

## HE VAKA MOANA

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### Navigating Māori and Pasifika student success through a collaborative research fellowship

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#### Abstract

This article introduces He Vaka Moana, which has been tested and evaluated at international and local levels. He Vaka Moana is a strength-based model of academic fellowship that is framed by Oceanic principles and methodologies. The authors base this model on what connects and sustains us as Māori and Pasifika people—that is, Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa. We draw from our shared ancestral history of navigating the vast Pacific Ocean on purposefully built vessels using Indigenous methods and *ways of being* to successfully reach our destinations.

Our fellowship draws on the rich knowledge and imagery of a Tongan saying “pikipiki hama kae vave manava”, which refers to lashing canoes together to exchange people and resources when a fleet is out on the ocean battling the swells and weather. This evocative Oceanic metaphor guides how, in He Vaka Moana, champions of teaching and learning across faculties purposefully come together to work collaboratively to examine existing practice and develop innovative ways for addressing issues of strategic priority to the institution: Māori and Pasifika students’ success. In He Vaka Moana, we look specifically and politically at ways to advance the success of Māori and Pasifika students in higher education, exploring what works; how success is defined and by whom; how, as a university, we listen (or fail to listen) to Indigenous stories; and the difference Oceanic-based research makes for our teaching and learning. Our agenda is revitalising Indigenous methodologies and knowledges to transform higher educational institutions’ ways of responding to our Indigenous learners. Employing our own Indigenous methodologies has emphasised our cultural ways of being, thinking, speaking and behaving. We wish to demonstrate how our ways of being and knowledge allow us to reclaim who we are and, more importantly, to chart our collective and desired future as citizens of Oceania.

#### Keywords

He Vaka Moana, pikipiki hama kae vavevae manava, Oceanic principles,  
Indigenous values and knowledges, va, seascape epistemology.

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## Introduction

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the educational outcomes for our Māori students and Pasifika students have continued to make positive gains over recent years (Tertiary Education Commission, 2017). However, Māori and Pasifika remain “priority learning groups” across the education sectors, including tertiary institutions, which often measure success in quantifiable factors such as grade point averages and timely course completion. While strategic policy documents at national and institutional levels express an aspiration to make a difference for Māori and Pasifika learners, what is required to gain parity and bring these policy directions into action to create transforming change remains elusive.

Prioritising both groups of learners is critical given the prediction that by 2038, 30% of the Aotearoa population will be of Māori and/or Pasifika descent (Stats NZ, 2013). Despite repeated calls to increase participation, engagement and completion rates, research on Māori student and Pasifika student success remain ad hoc and often disconnected. At a national level, the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education Commission, Te Puni Kōkiri (the Ministry of Māori Development) and the Ministry of Pacific Peoples have articulated in high-level strategic documents such as the *Pasifika Operational Strategy 2017–2020* (Tertiary Education Commission, 2017) and *Tertiary Education Strategy 2020–2025* (Tertiary Education Commission, 2019) their aspirations and recommendations for what is required to raise the success of both groups. Within our institution, *The University of Auckland Strategic Plan 2013–2020* articulates the institution’s commitment to both Māori and Pasifika communities in Objectives 11 and 12 respectively (University of Auckland, 2012). However, we suggest that our education system continues to underserve both groups.

In this article we introduce He Vaka Moana, a strength-based collaborative research fellowship framed by Oceanic principles and methodologies. It is conceptualised by drawing on the Tongan metaphor “pikipiki hama kae vaevae manava”. Literally, the saying refers to how canoes on ocean voyages lash together in order to share food and resources and perhaps even to swap crew members if required. Metaphorically, He Vaka Moana within a higher education context provides a model for how we, as Māori and Pasifika, can work together to share resources and draw on what connects us in order to address the educational achievement of our students.

He Vaka Moana provides the opportunity for

academic and professional staff to come together in purposeful and deliberate ways to research teaching, and thus share practices that promote Māori students’ and Pasifika students’ success in higher education. Importantly, He Vaka Moana is inspired by Oceanic principles defined by the work of Epele Hau’ofa. In his seminal work, Hau’ofa (2008) lays down the foundation for Indigenous scholars and researchers in Oceania to reclaim Indigenous knowledge systems and viewpoints as the basis of alternative views to institutions grounded in Western paradigms. Here we seek to occupy a discourse we have come to understand as historically dominated by Western voices. He Vaka Moana as a model interrogates Western knowledge systems and engages in continuous decolonisation, seeking to enact and engage in what Swadener and Mutua (2008) describe as a constant state of being alert and attentive to how research can centre Indigenous voice. As a research model, He Vaka Moana offers an alternative way of working together to articulate our story in this Western context. Meanwhile, the research here focuses on realising Māori and Pasifika success. Our revitalising metaphor signals our collective action in order to disrupt current approaches that have not worked for us (Battiste, 2013). Further, we reiterate, embody and enact the words of Kovach (2009): “for cultural knowledge to thrive, it must live in many sites including Western education and research” (p. 12).

