedback, and hold faculty responsible for *evaluative respect*, which includes assessment design, timely delivery of fair, clear feedback; as well as *care respect*, which demands careful consideration of the tone of the feedback. In addition to respect, some learners need frequent meaningful, friendly, motivational and supportive interaction with faculty to increase engagement (Chang, 2005; Theodore et al., 2018). Referring to Pacific learners in particular, Chand (2020) emphasises sensitivity for Pacific

cultures and embracing certain cultural practices; for example, the use of talanoa[1] as a way of building rapport and creating a safe space for Pacific learners. Also referring specifically to the Aotearoa New Zealand environment, Anderson et al. (2020) found that learners valued faculty who made an effort to nurture relationships and show care for students, and students were reported to work harder in those courses.

Factors relating to the environment that impact learners' ability to engage in learning, including feedback, are far reaching and include, among others, financial circumstances (including the need to work to supplement family income), family responsibilities (including taking care of siblings, older family members, and own children), reaction to a tertiary environment (managing the stressful transition effectively), and church and community responsibilities (Chang, 2005; Lourie, 2016; Meehan et al., 2019; Theodore et al., 2018).

WHERE-TO-NEXT FEEDBACK

Taking the factors above into consideration, as well as information gained at an online research seminar in 2021 (West-Smith et al., 2021), the authors decided on using where-to-next (WTN) feedback, as originally formulated by John Hattie and Helen Timperley (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Their model suggests three modes of feedback, as follows:

- Feed up – comments relating to the progress needed towards the final goal of the learner.
- Feed back – comments relating to progress made so far.
- Feed forward – comments relating to the next steps to continue progress.

WTN fits within the feed-forward mode, giving specific advice to the student on what to do next, framed in three clear steps:

- Issue – what is not correct or needs more work?
- Relevance – why the above issue is a problem.
- Action – what to do to correct the identified issue.

WTN overcomes some of the issues of comprehension regarding the goals of the work, and supports the understanding of feedback through its clear structure and specific focus.

This is borne out of a meta study (Hattie et al., 2021, p. 8), which found that "'where to next' feedback … led to the greatest gains from the first to the final [assignment] submission." In addition, research shows a strong connection of academic feedback to student achievement that is consistent across socioeconomic status, race, or school setting (West-Smith et al., 2021). These statements suggest a possible solution to the ongoing low academic performance overall, and that the priority groups in the learner cohort (Māori, Pacific, Under-25 years) would benefit from receiving WTN feedback.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) also suggest that this approach would help learners to develop increased confidence and self-efficacy that can be applied in future academic study or the workplace, which adds to the potential benefit of applying WTN to the first-semester cohort class (as in this project), given the possible long-term gains over their remaining academic career.

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1 Talanoa is word used in Fiji, Sāmoa and Tonga that translates to 'talk' but can also be used to describe conversation to settle an argument (Robinson & Robinson, 2005). In our institution it has been used to describe conversations or get-togethers for different purposes, but mostly involving Pacific learners and staff. Our School arranged a dedicated room where learners could gather at specific times to work on assignments, with an academic staff member present to guide learners if they needed support with assignments. Although it was originally aimed at Pacific learners to address Pacific course completion, all learners are welcome.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A phenomenographic study was used to understand learners' lived experience of WTN feedback. We believed this was appropriate, as we would base our findings directly on the experience and perspective of the learners. Eddles-Hirsh (2015) considers phenomenology as particularly suited for educational research, as authentic first-hand learner experience provides rich, descriptive and valid information. Koukal et al. (2002) argue that Heidegger's hermeneutical phenomenology can be applied to the classroom, as it includes notions of authenticity, responsibility and accountability. Applying this philosophy to the classroom suggests that learners should be authentically involved in their studies, take responsibility for their own learning, and will ultimately be held responsible for a successful or unsuccessful outcome, based on their own actions. Committed faculty succeed when they engage in, and allow, authentic dialogue with learners, and are committed and responsible in their duties (Koukal et al., 2002). In the context of the pilot study, the lecturer's commitment is primarily to provide WTN feedback to enable a positive learning experience for learners, and secondly to determine, through the pilot study, whether this is a viable tool to use in working towards parity for all cohorts.

A hermeneutical phenomenological study is also suited for qualitative research because it allows the researcher to understand participants' descriptions, interpretation and experience of a situation (Eddles-Hirsh, 2015). We were not only interested in the statistics of our research, but we wanted to be able to understand the rationale for the choices students made to either participate or not.

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative data was gathered from two learner surveys. The surveys consisted of open-ended questions and some Likert-scale questions. The aim of the beginning-of-semester survey was to understand learners' attitudes towards feedback at the beginning of their studies, and for them to understand the context of the WTN intervention. The end-of-semester survey captured student perceptions of the WTN experience and investigated a possible change in student-attitude feedback. The opportunity for verbatim comments allowed some understanding of the reasons given by students for participation, or not.

The qualitative data collection supported the qualitative, phenomenological nature of our research and allowed us to gather in-depth information from the open-ended questions. Borrego et al. (2009) claim that qualitative surveys allow researchers to establish the relationships between different phenomena affecting a specific situation.

Faculty involved

Three faculty members were involved and had distinct roles: the lecturer would mark assessments and provide WTN feedback, another colleague (who did not know the learners) managed the surveys in the absence of the lecturer to ensure anonymity, and our third colleague moderated the marked assessments. The moderator analysed a larger sample of scripts from both participants (five) and non-participants (five) to ensure consistency of marking.

By involving faculty members not associated with the cohort, and thus avoiding interacting with learners on a deep relationship level, we would retain objectivity when reviewing feedback from learners provided in surveys.

Sample

The study focused on one cohort in one course of first-semester learners enrolled in the NZDB. This cohort was chosen, as one of the faculty members involved in the study was the lecturer. There were 47 learners at the beginning of the course and 34 at the end. We acknowledge that this is a relatively small cohort; however, Anderson and Vingrys (2001) argue that small sample sizes are useful where a specific effect is under investigation, while Graham et al. (2012) describe small samples as well suited for behavioural and educational research. Etz and Arroyo (2015) assert that small samples are useful when a phenomenon has to be researched in a specific context. In this case, we were specifically interested in WTN in early tertiary study, and also as a possible tool to effect parity. The

cohort was also ethnically diverse, as shown in Figure 1 (showing the ethnicities with which learners identify most). Again, we wanted to understand WTN in a diverse context and give in-depth attention to all participants in the study.

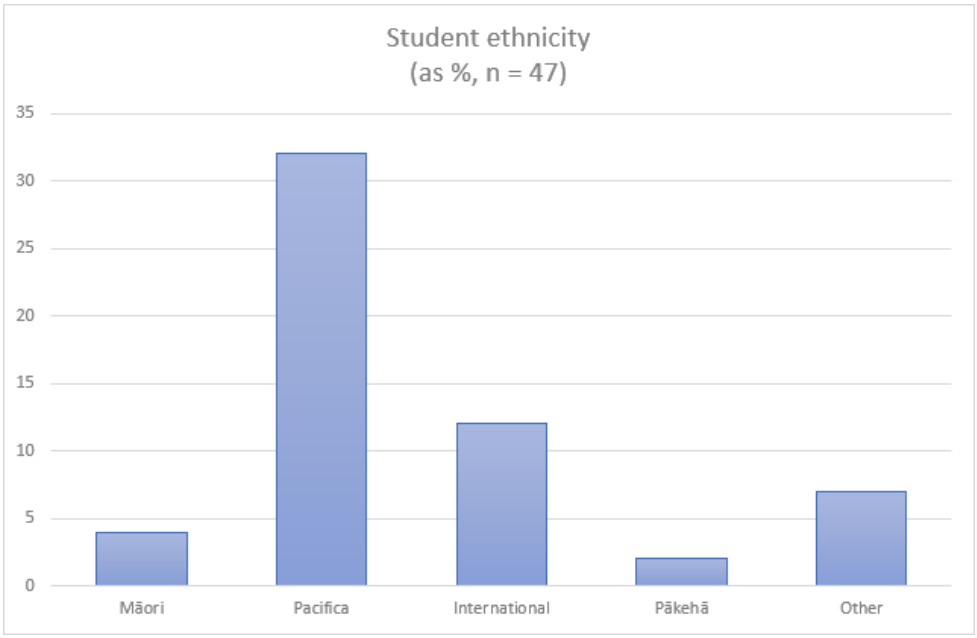

Figure 1. Ethnic composition of the cohort.

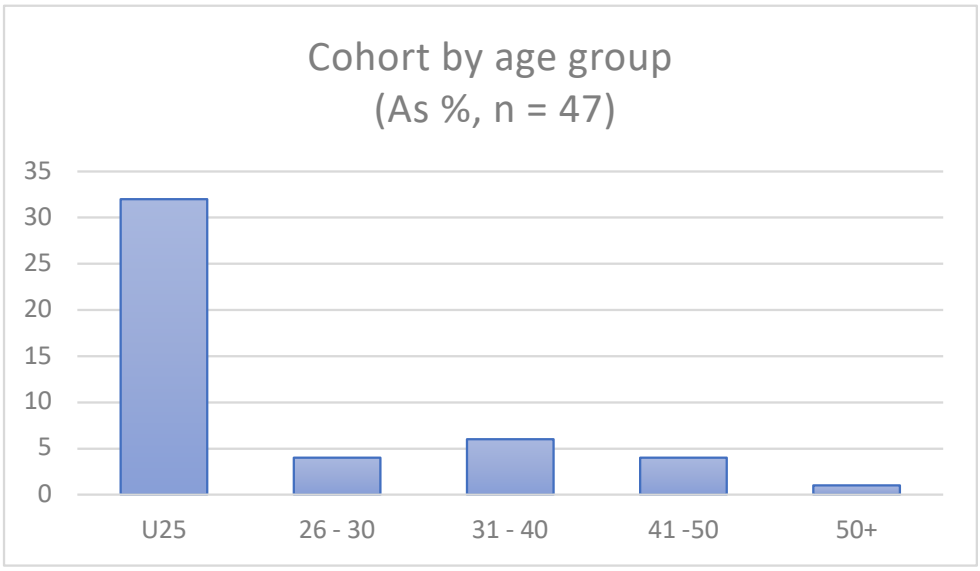

Figure 2. Age dispersion of the cohort.

In addition to aiming at parity between ethnic groups, tertiary institutions across Aotearoa New Zealand are working at increasing successful course completion of the under-25 age group. The data for the NZDB shows that the successful course completion rate of under-25 learners is approximately 10% lower than that of other age groups. In the context of academic feedback, these learners may have lower academic literacy than an over-30 learner embarking on the NZDB, from poor educational outcomes in the past, or a late start to education.

Thus, a particular focus was to investigate whether these priority groups (Māori, Pacific, International and Under-25) would benefit from WTN. The influence of age is compounded because the majority of learners fall under an ethnic priority group, while they are also under 25 – in total, 57% of the original enrolled cohort of 67.

Table 2. Under-25 combined with ethnicity.

Under-25 learner identity	Count	As % of the cohort
International and Under 25	8	12%
Pacific and Under 25	15	23%
Māori and Under 25	1	2%
Māori and Pacific and Under 25	1	2%
Under 25 – no other priority group	12	18%
Total	37	57%

Since the literature suggests that feedback takes place within the context and lived environment of the learner, the learners were surveyed on their time commitments other than study, with the data shown below. The concerning result was the large proportion of the cohort attempting full-time study while also having either full-time or part-time commitments. In the survey, family and work commitments were treated as the same, which may disguise the impact of family commitments on study as learners have to respond to family matters above all else.

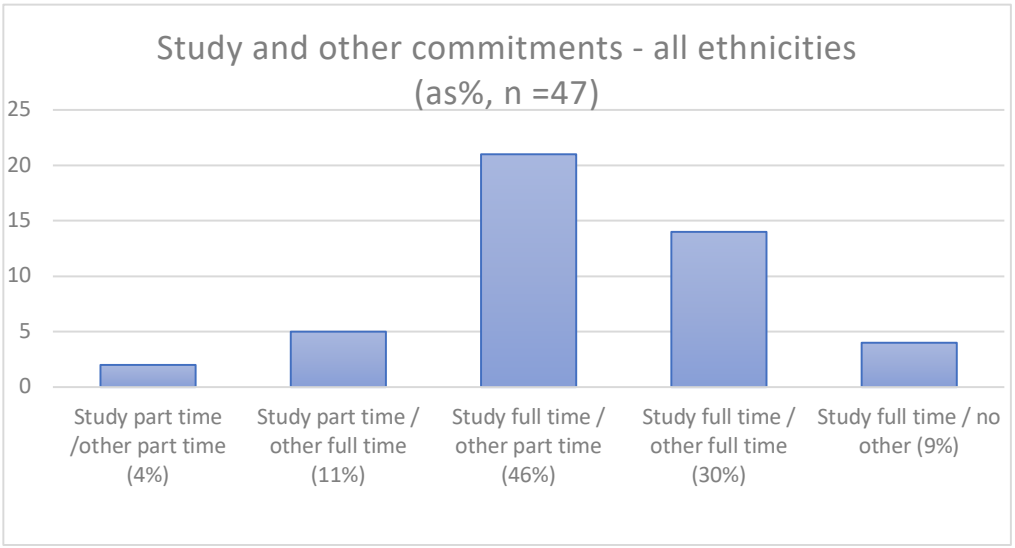

Figure 3. Environment – study and other responsibilities.

Priority of family is a noted feature of Pacific culture (Sullivan et al., 2017) and the data for this section of the cohort is separately analysed in the figure below. The majority of the Pacific learners show a significant time commitment outside of their study. This finding is supported by Colmar and Brunton data collected in the 2021 'U Matters' survey, which showed only 28% (n = 360) of Pacific learners felt they had enough time for study against an average for the survey of 35% (n = 1742).

