Tātou Tātou/Success for all: Improving Māori student success

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Introduction

Tātou Tātou was a qualitative research project, funded by Ako Aotearoa National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence, involving Māori students within medicine, health sciences, pharmacy and nursing in the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences at The University of Auckland. Tātou Tātou was Indigenous-led via Te Kupenga Hauora Māori (the Department of Māori Health) in collaboration with non-Indigenous academic representatives from the Schools of Pharmacy, Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences who worked alongside the Māori and Pacific Admission Scheme (MAPAS) student support staff.

The project explored the ways in which non-lecture teaching and learning helps or hinders Māori student success. It aimed to foreground the Indigenous student voice and provide recommendations in a toolkit for quality tertiary teaching to better support Māori students to succeed in their study within health disciplines.

The project team included Dr Elana Taipapaki Curtis, Ms Erena Wikaire, Ms Torise Lualua-Aati, Dr Bridget Kool, Mr William Nepia, Dr Myra Ruka, Ms Michelle Honey, Ms Fiona Kelly and Associate Professor Phillippa Poole.

Why was this project initiated?

Targeted secondary and tertiary education sector initiatives that successfully recruit and retain Māori students and achieve student success are vital to Māori health workforce development and meeting Māori health needs (Ratima et al. 2007). Central to Māori student success in health programs is the teaching and learning involved (Greenwood & Te Aika 2008). Literature shows that teaching and learning factors can both help and hinder student success and that Māori and Pacific student success can be facilitated through key teaching and learning factors, particularly within the non-lecture context (Airini et al. 2011; Madjar et al. 2009).

Understanding the distinctive worldviews of Māori students is critical to the knowledge base that drives teaching and learning practices in tertiary health programs. While some evidence has been gathered about lecture-based learning in universities, little is known about non-lecture teaching and learning activities (i.e. less than fifty studies) that complement traditional en masse teaching, with few studies focused on representing Indigenous student voices.
Aims and objectives

The following research questions guided the project:

• What teaching and learning practices in non-lecture contexts help or hinder Māori student success in degree-level study in nursing, pharmacy, medicine and health sciences?

• What changes are needed to teaching and higher education practices in order to best support Māori success in degree-level study designed to prepare students for work in the health professions?

Key objectives for the project included:

1. The delivery of high-quality research on the nature of non-lecture teaching and learning practices that help or hinder Māori students studying in degree-level programs within the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences.

2. Identification of factors in non-lecture teaching and learning that help and hinder Māori student success within the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences within non-clinical and clinical contexts.

3. Production of a toolkit for quality tertiary teaching targeted at tertiary institutional change.

Approach to achieve aims and objectives

This qualitative study incorporated Kaupapa Māori research methodology and the Critical Incident Technique (Airini et al. 2011; Flanagan 1954) within two phases:

1. The production of critical incidents narratives from student interviews using the Critical Incident Technique.

2. The development of a Quality Tertiary Teaching Profile from the analysis and interpretation of the narratives.

Kaupapa Māori research practice is embedded in research design, implementation, analysis, report writing and dissemination. The research was led by Māori researchers, with MAPAS and academic program staff within the research team. The Kaupapa Māori research framework provides a methodology in which a non-victim blaming, non-deficit approach is taken (Smith 1999). Overall, the research team committed to a Kaupapa Māori research approach by:

• utilising Māori input into the research via consultative and participatory processes, including an Advisory Group with Indigenous and research expertise

• proceeding in a manner appropriate to the cultural contexts concerned

• ensuring that members of the research team acknowledge cultural limitations and work in culturally safe ways

• ensuring that all aspects of the research are monitored closely for relevance and excellence in methodology.

The Critical Incident Technique is an established form of narrative inquiry that has been used to reveal and chronicle the lived experiences of students undertaking tertiary studies (Victoroff & Hogan 2006).
By asking students to describe specific important events during their time as undergraduate students and their outcomes, a critical incident is able to capture well-defined key experiences that inform the research objective. The Critical Incident Technique allows analysis and categorisation of qualitative information that provides deep insights into the situational experience and has been successfully implemented in a number of health care studies (Airini et al. 2011; Pavlish et al. 2011).

One-on-one interviews of between forty and sixty minutes were conducted with forty-one Māori participants currently enrolled in, or recently graduated from, the Bachelor of Medicine (seventeen), Bachelor of Nursing (seven), Bachelor of Pharmacy (three) and Bachelor of Health Sciences (fourteen) courses at The University of Auckland. In accordance with the Critical Incident Technique, interviewers repeatedly asked participants the key question, ‘Can you describe a time when the teaching and learning approach used in your undergraduate program has helped or hindered your success as a student?’ Participants were not provided definitions for terms (e.g. help, hinder, success), consistent with the Critical Incident Technique methodology and the project approach, to frame these concepts broadly as linking with individual and community notions of potential, effort and achievement (Airini et al. 2011).

A complete incident story comprises three parts: trigger (the source of the incident), associated action and outcome. Once MAPAS and academic program staff identified the critical incidents within each interview, they assigned a subcategory to label the types of issues being discussed by the student within any given narrative and whether they were considered to be examples of helpful or hindering practice. Additional team analysis then collapsed the subcategories into three broad contexts representing groupings of incidents into areas of focus for potential institutional development.