He Vaka Moana as a research fellowship comprises nine research fellows understood as wayfinders. In 2017, expressions of interest were received from potential fellows in each faculty with the endorsement of their dean to commit to a one-year fellowship. Each fellow received a .2 time release and some also applied for a small support grant of \$5,000 to support their project, for example, to fund hosting of events, research assistance (RA), resource development and data gathering. Both the time release and SEED funding were one-year commitments hosted at the Centre for Learning and Research in Higher Education (CLear). Alongside the support of the institution, Ako Aotearoa also provided funding for the fellows to continue their projects and to be able to evaluate their work over two years. The initial intention of the project was to work across two institutions over two years. However, because of a number of challenges, involving the second institution was not possible.

All He Vaka Moana projects centre around Māori student and Pasifika student success, with each project emerging from a specific faculty focus

or need. Each project is independent. However, they share a common aim, that is, to purposefully examine, improve and evaluate multiple interventions that develop and advance Māori and Pasifika learners' success across the institution. The two navigators (authors) who provided leadership for the fellowship are both of Indigenous descent and are academics and researchers within CLear.

At an institutional level, high workload remains an issue for all staff but more so for both Māori and Pasifika academics and professional staff, who perform multiple roles that include pastoral care for our students. Hence, they often struggle to find time to meet, discuss and share knowledge about their work. Similarly, those academics who are interested in Māori students' and Pasifika students' success do not talk to one another enough; they too often struggle to find the space and time to come together, to share knowledge and engage in meaningful conversations that promote transformational change.

While there is not one prescribed model or answer to address Māori and Pasifika success, the current landscape gives us the impetus to engage in what Archibald and colleagues (2019) refer to as a process of going in deeper into our own knowledge systems to look for our own solutions. In doing so, we are also engaging in a self-determining exercise in which we take control of our own destinations and guide our journeys, navigating with Indigenous knowledges and values.

This is timely. While we want to avoid a deficit-based approach, we are in a crisis. The current system has continually marginalised and failed our students (Airini et al., 2009; Bishop & Glynn, 2003; Curtis et al., 2012; Curtis et al., 2015; Kalavite, 2010, 2012; Samu, 2006; Wolfgramm-Foliaki & Santamaria, 2018). At many levels, research on Māori and Pasifika student success is still limited. This necessitates a quest for innovative and culturally relevant ways of working together to transform higher educational systems to be more accountable and responsive to our Māori and Pasifika learners. The growing amount of work in this area (Archibald et al., 2019; Ingersoll, 2016, Kapā'anaokālokeola et al., 2016), together with inequitable achievement of our students, tells us there is a need to develop our own research methodologies and processes. He Vaka Moana offers an alternative way of centring Indigenous knowledges and methodologies in our approach on Māori and Pasifika student success. As an Indigenous approach, it could be taken up and used in other contexts and not just in higher education.

## Citizens of Oceania

Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding. Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically, in the tiny spaces which we have resisted accepting as a sole appointed place, and from which we have recently liberated ourselves. We must not allow anyone to belittle us again, and take away our freedom. (Hau'ofa, 2008, p. 39)

We argue that it is timely for Māori and Pasifika peoples to come together in this space, to harness the strength of being citizens of Oceania, and to acknowledge that the vast Pacific Ocean that encompasses all Pacific nations, including Aotearoa and Australia. Because we are of Māori descent and of Pasifika descent, we are both citizens of Oceania. Māori is used to describe those who are tangata whenua (Drewery & Bird, 2004). The term Pasifika is used widely in Aotearoa to refer to people who are descendants from the Pacific Islands (Mafie'o & Walsh-Tapiata, 2007). We use the term Pasifika because it aligns with our collective and inclusive agenda, a view shared by Naepi (2019), who explains that her use of the term Pasifika is "not about homogeneity but about bringing our people together to better serve our own interests in a globalised world" (p. 221). We position ourselves within our shared history and culture, a space noted by Teaiwa and Mallon (2005) as "an anchoring point or productive site" (p. 225) that we can use for advancing Māori student and Pasifika student success.