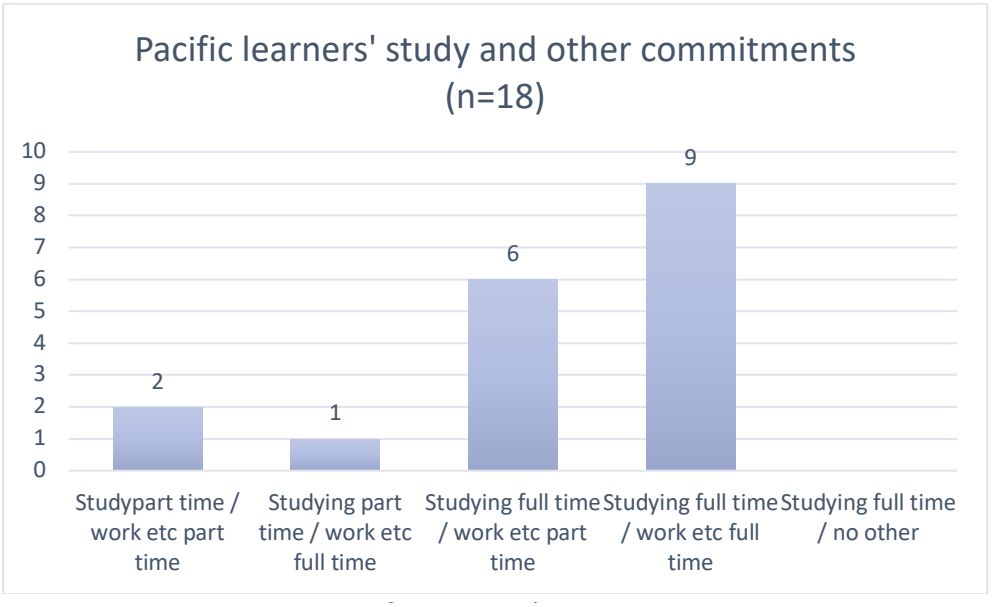

Figure 4. Environment – Pacific learners' study and other commitments.

PROCESS

The WTN opportunity was clearly outlined in Weeks 1 and 2 of the semester, to ensure that all learners were aware of it. This explanation was accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation that was then uploaded to the learning management system. Each learner (47) completed the beginning-of-the-semester survey.

The first assessment of the course was used for WTN, as the content and timeframe were suitable. This was a change-management plan of 2500 words, with 65% weighting. The assignment was due in Week 10 of the course and four WTN opportunities were offered, in Weeks 6, 7, 8 and 9. We believed this timeframe would motivate learners to work on their assignments consistently and increase the levels of engagement, an advantage of carefully planned frequency of feedback, previously reported by Espasa et al. (2022). Learners were able to choose to submit drafts to none, any, or all of these feedback opportunities. Participation was continuously encouraged during lectures, referring back to the rationale explained in Weeks 1 and 2. This frequent encouragement was important to motivate students to participate, since Espasa et al. (2022) determined that frequent opportunities to improve work also improve engagement with feedback.

The lecturer marked drafts as he received them and returned them within one to three days following the explained WTN method. The two examples of feedback below give an idea of how learners received the feedback, based on the three questions:

Feedback on strategy:

Issue:	Too many directions for the strategy in above three paragraphs.
Relevance:	Unfocused strategies don't deliver.
Action:	Either align the three strands somehow, or drop one of the strategies. (Don't need to be 'all things to all people'.)

Feedback on assessment processes/skills:

Issue:	Diagram is not related to your chocolate business (statements are too general).
Relevance:	You need to show a case for change for the business you are using in this assessment, so words on all diagrams need to relate to this.
Action:	Please modify the diagram to refer to your chocolate business.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

We hoped that a significant percentage of learners would have actively participated in the opportunity to submit their assessment for feedback at each, or at least two, of the feedback opportunities. This was not the case; a fact acknowledged in other research. Espasa et al. (2022) argue that often faculty are willing to provide in-depth and detailed feedback, but that learners do not take advantage of this. As the graph below indicates, there was a low uptake of feedback opportunities until the week before submission.

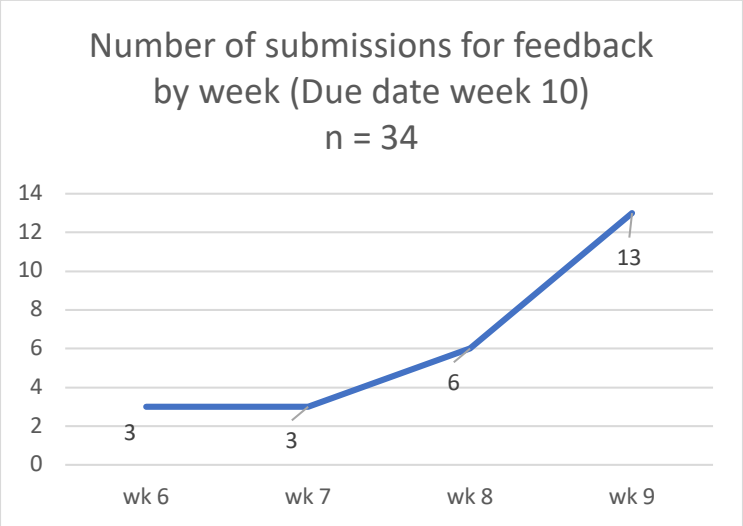

Figure 5. Draft submissions per week.

The response suggests that three opportunities closer to the due date of the assignment would have been optimum, and that four was too many. No learners submitted a fourth draft for review, as indicated in Figure 6.

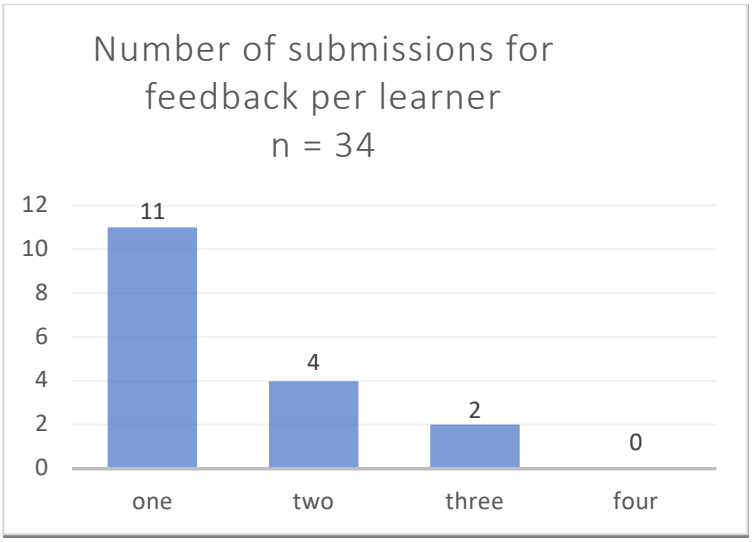

Figure 6. Number of submissions per learner. Note: the figure represents a total of 17 submitters. There were also 17 nonsubmitters from the class of 34.

Since only 17 learners submitted drafts for formative feedback, from the 34 learners remaining at the end of the semester, it was important to understand why learners did not participate after the detailed explanation of the benefits and motivational reminders to participate. The answer to this level of engagement was found in the end-of-semester-survey, where learners were requested to comment on engagement with WTN and results are reflected in the figure below.

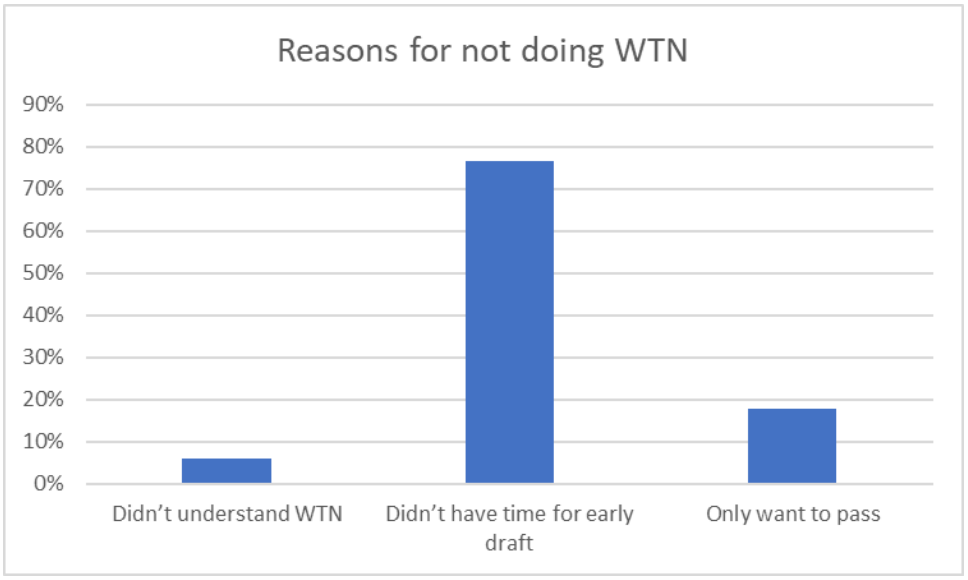

Figure 7. Reasons why learners did not participate.

The figure above shows that 76% of non-participants claimed that they did not have time for an early draft. Other reasons given included the following:

> *"I wanted to submit an early draft … however I was too busy at work."*
>
> *"I was sick and got an extension, and missed the early draft dates."*

These reasons contrast to a larger study of Jorgenson's (2019), which found that learners do not engage in feedback because of the organisation around feedback, and generalised feedback due to large cohort sizes, linear feedback, and a lack of understanding of the content of the feedback.

Two questions prompted by Figure 7 need further elaboration. Elbra-Ramsay (2022) reiterates that it remains the responsibility of the adult learner to engage with feedback. This relates to the notion that adult learners have responsibilities in the environment outside of the classroom that will influence their ability to accept these opportunities. Learners who did not have time to prepare an early draft probably consisted mainly of Pacific learners, who would have had other commitments (refer to Figure 8). The survey did not interrogate the option "I only want to pass", in depth, but it was included because we have all in the past come across this comment and attitude from learners. From experience, this does not indicate a non-caring attitude about their course results, but more of a laissez-faire attitude to studying. This may also indicate a link between the non-participation reported in Figure 7, the influence of the environment presented in Figure 4 and the relationship between non-participation and ethnicity in Figure 8, below.

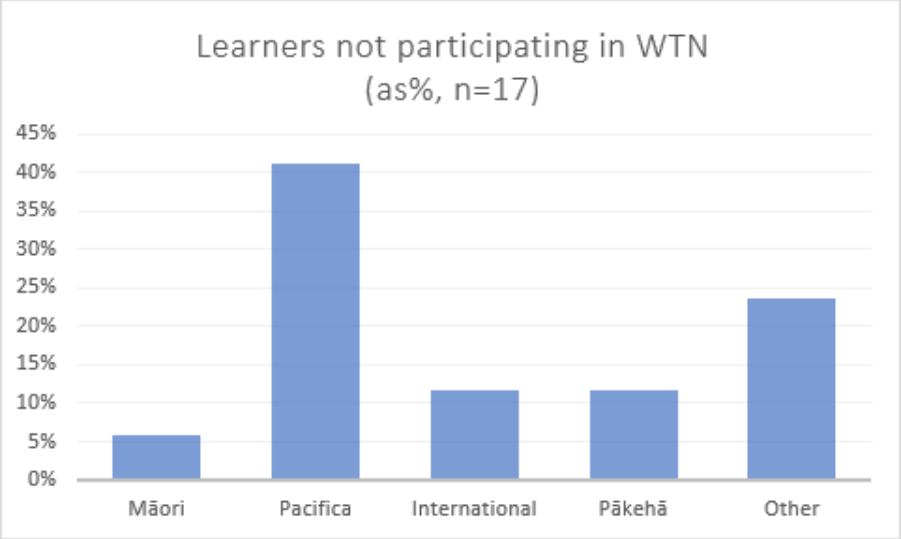

Figure 8. Ethnicity of non-participating learners.

Figure 8 contrasts markedly with Figure 9, below, when comparing participation in terms of ethnicity. In order to meet the most significant research aim (improve successful course completion) it was hoped that the priority-group learners would engage actively. However, Figure 9, below, shows that the majority of participants were not from priority groups.

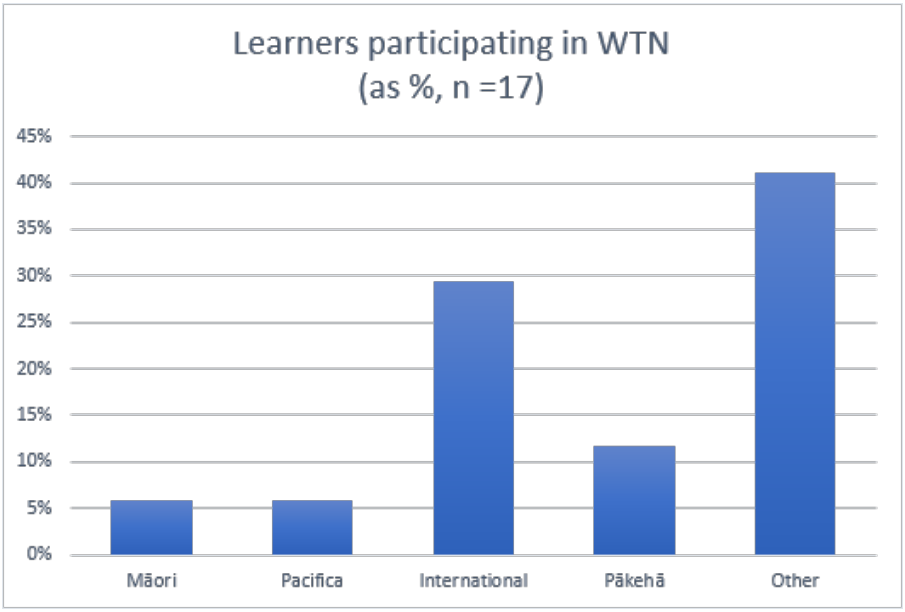

Figure 9. Ethnicity of participating learners.

Equally important to determining how many learners participated or did not participate was the impact, if any, on results. Table 3 shows that the marks of participating students were 19% higher than non-participating students.

Table 3. Average marks of participating and non-participating learners.