Research findings have been reported elsewhere (Curtis et al. 2012). A total of 1346 incidents that both helped and hindered student success were identified from the forty-one interviews. Approximately two-thirds (67%; 898) helped and one-third (33%; 448) of all incidents hindered Māori student success. Incidents related to the provision of Māori Student Support Services made up the majority of student stories (59%; 789), with 69% being helpful and 31% hindering success. Three hundred and seventy five incidents (28%) related to the Undergraduate Program, with a mix of helpful versus hindering (53% versus 47%), and 182 incidents (14%) represented stories associated with Māori Student Whanaungatanga (family bonding), with most being helpful rather than hindering (87% versus 13%). Thirteen subcategories describe incidents as being associated with MAPAS/tuākana tutorials; resources; academic transitioning; MAPAS staff and Māori academic staff; Māori mentoring and role models; racism/stigma towards Māori; teaching staff characteristics; program organisation; linking theory to practice; program incorporation of Māori cultural values; first-year health study competition; supporting whakawhanaungatanga (relationships); and group learning.

Project team meetings reviewed the three contexts and context subcategories identified via incident analysis to inform the development of a Quality Tertiary Teaching Profile, which represents the Tātou Tātou data by linking the incidents, contexts and context subcategories into five broad levels of institutional instruction:

1. Use effective teaching and learning practices.
2. Provide academic support that is culturally appropriate.
3. Provide pastoral support that is culturally appropriate.
4. Provide a culturally safe learning environment.
5. Encourage cohort cohesiveness.
Challenges

Although Tātou Tātou included Māori students across the four health disciplines, small Māori student numbers within the pharmacy and nursing programs have limited the ability to provide a between-discipline analysis. Specific exploration of helpful and hindering factors in each of the clinical, non-clinical and non-program domains was also limited due to a smaller number of incidents directly relating to the clinical context. While Tātou Tātou has developed the Quality Tertiary Teaching Profile to inform teaching and learning of Indigenous students within tertiary institutions, ongoing challenges remain in measuring the translation of the research findings into action, given that the specific implementation of the Quality Tertiary Teaching Profile in educational institutions was outside the scope of this research project.

Successes

The success of Tātou Tātou as a research project offering unique methodology and findings that foreground the Indigenous student voice is already becoming apparent. Dissemination to date (within six months of project completion) has been extensive with:

- multiple internal presentations to the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences boards of studies, school/department research seminars, and university committees and network meetings
- multiple presentations at research colloquiums that inform the broader tertiary education sector
- a national launch of the research findings within an Indigenous tertiary education conference, Tuia Te Ako
- national Indigenous and health conference presentations, including to the Australian and New Zealand Association for Public Health Education and Hui Whakapiripiri
- international conference presentations at LIME Connection IV, 2011, the Association for Medical Education in Europe Conference 2012 and Ngā Pae o Te Maramatanga.

Tātou Tātou has recently received a University of Auckland Excellence in Equity Award 2012 that further acknowledges the actual and potential impact of this research project.

What are the impacts?

Research findings are already informing changes within the university, including development and/or refinement of equity-focused initiatives to improve the teaching and learning environment (for example, a MAPAS tutor training program, and careers events); school action to lobby for the maintenance and creation of appropriate MAPAS student space; program self-reflection on the safety (or not) of teaching and learning contexts within clinical settings; and high-level acknowledgement of the importance of the findings. Involvement of non-Indigenous academic staff has led to greater networking (and understanding) between MAPAS and program staff who have now been exposed to the value of research framed within a Kaupapa Māori approach. Additional research, informed by Tātou Tātou methodology, is being conducted within the university (for example, in the Faculty of Arts masters project) to look at similar issues for Pacific student success.
Overall, Tātou Tātou findings support the need for tertiary institutions to provide additional Māori student support services, with a particular focus on fostering cultural bonding between students and their peers. The undergraduate program was at times unsafe and hindering to Māori student success.

Our findings highlight the important role of the educator, which can be both helpful and hindering within non-lecture contexts. Key success factors included the ability of educators to develop relational trust, demonstrate cultural safety and utilise high-quality teaching and learning methods while having an excellent grasp of the content. Our findings support the need to explore notions of a hidden curriculum that may be operating within clinical and non-clinical health professional training programs. Institutional changes need to occur within the broader context of the tertiary environment that have an influence on the educator and the student, and this research project provides a platform for these changes to occur.

How has the project developed Indigenous leadership?

The next phase of dissemination for Tātou Tātou is submission of research methods, findings and the Quality Tertiary Teaching Profile to peer-reviewed journals for publication and dissemination to a broader national and international audience to better inform the tertiary education sector. Ako Aotearoa, the funding agency for the Tātou Tātou research project, is actively engaged in dissemination of the findings via its website, which includes publication of the final report (Curtis et al. 2012) and together we are exploring other ways to translate the research findings into action (for example, through regional or national training workshops).

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References