In his selected works of essays, "Our Sea of Islands", Hau'ofa (2008) describes the peoples of Oceania as "kakai mei tahi" or people from the sea (p. 153) as opposed to people from the outer islands, emphasising that although Pacific nations differ, they are united by the ocean that makes home to all peoples in the region. More importantly, Oceania is vast, and is not confined to what has previously been used to describe people of the Pacific as based on small scattered islands, but rather seeing them as belonging to a much larger Oceania. The land-based view confines us to "tiny spaces" and fails to recognise the significance and relevance of our history, myths and legends, as well as our cosmic history, in which the people of the Pacific see themselves as not confined only to land, but rather as rightful inhabitants and navigators of both the land and the vast ocean (Hau'ofa, 1994,

2008). People of Oceania have for generations traversed the vast ocean with confidence using the constellation and calling on their Gods to guide their journeys. In a nutshell, the ocean was a place to explore, conquer and populate.

As both Māori and Pasifika, we (authors) are descendants of strong and successful navigators who did not hold such a narrow view of their existence. We are embarking on what Archibald et al. (2019) describes as a meaning-making journey that involves “using the heart (emotions), body (physical actions), and spirit (spirituality), while recognising the importance of how we relate and interact with family, community including the environment” (p. 4). Alfred Taiake (1999, as cited in Archibald et al., 2019) asserts that Indigenous research is about reaching the community and that one cannot understand the researcher as a single entity without their community. In this space, we endeavour to bring together our history, Indigenous knowledges and ways of being and political positioning in ways that promote self-governance, and transform how higher education responds to Indigenous learners. It is important to note that endorsing Indigenous approaches does not mean totally rejecting Western paradigms but rather drawing on existing work while at the same time upholding our own values (L. T. Smith, 1999). L. T. Smith (1999, 2012) asserts that decolonising does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research of Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centring our own concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own purposes (L. T. Smith, 2012, p. 39).

The work of Ingersoll (2016) asserts the importance of Oceanic knowledge and how it privileges an “alternative political and ethical relationship with the surrounding physical and spiritual world” (p. 5). As citizens of Oceania we draw on what Ingersoll has coined as seascape epistemology or an approach to knowledge of the sea. Together with Hau‘ofa (1994, 2008), Ingersoll (2016) points to the ocean as a space that connects rather than separates us; it is an “approach [to] life and knowing through the movements of the world. It is an approach to knowing through a visual, spiritual, intellectual, and embodied literacy of the ‘āina (land) and kai (sea)” (p. 6). As citizens of Oceania, we draw on this strength-based Oceanic knowledge and history to re-create (and de-create) how we approach Māori students’ and Pasifika students’ success in higher education.

### Conceptualising He Vaka Moana

Based on an internationally proven model (University College Dublin, n.d.), He Vaka Moana seeks to develop a sustainable fellowship of interdisciplinary academic and professional staff in teaching, learning, assessment and research in a research-intensive institution. Through using robust processes that test, evaluate and reflect on Māori and Pasifika students’ success, our fellows construct innovative pedagogical projects to advance students’ success, while the pikipiki hama kae vaevae manava methodology ensures that significant, positive and enduring changes occur institutionally.

The term He Vaka has been utilised in a number of useful ways in education. Here we conceptualise He Vaka Moana as a collaborative research fellowship by drawing on the shared success of our tūpuna who for hundreds of years navigated the vast Pacific Ocean in deliberate and purposeful ways. Successful Oceanic journeys were enabled through the development of large ocean-going vaka moana, waka moana or va‘a, drawing on deeply methodological Indigenous knowledge of the ocean, its tides, celestial navigation and weather conditions. These epic voyages could not be undertaken in isolation. While on the ocean and often far from land, vaka moana would routinely come alongside each other and lash together to share resources and provisions, learn from each other’s experiences, share stories of their journey and sometimes even swap crew members. At other times, vaka moana lashed together to ride out a storm, because one larger unified vessel is stronger and more resistant to the conditions than many smaller ones, before unlash and heading off on their journeys.