	Count	Mean mark
Participating learners	17	66.7%
Non-participating learners	17	44.9%

For us this is a clear indication of the benefit of engaging with WTN. Furthermore, the end-of-semester feedback from learners who were engaged was positive, and supports the notion that this is an effective tool for learners who engage. Asked about their opinions on the impact of the WTN process on their work, learner responses included:

> *"… was useful in pushing me to work on my assessment each week, and gave me a better understanding of what was required."*
>
> *"… very interesting and super helpful in understanding the assessment and getting better marks."*
>
> *"… provided details of what is the problem and actions to fix it."*

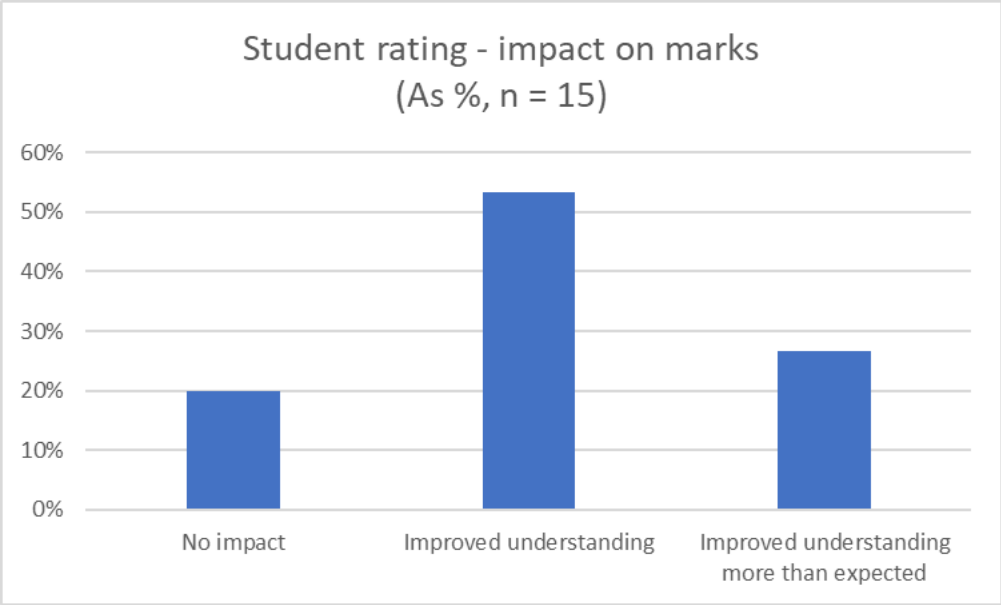

Figure 10. Participants' understanding of the impact of WTN on their marks.

Our second aim was to nurture academic skills that could empower learners in their careers or further study. The data in Figure 10 thus reiterates that those who participated could see the positive impact of participating in WTN on their overall understanding of the content and the advantage of it for getting better marks.

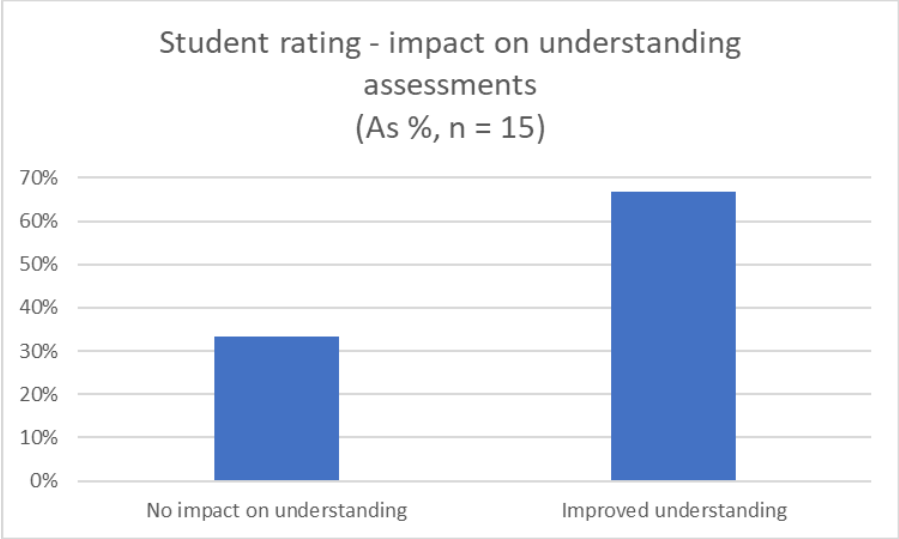

Figure 11. Participants' perception of the influence of WTN on their understanding of the assessment.

The overall positive experience of participants reflects observations made by Elbra-Ramsay (2022), who found that constructive advice has a significant and motivational impact on learners. The comments below confirm Elbra-Ramsay's observations:

> *"It was a big project and took quite a lot of time to do. However, [the lecturer] gave really good guidance."*
>
> *"I believe that this WTN method is great not only for Level 5 subjects but also for Level 7 subjects."*
>
> *"If I did not submit it for feedback, I am sure that I wouldn't have gotten good marks."*

FINDINGS

The resulting statistics and positive comments show a strong indication that WTN given as formative feedback does improve assessment results and is a positive experience for participating learners. In their feedback, participating learners indicated that WTN had specifically affected their perception and understanding of assessments. Although this study did not allow us to fully determine what effect WTN had on the marks of the high-performing learners who participated, their perceptions reflected in Figures 10 and 11 indicate that they perceive WTN as a satisfactory and advantageous tool, which benefits those involved with it.

Unfortunately, though, the lowest participation was from the priority groups, which we hoped would be most involved. This raises a paradox. We identified and used a tool that, from the evidence above and other published research (Hattie et al., 2021) is effective, but it is impossible to force learners to engage with it. Two main factors affected participation: time poverty and environmental factors. Time poverty was indicated as a concern by many learners (Figures 4 and 7), suggesting that this is a general trend. Figure 7, though, shows that within the cohort, Pacific learners were the most time-poor. Environmental factors affected Pacific learners, as family, church and work commitments take priority in time commitment (Sullivan et al., 2017), compromising their engagement with WTN.

From a faculty perspective, the lecturer who directly managed WTN reported that the formulaic approach was useful in focusing his attention on a specific issue or component of a learner's assignment. In addition, he believes it improved, and more effortlessly enabled consistent feedback across varying grades of work. An unintended, positive side-effect was that it also resulted in richer conversations in the following lectures with individual learners and the cohort as a whole. However, faculty members with large cohorts would find it difficult to adhere to a short turn-around time to mark formative work while maintaining a large number of high-quality feed-forward inputs.

CONCLUSION

Future research to determine whether WTN feedback in this course affected learners' approach to assessments in subsequent courses would be valuable. WTN could be considered effective and cognitively embedded if the learner applied it without prompts from a lecturer.

The time-poverty experienced by much of the cohort could justify further research on measures to support learners with extensive responsibilities outside of study. Environmental factors, specifically affecting Pacific learners, suggest that the WTN strategy is not the solution to improve the successful course completion of this priority group. In contrast, the resulting concern is that it may even create a larger discrepancy between the successful course completion by non-Pacific and Pacific students.

To effect a change, it seems necessary to move beyond the purely educational, classroom context into the external environment to influence learners to prioritise studies. Given the factors listed in the section Context and Environment, it does not seem possible for faculty members to have any influence on the environment. There are avenues for appeal through the collective nature of Pacific culture, as the family could 'invest' time into their learner family-member for study. As the learner may well be the first in the family to study, this may be a strategy to use at, or before, enrolment to gain family commitment to support their learner in time management. Future research could include factors affecting the perception of tertiary study and related time management among Pacific communities. The findings here suggest that WTN could have value for these learners, but until they find time to engage with WTN feedback through multiple submissions, this value will not be realised.

In conclusion, it can be seen that early tertiary learners in this study engaged successfully with an appropriate feedback tool that was fully explained and consistently applied, and were rewarded by achieving higher marks. As such, the additional effort required from faculty members is worthwhile.

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NAVIGATING THE HABITS OF THE KATO TOOLKIT FRAMEWORK THAT FORM PHENOMENAL EDUCATOR PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION

The Kato Toolkit framework identifies ten habits of phenomenal educators and how these are significant in effecting positive changes in the scope of teaching and learning for Pacific learners. Kato refers to a Niuean handcrafted woven basket traditionally exchanged as a gift; this concept of the Kato symbolises the act of gifting change or transformation upon educators.

Before exploring how Pacific academic staff might embody one or more of the ten habits of phenomenal educators (Chu-Fuluifaga & Ikiua-Pasi, 2021) through their individual and collective talanoa, it is important to understand the individual habits. Talanoa, as explained by Vaioleti (2011), is a distinctive research methodology that is based on Pacific cultural values and traditions that are familiar in many parts of the Pacific. To be accepted into the intellectual and spiritual space of a community, in the Pacific context, researchers must demonstrate their competence in engaging with participants in a respectful and authentic approach by observing appropriate research methods and methodologies (Havea et al., 2020). Talanoa involves having personal conversations with participants to gain insights into their views on relevant topics or issues of interest. It is dialogue based, interactive, and is a participatory approach to research. This paper presents a review of the principles of the Kato Toolkit, with a specific focus on the concept of talanoa and its connection to the broader discourse of the toolkit. Specifically, it emphasises the importance of fostering a dialogical relationship to enhance the teacher–learner dynamic. This article expands on these habits with reference to literature which informs good practice to educate diverse learners through the lenses of the Kato Toolkit framework. Below are the ten habits:

1. Fenua: The pedagogy of reflection
2. Moana: Know your Pacific learner and context
3. Vaka: Educate with phenomenal Pacific-centric methods
4. Le Teu le Vā: Building teaching and learning relationships with Pacific learners
5. Ola: Develop phenomenal practices
6. Teatea: Instil motivation and good work habits
7. Aupuru: Cultivate creativity and enthusiasm
8. Putuputu: Construct a Pacific learning community
9. Arofa: Enable mentoring
10. Ti'ama: Deconstruct and emancipate your Pacific learner's experiences

These habits are relevant to all educators and, while many may reflect some of these in their practice, it is important to be aware of and incorporate as many as possible in our practice. In addition, the identified Kato habits provide cross-cultural opportunities for the educator to inspire, grow and develop further knowledge and understanding of Pacific learners. Therefore, it also enhances the teacher–learner relationship and contributes to the success of the learner.

LET'S EXPLORE THE TEN HABITS

Fenua: The pedagogy of reflection

The Fenua habit is about recognising your place as a practitioner and as an individual. The Fenua habit is an ongoing process, where educators self-evaluate and improve their practices. As an educator working with Pacific learners, the quality of your relationship is just as important as how you build and maintain this connection (Chu-Fuluifaga & Ikiua-Pasi, 2021). For example, first steps in the teaching process might involve exploring the level of your learners to discern the appropriate level of the teaching content, identifying the students' cultural capital, and implementing strategies to aid students in the learning process in a way that is more inclusive. Educators also need

to self-evaluate to develop positive attitudes towards cultural differences and be open to learning different cultural aspects in order to demonstrate cultural competency.

As a practitioner, the process of self-awareness and evaluating your teaching and learning skills contributes to strengthening the relationships with learners (Chu-Fuluifaga & Ikiua-Pasi, 2021) and is an imperative step for reaching out to all learners equally. Being able to understand learners and where they are situated (socially and culturally) plays an important role in self-reflection (Hunter et al., 2016).

Educators are "complex systems who interact within three levels (macro, meso, and micro) within emerging, constantly changing, and unpredictable teaching situations where teacher identity is a fluid and ongoing process" (Puchegger & Bruce, 2021, p. 186). A teacher's identity should not be static; identity is formed through the connections of the interior perspective of teachers and the social worlds that they navigate through (Carey, 2022). There must be continuous improvement through the reflection of who one is as an educator. This may involve evaluating culturally learned assumptions, reviewing teaching philosophies, and/or one's flexibility in introducing worthwhile changes in your practice. Such notions act to support the Fenua Kato.

It is not only through the learners that educators are able to broaden their views of Pacific people but also by being actively involved in Pacific community events to explore Pacific cultures, and by having professional peer mentors to learn and discuss new strategies with, to be able to observe and grow as educators. Growing, retaining and valuing highly competent educators of Pacific heritage (Ministry of Education, 2020) promotes the Fenua aspect of being able to talanoa to help understand who you are as a teacher. Chu-Fuluifaga and Ikiua-Pasi (2021) identify the three elements of cultural learning: awareness/attitudes; knowledge; and skills. Being aware of the Pacific learning principles and applying them to your teaching practice is yet another ongoing process. Togiatama-Otto's (2019) study further supports this notion, that being recognised, respected and validated in the education system leads to learner success.

The Fenua Kato concentrates on being able to ground yourself in a pedagogy of reflection to find out where you belong as an educator through the process of reflection.

Moana: Know your Pacific learner and context

As stated by Chu-Fuluifaga and Ikiua-Pasi (2021), the Moana Kato represents the ocean, which, for Pacific people, connects us and separates us as individuals. Exploring these waters of the Pacific Ocean, and knowing Pacific tauira and the context of their learning leads to a better understanding of their strengths. Each Pacific nation is a separate country with its own language, culture, idiosyncrasies and nuances. Therefore, there are differences in cultural values, norms and learner identity. It is important to dedicate some time to exploring and expanding your knowledge of Pacific values and the culture through the means of talanoa. Effective educators also seek knowledge to improve their teaching practice by collaborating with fellow practitioners and through ongoing reflection (Kirp & Macpherson, 2023). As educators, understanding the culture of Pacific learners and their languages leads to respectful and reciprocal relationships with Pacific learners and their families (Hunter et al., 2016).

Learners bring their lived experiences and knowledge into the learning space. Therefore, as educators, it is important to provide opportunities to understand these experiences and knowledge of the learners. Acknowledging and supporting them to advance in their learning, while valuing their Pacific culture, is a quintessential demonstration of the Moana Kato. Effective educators demonstrate learner-centred approaches, where the lessons and activities are designed with tauira identity and learning styles considered (Feeney et al., 2020). Just as the Pacific Ocean is vast, so are the characteristics of Pacific learners. The Moana Kato encourages educators to explore the history and the current events of Pacific people in Aotearoa New Zealand that have had a significant impact on the lives of Pacific peoples. The further you research and acquire knowledge about the experiences of Pacific people in Aotearoa New Zealand, the deeper your understanding will be to inform the context of the Pacific learners in the classroom.

A characteristic of a good teacher, as identified by Tapasā (Ministry of Education, 2018), entails conducting research to explore more about the learner, the learner's background and culture, and the island nation(s) that they come from or connect with. As educators, it is important to acknowledge tauira Pacific values and take appropriate action to nourish cultural identity (Rimoni & Averill, 2019). Turu 1 from Tapasā (Ministry of Education, 2018) highlights the importance of change in practice and investigates how educators benefit from being aware of the diverse identities and cultures of Pacific learners.

The Moana exploration is a continuous ongoing process, as mentioned by Barton (2023), and checking a learner's understanding of a given topic is only half of the strategy; how you, as an educator, respond to such checks is also important. While exploring your Pacific learners, as educators you may come across new information or knowledge. Identifying new knowledge is the just the first step towards knowing your learners. The next steps would be having further discussions with peer professionals to have a better understanding, and to be able to respond accordingly to the new information or knowledge discovered.

The Moana Kato recommends investing time in knowing your Pacific learners and their context to continue enhancing their learning experiences.

Vaka: Educate with phenomenal Pacific-centric methods

According to Chu-Fuluifaga and Ikiua-Pasi, (2021), the vaka, or boat, travels the moana carrying its people, who have designated roles and responsibilities. In education, one of these roles is the educator, who must ensure that they are well prepared to teach the Pacific learner. This shows that they respect their relationship, or vā, with the Pacific learners by planning and preparing well before teaching them. It also includes researching background information about Pacific people to gain knowledge and understanding about them and their worldviews, their cultural and spiritual values, and beliefs; all of which will contribute to establishing close relationships with them. For example, respecting the vā within their relationship with the Pacific learner is highly regarded by Pacific people, and this is demonstrated by the way the educators speak and behave, especially with regard to the Pacific learner's relationship with authority such as the educator. The same is expected from the educator – to treat the Pacific learner with respect in return. However, the value of respect can sometimes be misunderstood when it is used inappropriately, especially when the Pacific learner is expected to contribute to the class talanoa, without trust being established within the relationship between the educator and the learner. Out of respect for others, they do not feel obliged to do so, putting others first and giving them the chance to speak before them. Their remaining silence can be misinterpreted as being disrespectful, and therefore they may suffer the consequences unnecessarily. Furthermore, the Pacific learner may be an individual in the classroom, but he/she comes with her family, community, church and the village. In addition, it is crucial to spend some time on research and to look for the appropriate resources and culturally appropriate environment for teaching. Also, it is important for the educator to be very clear about their goal, which is to ensure successful learning and achievement for the Pacific learner. The resources may include Pacific creative arts, narratives about ancestors and land, and about identified psychological, emotional, and social issues that impact the Pacific learner. More importantly, both the methods and the vā contribute to the journey of the Pacific learner as they are interwoven and applied in a culturally appropriate approach. Eaton (2020), in her research paper, strongly supports the notion of student-centred learning experiences in the same manner as the Vaka Kato. For instance, she highlights that educators need to seek every opportunity for leadership to support student empowerment and success to improve teaching and learning, and it is important that educators design learner-driven activities and environments that recognise and accommodate learner variability. This requires the leadership to build trustworthy relationships with the educators and support them closely as effective systems, policies and procedures are put in place to achieve the learner's success. In addition, to be consistent and to stay current in research encourages improved student learning outcomes, including findings from the learning sciences. Eaton (2020) also discusses strategies for designing an active learning space in which student-centred learning can take place. In their research, Hill and Thrupp (2019) note the importance of the first two years of teaching, as this tends to shape the attitudes and commitment to continue as educator and learners. In addition, learning is not just a classroom of students and furniture, but more a multi-layered and diverse

community of learners. More importantly, it is a community of collective, relational and connected teaching and learning environments shaped by cultural and social contexts. Furthermore, the recognition of Māori as Indigenous people in Aotearoa New Zealand and their cultural values and beliefs need to be considered and prioritised in the teaching and learning environment. In addition to the Pacific-centric methods mentioned in the Vaka habit, it is worth noting that Māori and Pacific people have common values that include relationships, whānau/aiga, whenua/fenua, connectedness, collectivism and inclusivity, which all contribute to the educator and Pacific learners' success in teaching and learning. Equally important is the role of the educator and the learning environment to be culturally competent and safe for the Pacific learner. Furthermore, the Vaka principles support the phenomenal educator's practice, hence the need to research and gain knowledge and understanding of these principles, and to implement them with cultural competence.

Le Teu le Vā: Building teaching and learning relationships with Pacific learners

'Teu le vā' is a Samoan expression that means 'nurture the relationship'. It is about equity and equal balance within relationships. In the practice of teu le vā, relationships are given vā/space and valued so that all involved may benefit. It is about nurturing relationships and how we are within the vā, or space; it encompasses principles such as reciprocity, balance, respect and mutual trust. It is also a call to nurture the vā/space in between, premised on forgiveness and reconciliation. The literal translation of 'teu le vā' is to tidy and beautify the vā/space in between (Anae, 2016). Le Teu le Vā represents nurturing and caring for the vā: the relationships between us and within us. When we nurture the vā, we are purposely promoting equity and equal balance within our relationships. In an educational context, the vā creates a sacred space that connects the educator and the Pacific learner, through the ways they respectfully relate to and interact with one another. The 'heart' of a phenomenal educator, or educator, is passionate about establishing effective teaching and learning relationships with the Pacific learner. This includes providing a culturally safe environment for teaching and learning, using the Pacific greetings in their language to welcome the Pacific learner, offering hospitality as appropriate, and including their whānau in their orientation talanoa, to name a few practices. In addition, the educator willingly acts as a mentor who supports the Pacific learner and goes the extra mile by providing pastoral care and tutorial sessions for those who need extra help. Therefore, as part of being a relationship builder, it is important for the educator to demonstrate their 'heart' for educating the learner through their language and actions. Furthermore, the values of trust, respect and empathy give life to the relationship between the educator and the Pacific learner, and thereby enhance the efficacy of teaching and learning (Chu-Fuluifaga & Ikiua-Pasi, 2021). These values are demonstrated by the way the educator collaborates with the Pacific learner through appropriate cultural activities, sports and other creative opportunities. Tui Atua Tamasese (Tamasese et al., 2005), in his research, emphasised the importance of collective groups working together, as the mentors collaborate and support the mentees. Mentoring is therefore interwoven into the process of learning as the educator mentors the Pacific learner.

In his research, Bishop (2019) discusses the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy for Indigenous people, and appropriate resources to cater for diverse and multicultural education. This aligns with the principles of Le Teu Le Va habit, as the crux of students' learning is placed on their relationships. In addition, leadership and management need to be supporting these efforts by working together with the educators and learners to help them succeed. A study by Leenknecht et al. (2020) shows that student–teacher relationships in higher education (through their interactions and collaborations between the in-class environment and educational institute) are crucial to the development of a learner's motivation and later success in their studies. Garcia-Moya (2020) also strongly argues that one of the essential factors that contributes to the health and wellbeing of students in school includes a good relationship between teachers and students. Therefore, it is important to foster connectedness between teachers and students in a proactive and holistic approach that further assists in the overall wellbeing of students.

Ola: Develop phenomenal practices

Chu-Fuluifaga and Ikiua-Pasi (2021) identify the Ola Kato as developing practices that enhance teaching and enriche and stimulate the lives of Pacific learners. Here, emphasis is placed on the importance of building

strong and positive relationships with the learners in the classroom, and practitioners who establish spaces that promote cultural principles such as collaboration, interpersonal connections, identity and unity assist in facilitating the success of Pacific students (Chu et al., 2013). Reynolds (2018) asserts that to effectively teach Pacific learners, educators who can either meet or learn to meet cultural expectations are considered successful from a Pacific perspective. Additionally, using conceptual language that is founded on Pacific thinking and cultivating relationships with Pacific learners can improve their academic achievement. Leenen-Young's (2020) research regarding Pacific students and learning to learn suggests that participants are cognisant of their learning and can identify their own learning styles and link them to assessments. Additionally, they can differentiate between various forms of learning in different contexts. These findings demonstrate that Pacific students are adept at learning and can effectively meet the learning requirements at university.

Pacific learners want to know their identities are valued, therefore providing a space that nurtures their identity will help support their learning. The Ministry of Education's (2018) *Tapasā: Cultural competencies framework for faiaoga of Pacific learners* highlights characteristics of a good teacher from the perspective of young Pacific learners; all of which are relevant to the Ola Habit. These include that an effective practitioner acknowledges the significance of a Pacific learner's identity, language and culture, and attempts to pronounce their names and other words in their language correctly; and that the practitioner will also endeavour to learn and use simple words in their language. Recognising the importance of each student and their identities, languages and cultures is crucial to achieving effective teaching approaches that encourage success and wellbeing in the classroom. Nakhid (2003) states that Pacific learners should be able to recognise themselves in the curriculum and the overall culture of the school. Additionally, when students perceive that classroom spaces and activities acknowledge their identity, they are more inclined to believe that these are beneficial for them. Educators who seek to establish rapport and make connections with their students, and are easily approachable, are highly respected by students and are more likely to retain students in their programmes or courses. Just as important is being able to link Pacific learners with other Pacific learners, as adjusting to the new tertiary environment can be challenging; therefore, this strategy is vital to prevent feelings of isolation (Chu et al., 2013a; Chu-Fuluifaga & Ikiua-Pasi, 2021).

While building connections with learners is paramount in a culturally safe and effective environment, so are the tools and resources available for educators to convey course material. Chu-Fuluifaga and Ikiua-Pasi (2021) stress the importance of planning thoroughly for the first class and outlining the class expectations, and clearly conveying this to the learners. This helps to set the tone for the course from the very beginning. Utilising teaching tools effectively in the classroom can improve students' learning and retention. While there are many high-tech tools at a teacher's disposal, including podcasts, blogs and web pages, the use of minor tech tools such as PowerPoint and the whiteboard can also facilitate meaningful engagement in the classroom, when used effectively. These tools should allow opportunities for discussions and interactivity, where learners feel they are contributing to their own learning. Opportunities outside of class time that encourage review of content, and further learning such as tutorials or resources on student management systems, should be available for learners. Teevale and Teu (2018) identified positive success factors that helped minority students succeed in tertiary education. Students who took advantage of support systems such as tutorials found them valuable to their academic success, because the setting was less daunting than large lecture rooms and it offered a space where students felt comfortable asking questions.

Focusing on building positive relationships in a culturally safe space, promoting principles that value Pacific identities, utilising teaching tools effectively in the classroom, and providing opportunities for continued learning can ultimately lead to success for Pacific learners.

Teatea: Instil motivation and good work habits

The Teatea Kato habit represents instilling motivation and good work habits in Pacific learners. The transition to tertiary education can often be a challenging terrain to navigate for Pacific learners (Chu-Fuluifaga & Ikiua-Pasi, 2021; Smith & Wolfgramm-Foliaki, 2020). To facilitate a smoother transition to tertiary education, Pacific graduates in Theodore et al.'s (2018) study reported that spaces that reflected their culture and fostered a sense of community that mirrored their home culture were significant in enhancing academic success and a sense of belonging.

According to research by Airini et al. (2010), Pacific learner success flourishes when teaching practices inspire and motivate learners while also acknowledging and validating their individual identities and intellectual abilities. When educators implement culturally effective and relevant teaching practices, students will be able to see themselves reflected in the classroom, thus fostering a greater sense of belonging and motivation to learn. Being committed to instructing students in ways that foster learner independence equates to a commitment to help students excel; teaching methods that promote independence are crucial for achieving student success. Independence or self-sufficiency can be facilitated through various methods, including the provision of relevant and pertinent feedback, gradually increasing the complexity of coursework to lift confidence, providing focused and intensive academic support (e.g., content-specific tutorials), and guiding learners to relevant learning-support services. Lecture spaces are daunting for some Pacific learners, therefore providing opportunities for small-group discussions away from large lecture spaces will encourage Pacific learners to feel more confident and motivated to discuss topics and ask questions to clarify their ideas (Teevale & Teu, 2018; Airini et al., 2011).

Pacific learners want and appreciate educators who ensure they understand the course material before moving on to a new topic, offer clarity and elaboration on assignments, and engage them in robust academic work that promotes learning and independence (Airini et al., 2011). To help learners meet course and assessment expectations, a phenomenal educator will provide clear instructions regarding what learners need to do to improve, while also praising them in the areas where they have shown strength and effort. The objective is to ensure that the feedback promotes dialogue between the learner and the educator rather than a one-way flow of information. Encouragement is key to the feedback process, reinforcing a learner's strengths, and providing meaningful feedback and feedforward comments; and demonstrates the educator's belief in the learner's abilities, thus instilling in them the motivation to improve their work (Chu-Fuluifaga & Ikiua-Pasi, 2021). Further to this, the formation of learning connections with peers, particularly with those whose cultural links are similar, can also serve as a source of motivation for learners, and educators who foster such communities play a crucial role in supporting learner success (Chu et al., 2013).

The Teatea Kato describes habits that will help practitioners foster good work habits and motivation in Pacific learners. To facilitate learners' transition into tertiary education, practitioners can assist by employing teaching practices that inspire and motivate students while acknowledging their identities and abilities and allow opportunities that promote independence and open dialogue between them and the learner.