Many hundreds of years later, the descendants of these methodological and strategic navigators continue to navigate and come together in deliberate and purposeful ways—now, instead of criss-crossing the Pacific Ocean, our voyages in this context are navigations of Māori students and Pasifika students in the tertiary sector seeking ways to purposefully journey towards success. Here seascape (Ingersoll, 2016) holds a powerful imagery of a place of adaptation, of change and challenge, allowing for a flow of ideas and innovation. For our purpose, it encapsulates what the ocean holds; that is, it can be powerful yet has the ability to be fluid and be a space to bring people together (Ingersoll, 2016).



### Pikipiki hama kae vaevae manava

Conceptually, we draw on the rich knowledge and imagery contained in the Tongan saying “pikipiki hama kae vaevae manava”. Pikipiki hama means to stick, bind or link strongly to the outrigger of a vaka moana. Vaevae means to give or share and manava—similar to the word manawa in Māori—is a deeply complex, core term in Pasifika expression meaning the heart, centre, womb or breath (Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi, 2003). It is important to note that in the Tongan language the word manava differs from the word mānava. Mānava is breathe while manava can mean two things. First, it refers to the heart, centre or womb of a woman—the source of nutrition and life for an unborn baby. The second means food prepared and carried for travellers during ocean excursions. This meaning is used in relation to pikipiki hama kae vaevae manava. The two meanings slide into each other, as Tamasese Taifi Efi (2003) has articulated above, providing a very positive image of life-giving sustenance. Pikipiki hama is used to capture the ancient practice of lashing together of vaka moana as they traversed the Pacific Ocean to sustain and support each other. Important to note here is that “coming together” resists further homogenising the already problematic simplified notions of Māori and Pasifika identities in the tertiary sector. Instead, we understand each of the research projects, researchers, their topics and how they have worked with students as self-determined but interrelated sets of ideas. As an Indigenous framework. As an Indigenous framework, it is informed by a relational ontology that centres relationship building and connections.

Lashing is a traditional ancient practice of the Pacific used and seen in their architecture to bind beams and also hold their navigational canoes together (Teaiwa, 2010). The lashings are made from kafa (Fotu & Tafa, 2009). Filipe Tohi, a renowned Tongan artist and sculptor, articulates lalava as a form of lashing used to bind and connect, and more recently has developed three-dimensional sculptures in which he demonstrates the traditional practice of binding also with aesthetic properties (Hamilton, 2014). Here we recall the words of a young Tongan teacher who attended our He Vaka Moana presentation at the Vaka Pasifiki Education Conference at the University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji, in July 2018. He drew attention to the lashing of the vaka together as key to maintaining connections and sustaining relationships with one another. In the popao model developed by Fotu and Tafa (2009), the lashings are perceived as

communication between all relevant parties. If the lashing is weak, the entire structure is likely to be weak also. As articulated earlier, we are embarking on a process of looking inwards for strength from our own cultural values and ways of being. In doing so, we conceptualise and envision how each vaka lash together by drawing on what political scholar and poet Haunani-Kay Trask (2002, as cited in Good-year- Ka’ōpua, 2016) coined as the “rope of resistance”. Goodyear-Ka’ōpua (2016) argues that the rope of resistance makes up what she asserts are methodological ropes that are critical for research and resurgence. She draws on four central principles from her Hawaiian culture, namely, lahui, ea, kuleana and pono, as the threads woven together to make a rope that will hold (Goodyear-Ka’ōpua, 2016, p. 2). Further, these four principles are single cords woven together to make a strong rope that holds things together and provides a way for connecting people. Goodyear-Ka’ōpua (2016) maintains that the concept of the intellectual rope is the work of early generations, who weaved and stored them for later generations to use. In the context of He Vaka Moana, the two navigators guide and provide the knowledge for when and how the lashing is carried out.

When Filipe Tohi talks of lalava or lashing, it is about how it can bind and hold materials together. More recently, he has argued that the patterns made on his artistic work of lalava also hold metaphorical and physical ties to cultural knowledge. To return to our young Tongan teacher’s comment, the four principles underpin how each vaka or fellow lash to one another. A shared understanding of the aim and purpose of their journey enables the fellows to navigate their way in the vast space of academia. More importantly, the four principles provide both the rope and the knowledge of when and how to lash together. This is the sustainable aspect of the pikipiki hama kae vaevae manava. The fellows come together in purposeful ways guided by the two navigators, thereby ensuring that the act of binding is meaningful.