Aupuru: Cultivate creativity and enthusiasm

Creativity and enthusiasm form the Aupuru Kato habit. Resources that offer innovation and creativity in course delivery are abundant, and breaking away from traditional forms of educational practices and experimenting with new and different teaching methods is beneficial for Pacific learners. Acknowledging and integrating Pacific students' ways of learning and culture is significant when considering the learners' space, what to teach, how to convey the content, and assessment development (Chu-Fuluifaga & Ikiua-Pasi, 2021). Being prepared, organised and having a toolbox of ideas can promote creativity in the classroom when the need arises. Participants in Airini et al.'s (2010) study reported how the level of content knowledge possessed by a teacher can either facilitate or impede their success. If the teacher has a strong knowledge base, it can build the learner's confidence and belief in themselves; whereas, if the teacher's knowledge is weak, it can have a negative impact on their learning. The participants also valued instances when the teacher understood them as adult learners, especially the times they provided guidance and support, scaffolded their learning, and were flexible and did not cause needless frustration. A creative and effective teaching practice employed by a university teacher that contributed to learner engagement is described below:

> Trigger: You know, like [referring to the lecturer] class and like, you know, has all these little different ways of, instead of reading a book.

> Action: He'll like cut out little bits of pieces of paper where you have to sort of organise them together. So, it sort of makes you have to read it in order to [put] them there and it feels like that, those, you could do the exact same thing just by reading the book, you know, or, and little tricks like that.
>
> Outcome: It's like it makes it fun and it gets you up and you're doing things. (Airini et al., 2010, p. 78)

Providing culturally appropriate and responsive student-centred teaching that values and acknowledges diversity and the cultural identity of the student is significant. Pacific learners benefit from enthusiastic educators. Reynolds' (2018) study found evidence that Pacific learners were conscious of positive non-verbal language cues such as smiling, polite behaviour and friendliness, which created a sense of feeling welcome and acceptance. Participants described a teacher as always positive, never angry, and constantly smiling and laughing, which contributed to a positive learning environment. As part of the Aupuru Kato, Chu-Fuluifaga and Ikiua-Pasi (2021) encourage educators to demonstrate passion for the topic by conveying enthusiasm through the effective use of tone, appropriate facial expressions, eye contact and body language when interacting with students. By doing this, educators can motivate and inspire learners

Putuputu: Construct a Pacific learning community

Putuputu is a gathering, in reference to the creation of a learning community (Chu-Fulufuiaga & Ikiua-Pasi, 2021). The community is very important to Pacific akonga and has proven to be an integral part of success for them. As the literature shows, this is not a new concept to Pacific learners; however, it is slowly being implemented within the tertiary sector. Pacific people come from collective communities, so it makes sense that, when constructing a Pacific learning community, it should have the elements that reflect the collective communities. These elements include, in part, working together to achieve a goal. Research has shown that the notion of vā can also be used in this context, described by Thaman (2008) as metaphorical spaces between and among people. Creating this vā for Pacific students will allow them to be in an environment that they know is safe and is able to provide what they require as students. Thaman (2008) also notes that, through education, it will go a long way towards improved intercultural understanding among people and communities. The building of community fosters students' cultural identity and encourages a sense of belonging. It brings their lives and interests to the forefront of education, rather than hiding them away (Chu-Fulufuiaga & Ikiua-Pasi, 2021). One of the ways to support Pacific learners to succeed is for teachers to build positive relationships with them and their family. Another strategy is to encourage students to participate in the activities and learning workshops that are offered, as this will support a sense of belonging (Chu-Fulufuiaga & Ikiua-Pasi, 2021). Vaioleti (2011) notes that the classroom, 'ofa, provides a sense of connectedness, spirituality and regard between students as well as between students and teacher. This is supported by Benseman et al. (2006), who state: "If you have a relationship, like you know a learner and a tutor, a relationship that is good and supported, that will equal Pacific students' success and all that, and there is a relationship there, they can really achieve a lot. But if it's not there, they know you don't care, it affects their learning first" (p. 160). All this contributes to building a positive learning community.

There are many definitions of communities, and these can also include relationships with mana whenua (people of the land: Māori), marae, accommodation, counselling, health support, library, careers and Pacific spaces. The community spaces shared with students will encourage a sense of belonging to the learning environment and a willingness to attend online and live lectures. The other benefits of building a positive community, as noted by Chu et al. (2021), are that students develop and continue positive relationships, and these confirm learners' social skills, the meaning of teamwork, and a sense of accountability towards others.

The purpose of Putuputu, in this sense, is to create an environment that closely reflects the learner's background, culture and values. The learning environment is an extension of their traditional living environment. Research states that when a learner's home background is the same as, or similar to, the mainstream culture, school activities are generally familiar, and learners can more easily build on their cultural understandings to learn school content. When the cultural knowledge and values of learners from diverse backgrounds do not resemble, or conflict with, the expectations, values and knowledge of school, learners can find it difficult to participate in the main discourse,

and may be marginalised and fail (Hargreaves, 2007). This is also supported by Zepke et al. (2006), who note: "Those (students) from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, or holders of different cultural capital, find it difficult to integrate into the dominant established culture" (p. 588). Research shows that culturally responsive instruction raises student accomplishment for all cultural groups, ensuring that all students are given the encouragement and support to recognise their educational potential, irrespective of their social, economic or traditional background, or their individual needs.

It is important not to pretend that differences do not exist, or to treat students all the same regardless of culture. Culturally responsive teaching has been described as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches to and through the strengths of these students" (National Education Association, 2015, p. 2). By providing these resources and encouraging conscious efforts by educators we can move from cultural recklessness to cultural responsiveness (Hargreaves, 2022).

Arofa: Enable mentoring to be a natural part of your teaching and manage the 'wobbles' that arise

Arofa in a Pacific context means love, and in the education context it is showing love and care through the mentoring process. The mentoring process involves deep connections between the mentor and mentee (Chu Fuluifaga & Ikiua-Pasi, 2021).

As educators, it is important to demonstrate the connections and be a good role model: as a professional, being a mentor and at the same time creating a learning space that allows students to be able to display similar mentoring skills to their peers. This supports the overall mentoring practice within the learning environment and amongst peers and educators. As mentioned in the study by Chu-Fuluifaga and Ikiua-Pasi (2021), mentoring is a staged approach in which elements like support and protection play an important role. The staged approach is also confirmed by Zachary and Fain (2022), where the four phases of mentoring include preparing, negotiating, enabling growth and coming to closure. All four phases are important in the mentoring process throughout the learning journey.

As stated by Waterhouse (2021), educational mentors provide positive foundations for wellbeing for learners to be successful through the following key five areas: "the ability to create and develop positive relationships, emotional literacy, self-awareness, how our brain can affect learning and behaviour skills for learning" (p. 1).

Mentorship is evidenced through good relationships and connections, and human connection is an important part of the learning process. As stated by Holland (2012), it means making the initial connection and recognising, respecting and understanding the diverse learners to be able to support learning and provide encouragement through the mentoring process: "Whangia ka tupu, ka puawai. That which is nurtured, blossoms and grows" (Holland, 2012, p. 47). While building respectful relationships is important, establishing trustful relationships and maintaining them for the long term is also very important (Tualaulelei & Kavanagh, 2015).

Arofa means creating a safe space to provide nurturing conversation through mentorship that allows learners to think critically and strategically about their learning situation and ongoing solutions.

Ti'ama: Deconstruct and emancipate your Pacific learner's experiences

We take the concept of Ti'ama to mean giving freedom for Pacific learners to be themselves. Pacific learners will flourish when they are permitted to be themselves (Chu Fuluifaga & Ikiua-Pasi 2021).

As educators, we should be strengths-based in our methods, and use the strengths of the individual to assist them in discovering their potential, and provide encouragement and practice for self-development. By focusing on the learner's strengths, we can help them to fully believe in what they have rather than what they do not. For Pacific students to feel culturally safe, there is a need to develop their own ways of learning exchangeable within their own

languages, while increasing supporting factors to assist their learning (Lee Hang & Bell, 2015). This is a strengths-based approach focusing on ways in which participants could do their best to maximise improvement and knowledge in educational settings. Students from different Pacific countries also have different beliefs, backgrounds and values, which can be demonstrated when tauira begin talking about relationships between nature, people, history and traditions. These arise from foundations of the spiritual, cultural, physical, social and environmental elements that are the basis of Pacific knowledge, values, beliefs and practices near the physical environment/land that Pacific people depend on for survival (Pulotu-Endemann, 2009; Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014). As educators, we could do better in designing and leading initiatives to allow Pacific students' successful navigation of university study without a need to compromise their own identity (BoonNanai et al., 2017). We are aware that students, regardless of where in the Pacific Islands they originate from, do not all learn the same way or in the same style, and this is discovered by the educator once a relationship has been formed with the learner. In an inclusive environment, students of Pacific origin will be able to exercise Ti'ama because they will have a sense of belonging to the institution, lecturer and cohort, and they will know that the environment is a positive one that encourages all types of learning. A student will tend to disclose what they know and do not know when they feel they can trust the teacher with these disclosures (Cowie et al., 2009). But what constitutes trust in a teacher–student relationship from both the teacher's and student's perspective is often based on what cultural values they bring to the relationship (Bishop et al., 2009).

An example of this is that some students are very verbal whereas other students are quiet. Lee Hang and Bell (2015) support this through their observations of non-responsive and quiet behaviours from Pacific students. Stating that although not answering is seen negatively in the dominant Western, Eurocentric culture of learning institutes, it is actually a sign of respect being shown to the educator and is a cultural practice. At times, silence can also be mistaken for a lack of knowledge, and this could underpin the negative deficit model for Pacific students.

Ti'ama, when fully established in learning establishments will attest to its effectiveness through the success rates of Pacific learners.

CONCLUSION

All the ten habits discussed in the Kato Toolkit provide valuable insights into how educators can support, and provide positive opportunities for, Pacific learner success. As a reflective practitioner, there is always room to grow and to adopt new strategies to cater to the diverse Pacific student population. While some habits are quite clear in how they can be adopted, other habits may require ongoing reflection and professional conversations for them to become part of our everyday practice as educators. Overall, the Kato Toolkit habits identified and discussed here will no doubt contribute to growing and expanding the number of phenomenal educators. As teachers continue to embody these habits, they will not only improve Pacific student education but also create a positive impact on the lives of their learners, both personally and professionally. Chu-Fulufuiaga and Ikiua-Pasi (2021) assert that phenomenal educators make teaching their way of life and demonstrate aroha (genuine concern) for their students. Phenomenal educator habits, with time, will grow stronger and spread widely to enhance and improve Pacific education.

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SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR SUSTAINABILITY: INSIGHTS FROM THE STUDY "CRITERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN COMMUNITIES AND CITIES IN VIETNAM"

DR ANGIE DANG

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ABSTRACT

Social inclusion has been identified as being integral to the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. It is essential for marginalised and vulnerable groups, who often suffer the most but have the least resources to cope with adversities, and whose issues affect the whole community. This is a matter of urgency for urban Vietnam, where huge social disparities have developed and persisted amidst rapid urbanisation and other underlying social, political and economic changes, which together have fuelled the current sustainability crisis there. To enable changes towards more social inclusion and sustainability, there is a need to understand people's thoughts and behaviours on social inclusion. This article will critically examine responses to social-inclusion-related questions in a survey designed and conducted by this author and other researchers to gain insights from urban residents' viewpoints on this important subject. The survey was part of the study "Criteria for sustainable urban communities and cities in Vietnam" in 2021. The article shows that participation is low for marginalised and vulnerable groups, while mainstream groups have better, but far from satisfactory, participation. There is a low level of social-inclusion awareness and actions. This calls for more efforts to make marginalised and vulnerable groups visible and their voices heard and considered.

KEYWORDS

Social inclusion, sustainability, vulnerable groups, marginalised groups, Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

Social inclusion means "the minimization of discrimination and maximization of participation for all" (Heigl et al., 2022, p. 4). Social inclusion has a focus on vulnerable, deprived and marginalised individuals and groups, such as women and rainbow groups, cultural and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and the poor (Carnemolla et al., 2021). Given their special characteristics, needs and vulnerability, and the historical development of societies, these groups have been marginalised and denied opportunities, resources and rights. Social inclusion helps to remove such oppression and enhances these groups' participation (O'Donnell et al., 2018). In this way, social inclusion can promote changes towards sustainability (Heigl et al., 2022). This is because it improves social cohesion, safety and productivity, and contributes to the whole society's wellbeing (United Nations, 2016). Social inclusion, therefore, supports a balance among economic, environmental, social and other interests in which the environment is protected, quality of life, equity and justice are enhanced, and social issues are resolved (Barbosa et al., 2014) while "the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" is not compromised (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43).

The urban population is growing steadily, from around 1 billion in 1960 to nearly 4.4 billion people in 2020. Its percentage of the total world population increased from 33% in 1960 to 56% in 2020 and is predicted to reach 68.4% by 2050 (United Nations, 2019). Under the pressure of population growth, urban areas are suffering from overloaded infrastructure, pollution, widening social gaps, violence and crime (United Nations, 2020a; 2020b). Public health, safety, food security and access to basic services are concerning (Crume, 2019).

Vietnam is no exception to these issues (Kataoka et al., 2020). Over the last 30 years, the country has urbanised rapidly. The percentage of urban population within the country's total population is set to more than double from

20.1% in 1989 to 43.3% in 2029, and it is estimated that it will reach 58.2% by 2049 (Tong cuc Thong ke & Quy Dan so Lien Hop Quoc, 2016). Big Vietnamese cities are suffering from "weak urban infrastructure networks, restricted access to clean water, a deteriorated environment, bad urban sanitation, flooding, unmanageable solid waste, traffic congestion" (Nguyen, 2020, p. 2). City dwellers tend to be less active, eat unhealthy food and be overweight (Nguyen & Trevisan, 2020). Urban disparities are rising, with stark contrast between the haves – i.e., mainstream, wealthy people – and the have-nots in terms of income and access to basic amenities and services (Tong cuc Thong ke, 2021). Drugs, crime, violence, corruption and environmental pollution are regular news, in parallel with the promotion of material wealth and Western lifestyles as measurements of success and fulfilment (Dang et al., 2011). Social disparities pose threats to social stability and could lead to economic and social breakdowns and crises, such as depressions (Landsley, 2012), conflicts and wars (Justino, 2012). They also reduce capacity to cope with and recover from disasters and catastrophes, as demonstrated under the current Covid-19 pandemic (United Nations, 2020a).

Vietnamese authorities, civic groups and the private sector have acted to deal with these issues. The state has set up legislation based on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030 (Dang et al., 2021). Non-state organisations and groups have created bottom-up movements and actions for urban sustainability such as campaigns, research and development of sustainable urban business models. These efforts are significant, but insufficient to achieve urban sustainability (Dang et al., 2022). Among others, social inclusion remains a key unresolved issue.

A comprehensive transformation of the way cities and towns operate is needed to deal with these challenges and ensure sustainability and prosperity for all, where social inclusion is an important area to address (United Nations, 2016). This points to the need to understand people's thoughts and behaviours on this topic.

This paper aims to address this need by critically examining the relevant results of a survey conducted under the study "Criteria for sustainable urban communities and cities in Vietnam" in 2021. It looks at responses to social-inclusion-related questions to tease out participants' understanding and evaluation of social inclusion in their communities or local areas. The paper uses Simplican et al.'s (2015) model of social inclusion, and thematic and critical discourse analysis, which are presented after an overview of the study. Social inclusion questions and findings from the survey will follow, and the final section will discuss implications and possible ways forward.

STUDY ON CRITERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN COMMUNITIES AND CITIES IN VIETNAM (2021)

As its title describes, the study aimed to develop a set of criteria which are cost effective and feasible to monitor, and promote sustainable urban communities and cities in Vietnam. It was implemented by the Center for Development of Community Initiative and Environment (C&E) in collaboration with experts from state agencies and services, local organisations, and a local university under the sponsorship of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. These community partners had a vested interest in sustainable development and the social inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable groups.

The study started with a desk study reviewing existing criteria for urban sustainability, cases of urban sustainability in the world, and relevant legislation in Vietnam. This stage used literature and expert inputs as the main sources, and documentary study as the main method. Based on this, a set of criteria was proposed. This framework is based on the European Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities, 2019). It aims to meet Vietnamese conditions and the requirements of measurability; simple, cost-effective data collection and analysis; and acceptability to key stakeholders, including local and State authorities and leaders. This framework has five dimensions – spatial, environmental, economic, social and governance – and 16 criteria (see Figure 1). It was assumed that these five dimensions were equally important. There was no consideration of weighting factors for each dimension, or the criteria in these dimensions.

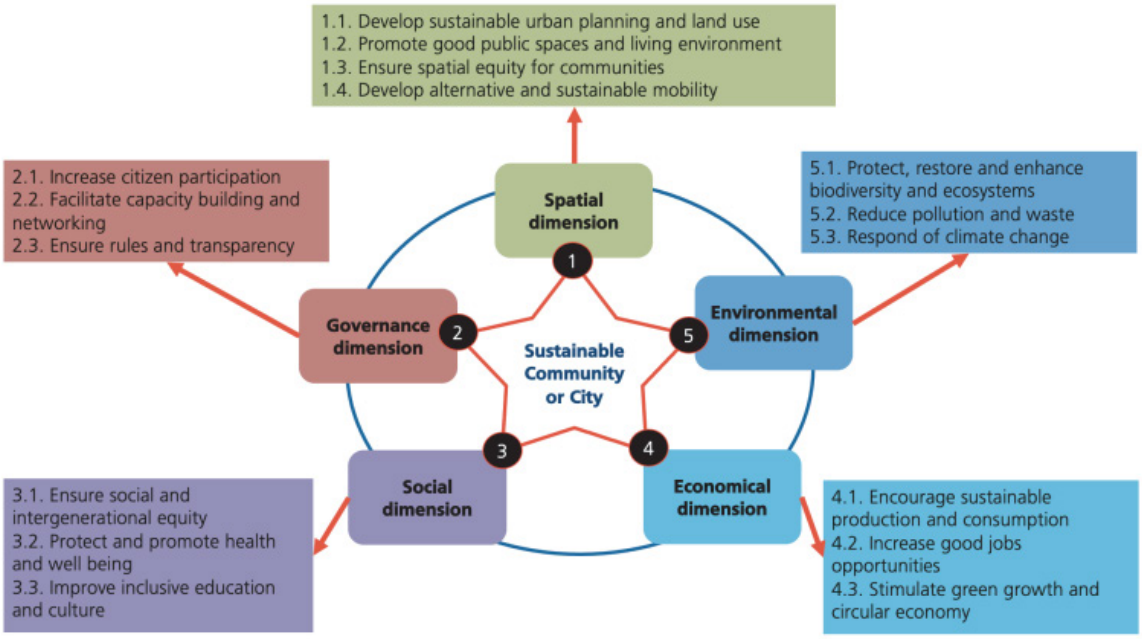

Figure 1. Criteria for urban sustainability in Vietnam (Dang et al., 2021, p. 18).

Social inclusion is covered in all five dimensions of the framework and is most visible in the following ten criteria:

1.2. Promote good public spaces and living environment
1.3. Ensure spatial equity for communities
1.4. Develop alternative and sustainable mobility
2.1. Increase citizen participation
2.2. Facilitate capacity building and networking
2.3. Ensure rules and transparency
3.1. Ensure social and intergenerational equity
3.2. Protect and promote health and wellbeing
3.3. Improve inclusive education and culture
4.2. Increase good job opportunities

The framework was then tested in three locations: Ha Noi (Bac Tu Liem and Nam Tu Liem), Da Nang (Son Tra), and Can Tho (Binh Thuy and Ninh Kieu) (see Figure 2). The test used a mixed design, in which the research team collected quantitative and qualitative data using questionnaire surveys with 60 resident respondents and semi-structured interviews with 38 state officials and experts. The data were then analysed and synthesised using both quantitative and qualitative methods, with point ratings calculated and qualitative comments analysed and synthesised as per criterion. Expert input was also sought for the draft report. Findings were then used to evaluate urban sustainability in these cities and refine the proposed criteria.

Figure 2. Research locations (Dang et al., 2021, p. 13).

SIMPLICAN ET AL.'S MODEL OF SOCIAL INCLUSION (2015)

Social inclusion is a broad and complex concept (Koller et al., 2018). Heigl et al. (2022) define social inclusion to be the opposite of discrimination and interchangeable with participation for everyone. The concept is based on the premise that people belong to social groups distinguished by characteristics, such as the poor, people with disabilities, children and youth, women, rainbow groups, ethnic minorities, migrants and others. Such characteristics can be the grounds for these groups to be discriminated against, thus causing them to suffer disadvantages or harm compared to other groups (Altman, 2020). Examples are unequal distribution of resources or limitation of access to services and communities, and denial of opportunities to these groups. They might be excluded from decision making on shared issues to the advantage of the mainstream groups. On the opposite side, participation entails empowerment. For example, these groups are provided with education and access to resources and are involved in such processes so that they could be in control of their own development while having voices over shared matters. It also requires the removal of barriers such as discriminatory legislation, and changes to the attitudes and behaviours of other groups (United Nations, 2016).

Simplican et al.'s (2015) model of social inclusion demonstrates well the complex, multi-layered nature of this concept while allowing a holistic view and detailed approach to evaluating and promoting social inclusion (see Figure 3 below). It covers two overlapping and mutually supporting domains of interpersonal relationships and community participation, and identifies factors that shape social inclusion. The relationship domain involves people to whom an individual relates, such as family, friends, and staff from associated organisations. Each relation has a certain structure, i.e., length, frequency, size and function, or how it serves the individual. The community participation domain consists of the categories of leisure, politics and civics, employment, education, access to goods and services, religion and culture. These activities could be structured as segregated, semi-segregated and integrated or mainstream. Participation could be as minimal as presence, i.e., being physically present with others. It could be encountering, i.e., meeting or making contact, or participation at the maximum level (Simplican et al., 2015).

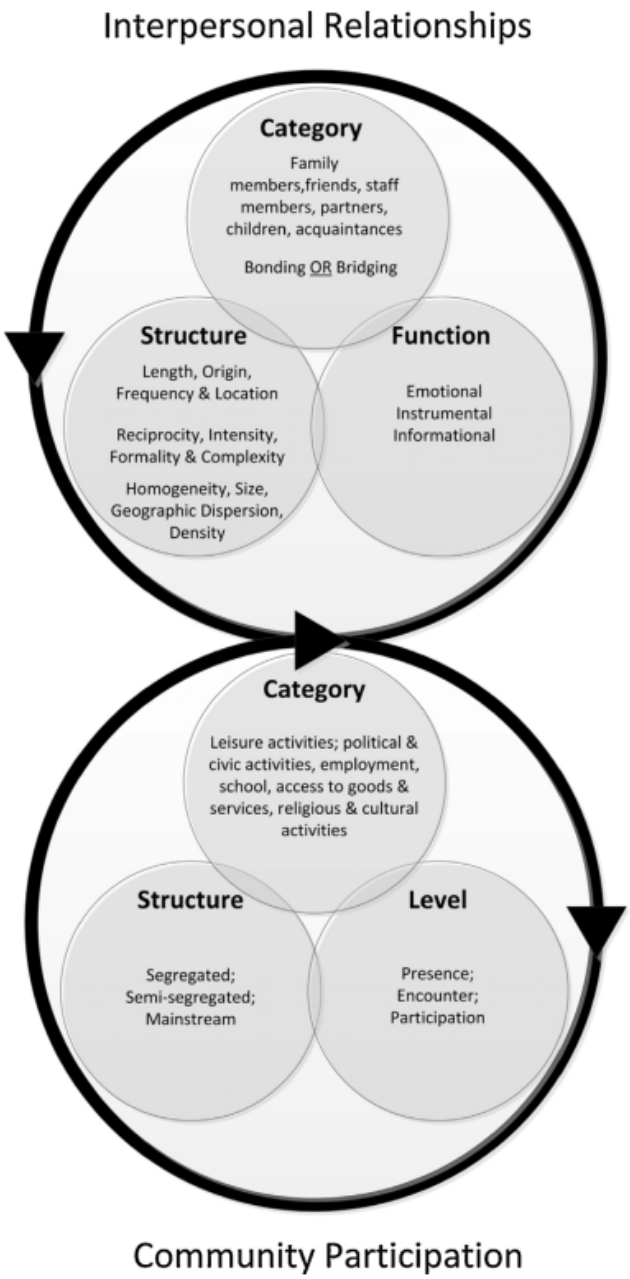

Figure 3. Simplican et al.'s Model of Social Inclusion (2015, p. 23).

THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is useful in searching for themes and subthemes in qualitative data with the guidance of a framework (Bryman, 2016). In this case, the author of this paper examines responses to identify whether there are recurring observations and comments on each of the elements of the above model of social inclusion. The author also explores similarities, differences and omissions in these answers (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

Critical discourse analysis is helpful to gain insights into ideologies, practices and power relationships that shape respondents' views of and behaviours towards social inclusion (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). To do this, the author of this paper draws on the findings of thematic analysis and existing literature about the historical and social settings

that might contribute to these themes. Critical discourse analysis is, therefore, done after and based on thematic analysis. Contributing factors identified are presented after major themes in the discussion.

SOCIAL INCLUSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Participating residents were asked to provide their ratings using a scale from zero to five, where zero means very bad and five means very good, and comments on every relevant criterion. In the spatial dimension, respondents rated public space, living environment, affordable housing with adequate neighbourhood amenities for low-income groups, and transport/mobility, and explained their views on them. They did the same for the criteria on the involvement of diverse political, civil, religious and ethnic groups in the authority's decision making, state support for capacity and building connection between the community and residents, and the transparency of the city's legislation and information. Similarly, they rated and commented on health and wellbeing, the assurance of social and intergenerational equity, and the inclusiveness of education and culture, especially for the poor and other vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. They also offered opinions on whether workers could easily find reasonable jobs in their localities. All respondents provided ratings, but fewer commented, ranging from 38% for health and wellbeing to 73% for spatial equity. This demonstrated the varying interest and awareness of the respondents (See Figure 4).

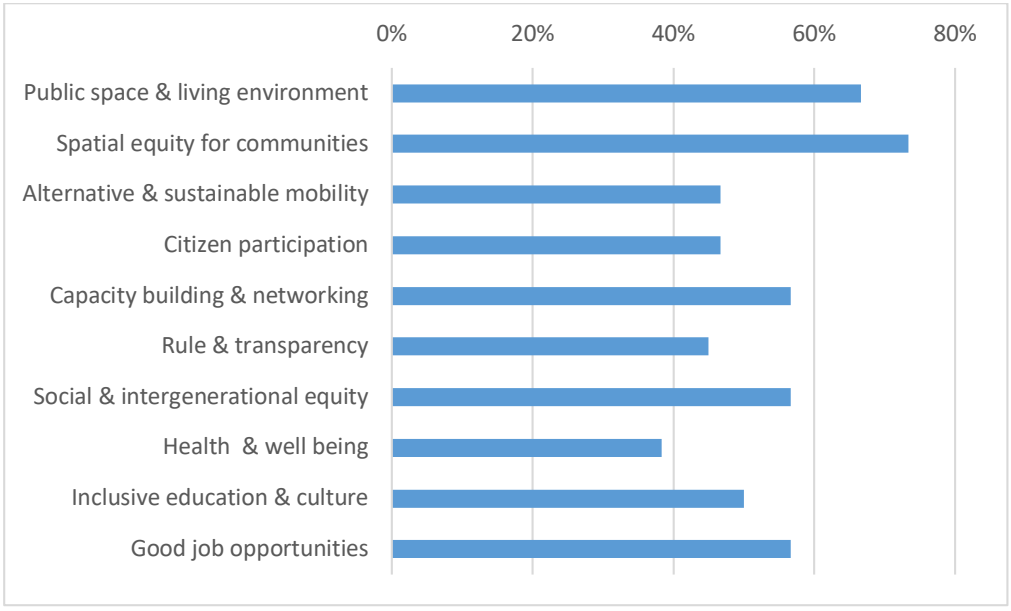

Figure 4. Percentage of respondents commenting on each criterion.

No interpersonal relationships were identified in the answers, while community participation received the most attention, possibly given the focus of the survey. As further detailed below, the answers suggest that respondents rated most of the social inclusion-related criteria at an acceptable level. The responses show diverse visibility of groups and cover broad categories of social inclusion. They indicate highly segregated structures and diverse levels of community participation.