Coming together this year has entailed monthly hui hosted at CLear with guest speakers, regular professional development events, workshops, talanoa groups and writing retreats. As well as the fellows enacting pikipiki hama with one another, the fellows also pikipiki hama with colleagues in their faculty and across the wider university community, thereby growing the fleet.

In our use of this seafaring metaphor, we also acknowledge a similar metaphor: pikipiki katea kae vaevae melenga. Both metaphors are often referred

to interchangeably. The difference between them lies in where and when the ocean canoes join with one another to share rations and resources. While *pikipiki hama kae vaevae manava* refers to the joining of the outriggers in order to provide balance and to enable the voyagers to share, *pikipiki katea kae vaevae melenga* is when the canoes join at the hull (Fotu & Tafa, 2009). Both metaphors speak to seafarers' awareness and knowledge of the sea conditions as well as of the relationship between voyagers of each canoe. Hence, if the sea is rough, then lashing at the hull will be very dangerous. Both metaphors imply good practice and appropriate ways of sharing with one another. We posit this paper within the first metaphor because it points to a way of coming together intentionally to share what is most precious to us. *Manava* or *manawa* points to the human inner core; as Tama Ataua Tupua Tamasese Efi (2003) asserts, it is "the heart, centre, womb or breath" where the sharing originates from.

#### **Pikipiki hama: Working together**

He Vaka Moana is grounded in good and meaningful relations. In reflecting on both Māori and Pasifika peoples' relationality, He Vaka Moana creates a space for the fellows to come together and engage with one another. Indigenous peoples articulate a relational ontology that is grounded in their relationship with one another and with their environment, including the land, the cosmos and their thoughts and ideas. Relationality is core to the Pasifika word *va*.

*Va*, as we understand it, is our connection with one another as citizens of Oceania and all "things" (both living and non-living) in our environment (Anae, 2010; Ka'ili, 2005; Thaman, 2008). The word *va* exists in many Oceania/Moana languages, including Aotearoa, where it is referred to as *wā* (Ka'ili, 2005). The notion of *va* or relational space refers to a space between two or more points, people or things. Here we argue that the *va* is active rather than in the Western notion of space, where it is empty or null. From a Tongan perspective, Ka'ili (2005) draws attention to *va* as the space in between. When one understands and acknowledges *va*, it brings a sense of obligation alongside with the need to take care, tend and maintain existing relationships (Ka'ili, 2005; Mila-Schaaf, 2006; Thaman, 2008). Similarly, Wendt (1999, as cited in Reynolds, 2016) articulates the importance of *va* from a Samoan perspective, where the emphasis is on maintaining and nurturing the relationship. Mila-Schaaf and Hudson (2009) link a well-balanced *va* to "wellbeing and good

outcome". Along the same vein, Anae (2010) points out the significance of *va* not only in our sociocultural contexts but in the way it is also relevant and central to Pacific research relationships and educational contexts. She expands on the Samoan practice of *teu le va* or taking good care of the relationship at all times. The value of *teu le va* lies in its "prescribed ethical behaviour" that underpins it. "By its very nature *teu le va* has multi-relational, situational and spiritual inferences" (Anae, 2010, p. 13). Any actions to take care of the *va* are underpinned by cultural values, obligations and responsibilities to sustain good and long-lasting relations (Anae, 2010; Ka'ili, 2005; Reynolds, 2016; Thaman, 2008). A significant contribution of Anae's work in this space is her argument for the need for Pasifika researchers to *teu le va* first with Māori as *tangata whenua* and with relevant parties, including the institution, funding agencies and our communities.

In this research space, there is a need to constantly tend to the *va* in order to maintain good relations and, more importantly, work with one another to counter a colonial relationship that has continually minimised the importance of Indigenous knowledge and values in comparison with Western knowledge systems and paradigms (Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009). Reynolds (2016) argues that *va* has a place in both the classroom and the New Zealand educational system.