Ratings of social-inclusion-related criteria

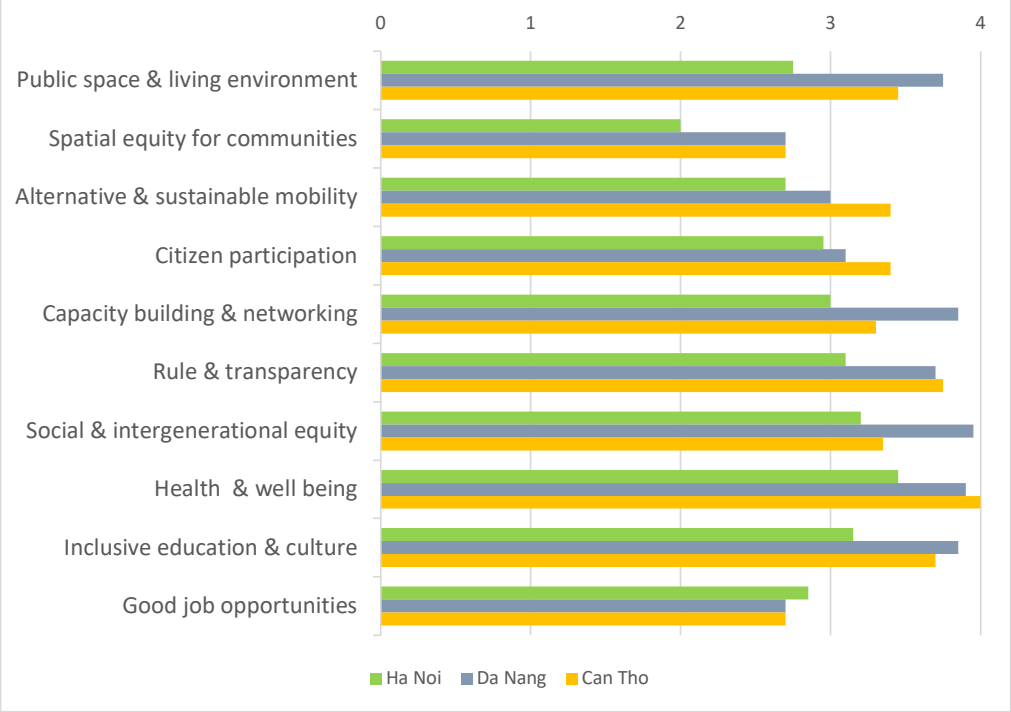

Figure 5. Mean ratings of social inclusion-related criteria.

As shown in Figure 5, all three cities scored low in two criteria of spatial equity for communities and good job opportunities; i.e., between 2 and 2.85, below the acceptable level of 3. The residents' ratings were of an acceptable level of social inclusion across the eight remaining criteria. All ratings were below 4, the good level, except for Can Tho's health and wellbeing rating. Ha Noi scored the lowest across the ten social-inclusion-related criteria. This means that social inclusion was considered worse in Ha Noi by its dwellers than in the two other cities.

Broad categories

The survey touched on all five categories of leisure, politics and civics, employment, education, access to goods and services, and religion and culture under Simplican et al.'s (2015) model but did not cover them all. Specifically, leisure activities were covered under the questions about public space and living environment, spatial equity for communities, and alternative and sustainable mobility. Respondents mentioned parks, entertainment areas, eco-tourism areas, sports, playgrounds, green public spaces, shopping centres, and cultural/community houses. Comments from participants included:

> *"There are many public places for entertainment, eco-tourism, sport, and parks."* (Resident, Da Nang)
>
> *"There are spaces for people to walk and exercise … shopping centres might be developed."* (Resident, Ha Noi)
>
> *"There used to be more cultural activities … playgrounds for children …."* (Resident, Ha Noi)
>
> *"There are many entertainment areas."* (Resident, Can Tho)

Political and civic activities were covered under the questions of citizen participation, rules and transparency, in which respondents informed that the authorities involved multiple groups in their decision-making processes.

> *"Overall, the communication shows the diversity of groups involved in the authorities' decision-making process."* (Resident, Da Nang)

> *"The political system consists of … workers, farmers, military and religious groups."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

Employment was addressed under the questions about good job opportunities, where residents advised the availability of job opportunities in their cities.

> *"The city economy is developing so [workers] can easily find reasonable jobs."* (Resident, Can Tho)

> *"Because this is a regional economic centre, there is a huge demand for human resources. There are industrial parks … factories … restaurants, hotels and small enterprises so there are diverse jobs. Thus, it is not difficult to find jobs."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

> *"The city is active with many industrial parks and tourism development so [workers] can easily find jobs that suit their ability."* (Resident, Da Nang)

Answers to questions about health, wellbeing, education and culture covered access to education, cultural activities and access to services. Respondents advised the existence of healthcare, education and social campaigns for wellbeing.

> *"Healthcare service quality is increasing. There are more and more high-quality hospitals and healthcare centres."* (Resident, Da Nang)

> *"Public policies such as vaccination are well developed."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

> *"Residents can buy or be granted health insurance … There are campaigns against domestic violence to protect women and children. Universal education is achieved."* (Resident, Da Nang)

No questions were asked about religious activities. However, the role of religious organisations and groups was included in the citizen participation question, as mentioned above.

Diverse visibility of groups

The authorities and residents were mentioned most often in residents' answers, respectively 119 and 108 times. The poor and children followed, and were respectively mentioned 42 and 18 times. This showed that these groups had high visibility and a certain level of acceptance and popularity in the respondents' daily lives and their influence over them. Civic organisations, people with disabilities, the elderly, religious groups, women and the disadvantaged were mentioned eight or fewer times, demonstrating their low visibility. Only one respondent mentioned LGBT as part of the rainbow groups. This indicated either a very low visibility or very little recognition of these groups or their needs.

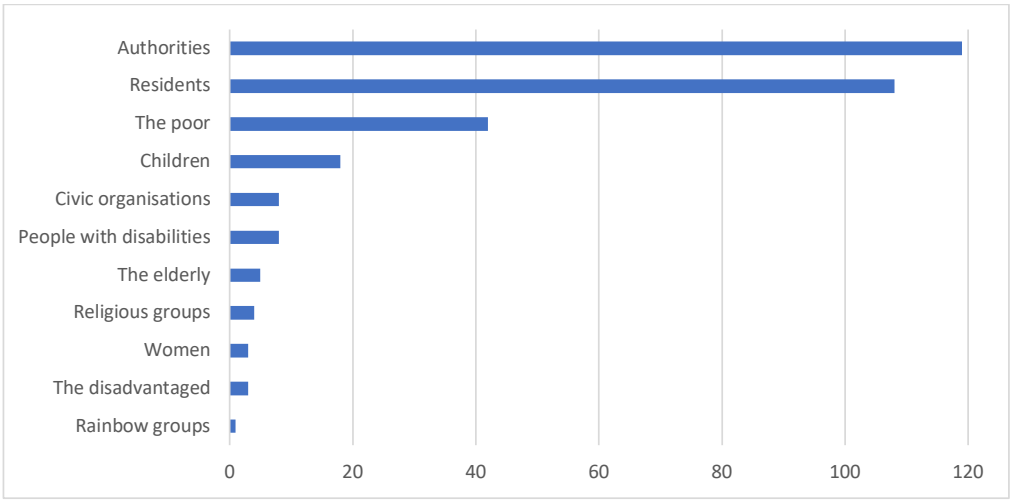

Figure 6. Frequency of groups mentioned in the residents' answers.

Participation structure and level – leisure activities

Responses show participation varies across groups and categories, and is often segregated. The segregation is obvious between mainstream groups, including permanent residents and healthy and wealthy adults, and the rest of society, such as children, people with disabilities and people with low incomes. For example, public spaces are open to all, but these are limited.

> *"Too small areas are designated for public spaces."* (Resident, Ha Noi)
>
> *"There are not many public spaces."* (Resident, Can Tho)
>
> *"There are few parks and gardens."* (Resident, Da Nang)

There are shortages of children's playgrounds, toys for children and utilities for people with disabilities. Some areas are managed by private enterprises that charge money.

> *"There is a shortage of children's playgrounds."* (Resident, Da Nang)
>
> *"Public spaces lack utilities for people with disabilities."* (Resident, Ha Noi)
>
> *"Gardens and parks should not be run by private enterprises that collect fees."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

Participation structure and level – civics and politics

Permanent residents have access to activities organised for them by the authorities. There is no indication that temporary residents have such rights.

> *"If they have permanent residency in the area, they are allowed to join general activities in the district."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

Communication channels exist to ensure communication between the authorities and the residents.

> *"There are many information channels to connect the authorities and the residents, such as hotlines, direct reporting and submissions, social networks, and resident group meetings …."* (Resident, Da Nang)

The authorities play a key role in decision making. Residents and civic groups were asked to follow the decisions made and support their implementation.

> *"Currently [the country] is under the Communist Party [and] a one-party government, so the authorities decide and people participate superficially."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

The authorities hold public consultations with mainstream organisations such as the women's union and the elderly, while other civic groups have little or no voice.

> *"The authorities will hold public consultation with the population via social organisations before making decisions."* (Resident, Da Nang)

> *"The right to decision making belongs to the mainstream groups. The elderly might have some voices but younger groups, people with disabilities, LGBT, youth and children have no voices."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

> *"Political groups are not allowed access to the authorities' work. Religious groups only participate superficially."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

> *"Civic groups don't know about the decision-making process of the authorities."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

Even the mainstream organisations might not be 'vocal' or active enough, and their voices might not be considered properly.

> "*Such organisations do not attend properly to this process."* (Resident, Da Nang)

Respondents advised that authorities provided support for community capacity-building and connection. For example, some respondents observed that the authorities implemented district and street-based neighbourhood watch programmes, campaigns for people to join civic organisations such as those of women, the elderly and people with disabilities in Ha Noi, community organisation models in Da Nang or education promotion for the residents in Can Tho. Some commented that these were limited and not popular.

> *"I did not see many activities like this from the authorities."* (Resident, Can Tho)

> *"Yes for Covid, but no for human-rights promotion."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

> *"Activities are organised but are not popular."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

The responses point to a history of passive compliance, where individuals did not care or participate but complied with the authorities, given the way they were educated. They also show a low level of interest in civic activities.

> *"I do not care much about this. I don't want to comment on this issue [participation]. Residents do not have the habits to participate. Because of their awareness and interests, their education did not attend to this issue. In this country, people were taught to comply."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

Participation structure and level – education and employment

People with disabilities, low-income people, the poor and the disadvantaged have limited or no participation in education, given their limited resources. Free, segregated supplementary classes are available for them in some places.

> *"People with higher incomes could access better and higher education."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

> *"As far as I am aware, besides supplementary classes at schools, there are friend classes for disadvantaged children. These classes are taught by youth and are free."* (Resident, Can Tho)

Some participants were concerned about educational issues such as teachers' violence and corruption, and the limited spaces at public schools that make enrolment difficult.

> *"Many people apply so enrolment in public schools is difficult. Some teachers are violent and corrupt."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

While job opportunities are available for people who want to work, most provide low income, even for those who have skills and qualifications.

> *"It is easy to find a job but it might not be appropriate because many university graduates have to take a job that does not fit their qualifications."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

> *"Job opportunities are all right, but income is low."* (Resident, Can Tho)

> *"It is difficult to find a job in an enterprise. Non-skilled jobs are abundant."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

Participation structure and level – access to services

The poor could afford neither health insurance nor decent housing with appropriate, close-by amenities and often ended up living in a poor environment.

> *"People having health insurance can receive healthcare … If one is poor, one could not afford it."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

> *"Housing price is still high and not affordable. The poor have difficulties accessing quality services and amenities."* (Resident, Da Nang)

> *"The poor suffered more from pollution and their living environment is more polluted."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

Public transport is limited, and people rely mainly on private motor vehicles for transport. Big disparities remain between high- and low-income groups, people living in the CBD and commuters, and people with special mobility needs.

> *"Public transport has not yet developed to meet people's needs. There is a shortage of public transport utilities."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

> *"The rate of private vehicles [of the total number of vehicles] remains too high."* (Resident, Da Nang)

> *"There are many private vehicles used …. No public transport near your houses."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

Responses confirmed that the state provides support to the poor and disadvantaged groups, such as housing, education and healthcare.

> *"The city … has support policies such as low-rental housing, tuition fee exemption or reduction and free health insurance."* (Resident, Da Nang)

Notably, many thought that this was good support and took the view that the city was doing well for them. These responses suggested low connections between the residents and these groups, who were mainly viewed as others in need.

> *"I believe that the city has been providing support to these groups very well, always giving priority so that they have proper food and clothing to live happily daily."* (Resident, Can Tho)

Only a few thought that these were not good enough.

> *"It is not sufficient."* (Resident, Can Tho)

This accounts for the fact that social disparities remain between the rich and the poor, and the mainstream and disadvantaged groups.

> *"There is no absolute justice. The poor still have many difficulties."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

"There are social-support centres and old-age centres, but child beggars and child abuse are seen daily." (Resident, Ha Noi)

Participation structure and level – culture and religion

Respondents noted the role of cultural houses and the authorities in running cultural events and involving the residents therein.

> *"There are cultural houses in all districts. Or cultural events and anniversaries have residents' performances … but the residents were lazy."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

A respondent noted the role of smartphones and the internet, which allow people to access information, knowledge and culture.

> *"[I]n the city, the internet is available in the localities … most city dwellers have smartphones as they are very cheap … all people have access to knowledge."* (Resident, Ha Noi)

DISCUSSION

Complex, low social inclusion in urban Vietnam

Findings demonstrate the complexity of the current stage of social inclusion in urban Vietnam, which varied across categories, structures and levels of participation and the three locations of Ha Noi, Da Nang and Can Tho. In this complexity, three common features stand out. Firstly, the participation of marginalised and vulnerable groups is generally low and highly segregated. Secondly, the mainstream groups have better, more varying, but still constrained participation. Thirdly, respondents have a significant knowledge and awareness gap in social inclusion.

Marginalised and vulnerable groups are lacking resources and receive insufficient support from the authorities and society to participate in leisure, employment, education and culture. They also have limited access to services such as healthcare and housing. Except for the poor, the visibility of other marginalised and vulnerable groups is low, demonstrating that they do not receive much public attention. Public spaces and living environment, employment, education and culture are also exclusive of the needs of such groups; for example, the lack of utilities for people with disabilities, or playgrounds for children. This is in line with the literature. Banks (2019), for example, finds that in Vietnam "social protection was particularly insufficient at promoting social inclusion amongst people with disabilities, as well as ensuring sustainable livelihoods" (p. 4). He also points out that support for them is mainly in the form of money but non-financial barriers still exist, such as the lack of suitable services and utilities, or discrimination.

Mainstream groups have more resources and employment opportunities. They can therefore afford entertainment and other fee-charging leisure and cultural activities, better education and better healthcare, housing and private transport. They can also enjoy public utilities that are designed to fit their needs.

Both marginalised and vulnerable groups and mainstream groups have low participation in civics and politics under the direction of the authorities. They will provide feedback upon being asked, via selective civic organisations such as the women's union or in residential meetings. The authorities make decisions, considering this feedback, and ask these groups to comply with them.

Responses show that respondents have insufficient awareness and understanding of the importance of participation for themselves and marginalised and vulnerable groups as part of their rights in society and for urban sustainability. Except for the poor, the low visibility of these groups to the respondents means that some respondents might not be aware of or have as much interest in them as they do in other matters of sustainability. For many respondents, social inclusion is equivalent to support so that these groups could live better. This fits with

the charity model, in which these groups are seen as dependent and incapable (see Banks, 2019 for a discussion). Only four respondents mentioned that the voices of these groups were not counted in the decision-making process. Only three respondents mentioned that there was no social justice for these groups.

Multiple social and historical contributing factors

Multiple social and historical factors have contributed to this situation. Vietnam used to be poor and was devastated after the French and American wars, which ended in 1975, and during the following socioeconomic crisis. With Doi Moi, an overall reform since the mid-1980s, the centralised socialist state model was replaced by a market-orientated one characterised by power delegation, decentralisation and privatisation. The private sector developed while the state sector shrank, along with state welfare (Nguyen et al., 1996). Thus, the reform brought economic recovery and growth and fuelled urbanisation, while widening social disparities (Taylor, 2004).

In contrast to radical economic changes, civics, politics and public services have seen more conservative moves. The Communist Party retains strong control of the state and the government. State planning of services and utilities continues the top-down approach (Benedikter & Nguyen, 2018), in which the interests of local officials and businesspeople are key drivers of urban development (Nguyen et al., 2018). These are significant barriers to participation by other stakeholders in urban development.

The civic sector has developed better, thanks to funding from both foreign governments and international organisations such as the UN or overseas non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These have made significant contributions to social inclusion by gathering more people who share interests and purposes for actions, such as sustainability and environmental protection. Still, the sector is closely monitored and strictly controlled by the authorities via multiple measures, such as approval and reporting requirements for organisation setups and operation and project activities. This explains the limited efforts that the sector can contribute to urban sustainability and social inclusion (Dang et al., 2022).

Besides these obstacles, social surveillance has been common since the 1950s, as people were not allowed to voice their opinions but had to guard their thoughts and speech to comply with the Communist Party's directions (Dang, 2009). This explained the common compliants and/or indifferent attitude from the residents and civic organisations towards the authorities and their low participation in political and civil activities. Furthermore, with low participation, indifferent attitude and limited education, and a constrained civic sector, the population understandably has insufficient social-inclusion awareness and understanding.

Areas for actions

There is a big gap between reality and the ideal stage of social inclusion for sustainability in urban Vietnam. Actions are necessary for changes to occur towards better social inclusion. Such actions could use Simplican et al.'s (2015) ecological pathway of social inclusion as a guide (see Figure 7). This allows a holistic view and detailed approach to promoting social inclusion. It identifies the layers of socio-political factors, community, organisational and interpersonal factors and individuals contributing to social inclusion. Socio-political factors include laws, legal enforcement, market forces, state perspectives, histories of service delivery, and legislative cutbacks. Community includes the availability of and access to services, housing, communities and resources, and community attitude, culture, geography and discourse. Organisational factors include involved organisations and their cultures, group culture, and family circumstances. Interpersonal factors include relationships with others such as family, friends, staff of organisations, social networks, attitude, respect, trust, and resources or social capital. There are multiple points and ways to intervene to change the current stage and individuals, groups and communities could choose the ones they could best work with.

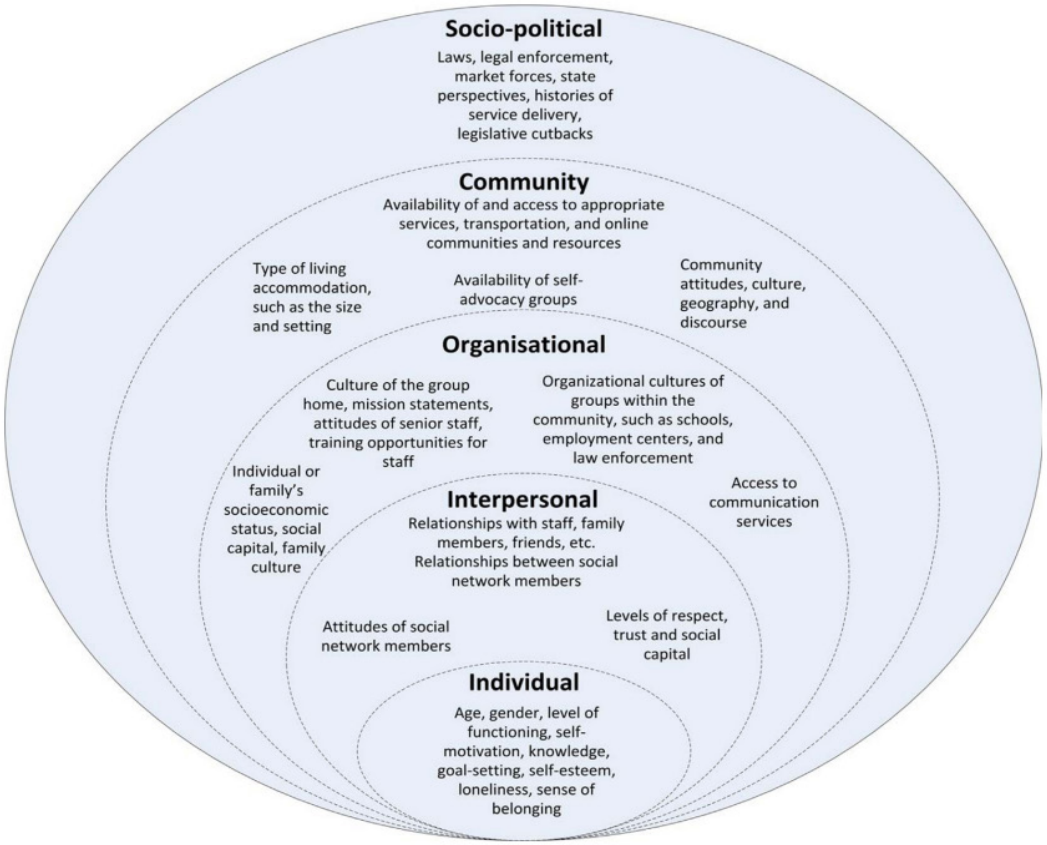

Fig. 3. Ecological pathways to and from social inclusion.

Figure 7. Simplican et al.'s Ecological Pathway to Social Inclusion (2015, p. 25).

Freire (2005) points out that the oppressed should act to remove oppression, starting with raising their consciousness about the oppression and its impacts, gaining an understanding of their conditions and themselves, education for empowerment, and transformative actions to overcome oppression. Priority should therefore be given to the empowerment of marginalised and vulnerable groups, and those who work with and for them. They might hold discussions about social inclusion and barriers such as beliefs and practices against social inclusion. They might challenge these barriers and empower themselves with knowledge and connections as social capital.

Next are actions to gain recognition of differences, dignity and worth of individual uniqueness, and to mobilise voices for sharing privilege and power in society. Awareness-raising campaigns can promote understanding and change the attitude of the public towards these groups and their rights and needs (Banks, 2019), and the barriers that exist against them in society (Koller et al., 2018). Social-inclusion activities with structure can facilitate community participation of the marginalised and vulnerable groups, for example, inclusive sports programmes, job-search support and other inclusive community activities with facilitators. These activities also allow suitable venues for these groups and the mainstream groups to meet and connect (Louw et al., 2020). Throughout, regular training and support for all participants, and dialogues between these groups and the mainstream groups, are important for mutual knowledge, understanding and skills to cope and deal with discrimination at interpersonal levels (Crawford, 2020; Prichett-Johnson, 2011).

These groups, and other supportive mainstream groups, could mobilise for legislation changes to protect their rights and ensure service development to meet their needs, such as the provision of wheelchair access and toilets in public buildings. For urban-development efforts, Mirzoev et al. (2022) suggest the following would contribute to enhancing social inclusion: 1) Prioritising the needs of the most marginalised and vulnerable groups and empowering local communities; 2) Advocating for a more equal presentation of these groups in the decision-

making process; 3) Making activities community-based and people-centred; 4) Developing public and private partnerships; 5) Considering local circumstances; 6) Considering both intended and unintended impacts of social-inclusion efforts.

CONCLUSION

This paper examines responses to a recent survey on urban sustainability in Vietnam and teases out the current stage of social inclusion in three big cities of Ha Noi, Da Nang and Can Tho. It shows that marginalised and vulnerable groups have low participation and are highly segregated, while the mainstream groups have better participation across leisure, employment and education, access to services and culture. Participation in civics and politics is, however, low for both mainstream and marginalised groups. Responses also suggest poor awareness and knowledge of social inclusion among respondents. These are a threat to urban sustainability and the wellbeing of the urban population in Vietnam.

Among the many points of interventions to improve social inclusion, priority should be given to the marginalised and vulnerable groups, and those who work for and work with them, to increase their awareness of the issues and develop understanding, voices and power to act to change the situation. The change towards better social inclusion and sustainability would take a long time but there have been successful examples to follow, as demonstrated in the literature. Ongoing documentation of new developments and shifting influencing factors would be helpful to support these changes.

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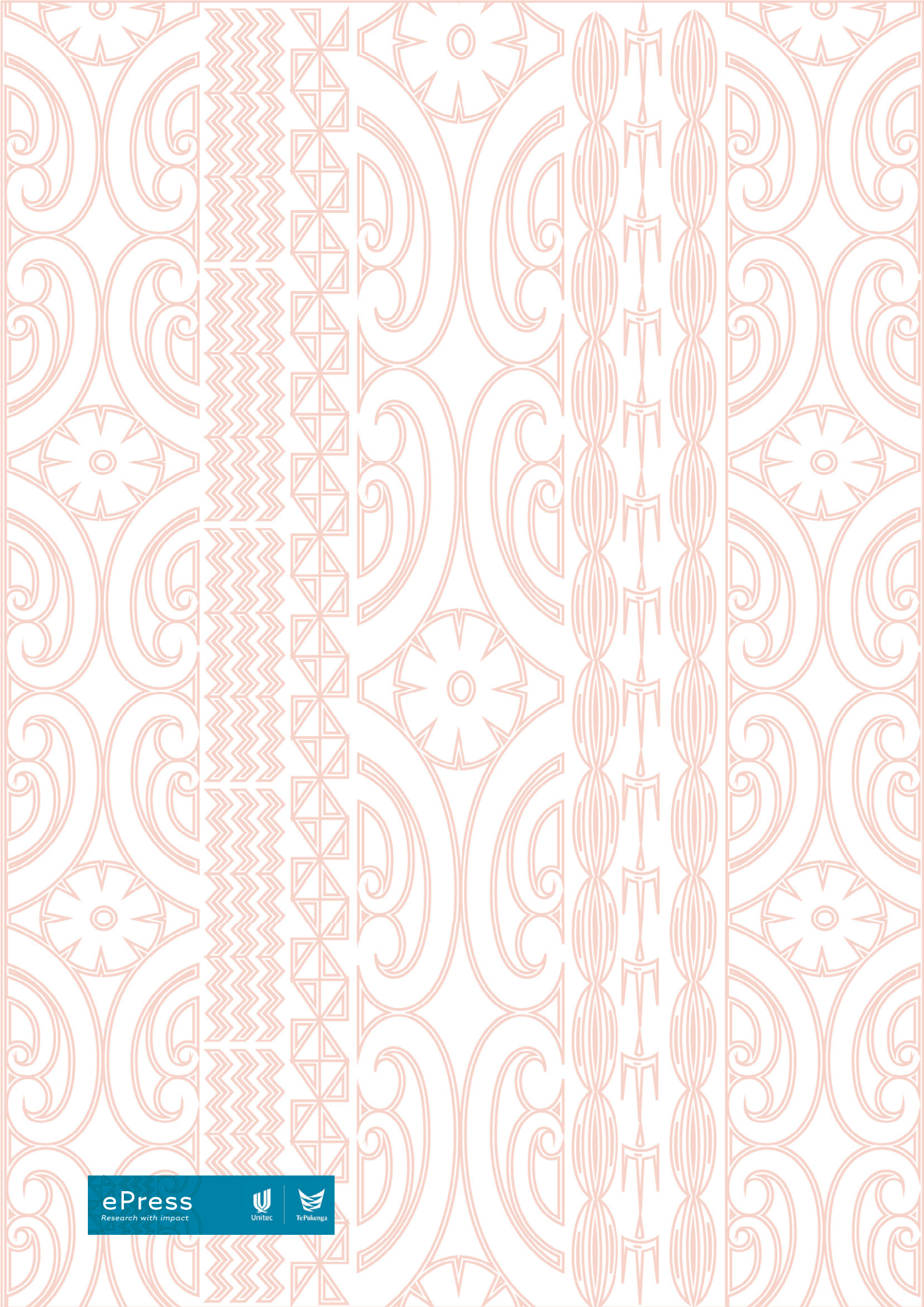
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