He Vaka Moana as a fellowship model creates a space that Mila-Schaaf and Hudson (2009) define as negotiated space. In a context where Pasifika people come together with fellow colleagues and staff who are of diverse ethnic and cultural identities, a negotiated space enables research activities across cultures. Sanga (2005) points to the need for a better understanding of relationships between Pasifika and non-Pacific, a combination he sees as a new kind of "scrutinisers" (p. 16). Although his call aims at encouraging overseas aid in the region, it is relevant to our current context. Sanga (2005) argues that what he calls "new scrutineers" (p. 16) will consist of Pasifika peoples who are committed to forming good relationships with others, including non-Pacific Islanders. "These two categories of people will form the new scrutineers. As a group they understand both worlds; the metropolitan and the Pacific; the city and the village. They appreciate the tensions and dilemmas of both worlds. As leaders, they see the need for change and aspire to develop a vision for change" (Sanga, 2005, p. 16). He Vaka Moana brings together Pasifika and non-Pacific peoples who are Oceanic and who share a focus on teaching and learning. Oceania is vast,

and in Hau'ofa's (2008) vision it is big enough to bring all peoples together, to work towards a common goal. He Vaka Moana is an open space that allows a group of researchers to work alongside one another despite their cultural differences.

According to Johansson-Fua (2016), a cultural hybridity space emerges in a context where researchers come together to engage in knowledge re-creation and production. Bhabha (1994, as cited in Johansson-Fua, 2016) refers to this as the "third space", where negotiation can take place to explore new considerations and meanings. Further, in the third space it is possible for different positions to emerge, and even possible to disrupt historical establishments, while at the same time, work in the third space can also "settle" the "unsettled" (Johansson-Fua, 2016, p. 36). While Bhabha's third space provides a vision for co-existing with others, it can also evoke a place of tension because of the multitude of cross-cultural interactions that take place within it. Sharma-Brymer (2007, as cited in Johansson-Fua, 2016) concedes the third space as a place of tension and at the same time an actionable space where researchers can consider the value and effectiveness of their work.

Importantly, the work of the He Vaka Moana fellowship aims to benefit the wider community of Māori and Pasifika whānau and communities (Taufe'ulungaki, 2001) by improving the tertiary success rate for their students. Johansson-Fua (2016) in support points out that an Oceanic researcher "works to change mind-sets and expand the power and control for the benefit of the Pacific communities" (p. 37). Similarly, Māori scholars (Pihama, 2001; G. H. Smith, 1997; L. T. Smith, 1999) have argued for Kaupapa Māori theory and research that places at its centre Māori language, ways of being and community aspirations for positive transforming change. Such an approach requires a conscious and active lashing together of theory and practice—what Graham Smith coined as Kaupapa Māori praxis. Therefore, a transforming praxis is not "complete" once change is realised; instead, the states of conscientisation, resistance and transforming action need to be continually re-engaged.

When canoes come together to lash up for mutual support on Oceanic voyages, they are guided by navigators, whose role is to provide the knowledge and processes for lashing of their vaka. As navigators/leaders of the fellowship, we feel privileged to undertake this traditional role.

### He Vaka Moana: Strengths and challenges

In academia we do not talk enough to one another nor are there sufficient safe spaces for purposeful conversations to take place. Similarly, we do not share enough of our successes and challenges in ways that advance success for our students. He Vaka Moana as a research fellowship centres Māori students and Pasifika student success and advances how we can employ our own ways of inquiry to further develop our research processes in a context that is grounded in Western paradigms. This project sees research fellows each navigating their vaka moana projects in purposeful and deliberate ways within the institution, regularly coming together to pikipiki hama—to share ideas and resources and gain knowledge from the navigators and other wayfinders. More importantly, it centres the responsibility on educators, thereby shifting the focus away from the deficit view that has been dominant in how we think about and work with our Māori and Pasifika students.

Statistics about school decile, rank score, secondary school to tertiary transition and preparedness, and low completion rates are regularly forwarded as determinants of success. While this statistical information is part of the story, we argue that it emerges from a deficit position that has not, and continues to not, serve Māori and Pasifika aspirations for success in the tertiary sector.

We acknowledge that there is no one prescribed model or answer to address Māori and Pasifika success. Based on our experience of He Vaka Moana, we offer some of the key enablers for a model as we look towards the horizon for strength-based ways to work collaboratively, both intra-institutionally and inter-institutionally, for better access, outcomes and opportunities for Māori students and Pasifika students.

Our model is also based on an internationally proven model from the University College Dublin, where they identified and developed key academic staff "with both the pedagogic expertise and the leadership capacity to effect transformational change in teaching, learning and assessment practices both in discipline-specific areas and thematically, across the institution" (UCD Teaching & Learning, 2020, para. 2). Fellows focus on "areas of strategic importance to the university . . . informed by a scholarly approach to the enhancement of teaching and learning and . . . curricular structures" (UCD Teaching & Learning, 2020, para. 3).

He Vaka Moana develops a sustainable tuakana-teina network of interdisciplinary fellows

who are academic and professional leaders in teaching, learning, assessment and research across the institution. Through using robust processes that test, evaluate and reflect on Māori and Pasifika students' success, our fellows construct innovative pedagogical projects to advance students' success, while ensuring significant, positive and enduring changes occur institutionally.

He Vaka Moana also encompasses what Alkema (2014) documents as the three pillars for Pasifika learners' success: people, place, and practices and pedagogies. Our model weaves these three key elements: by drawing on what we conceive as an Oceanic metaphor and methodology, we bring together a group of academics and professional staff (people) to work purposefully across faculties in a higher education institution (place) using culturally sustainable methodologies to (a) examine current practices, and (b) develop pedagogies that will help Māori and Pasifika students succeed (practices and pedagogies).

Similarly, the work of Sciascia (2017) provides an example of an inter-institutional project for improving participation, retention and progression of Māori tertiary learners in the Whanganui Region; two private training establishments (PTEs) collaborated on a common kaupapa and set of relationships that brought together distinct but complementary strengths to develop collaborative and complementary programming (p. 25). Importantly, the outcomes of this collaboration were not limited to the two PTEs but involved a local iwi authority and wider community groups with similar goals to improve Māori student retention and successful outcomes.

Sciascia's (2017) work highlights key considerations that have informed the planning and design of He Vaka Moana, especially the important role that Māori pedagogies, alongside people and practices, play in contributing to Māori learner success. Of relevance is the role that tuakana-teina approaches and culturally embedded methods or methodologies play in improving Māori student outcomes. Here we reiterate our agenda and role in decolonising research: we aim to legitimise our own values and Indigenous ways of being in a space that has continually rendered our voices and perspectives silent.

He Vaka Moana as an initiative proactively and positively engages with several national and institutional strategic priorities. Those involved care deeply that Māori and Pasifika students feel welcomed, feel empowered, feel a sense of belonging, feel pride, and experience success in their studies and, more widely, in their lives.

It is useful and important to note here the number of challenges that He Vaka Moana experienced. The .2 time release for each fellow is vital to sustain the momentum of the fellowship. However, it can also be a point of tension for the fellows as they try to carve out their time for the fellowship. In our experiences, if left unchecked the .2 time release can easily be absorbed and become an added responsibility in an already overloaded full-time workload. The low and overworked number of Māori and Pasifika staff within the institution makes it difficult for the fellows to prioritise their fellowship work. Hence, their .2 time release is often shelved in favour of other work demands. The support and understanding of managers, deans and the senior leadership team is critical to the progress and further development of He Vaka Moana. While we held on to our aspiration that He Vaka Moana would be taken up, we failed to obtain traction at the key decision-making tables.

## Conclusion

In this paper we demonstrate how we as Indigenous academics and researchers can draw on the strength of our shared ancestral history for our benefit. We are decolonising research while at the same time seeking to advance the success of Māori students and Pasifika students in higher education. The He Vaka Moana fellowship creates a space for champions in teaching and learning to purposefully come together to pikipiki hama and engage in deliberate conversations to exchange knowledge and share stories. We recognise the critical role of Indigenous knowledge and values in our post-colonial context. As Māori and Pasifika peoples, we must look to our own systems of knowledge to develop methodologies to investigate our own problems and make visible the way we see our world.

## Glossary

<i>Māori</i>	
Aotearoa	New Zealand
hui	meetings
iwi	tribal kin group
Kaupapa Māori	Māori approach, methodology
manawa	heart (of a person)
Māori	Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand
tangata whenua	people of the land; people Indigenous to Aotearoa
Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa	the Pacific Ocean



tuakana	elder sibling, more experienced relation
teina	younger sibling, less experienced relation
tūpuna	ancestors
wā	area, region, definite space
waka moana	seafaring vessels
whānau	family; nuclear, extended family
<i>Hawaiian</i>	
ea	sovereignty and leadership
kuleana	positionality and obligations
lahui	collective identity and self-definition
pono	harmonious relationships
<i>Samoan</i>	
teu le va	maintaining/tidying up the relational space
<i>Tongan</i>	
kafa	plaited coconut fibre cord
lalava	traditional form of cord lashing
pikipiki hama kae vaevae manava	to bind or lash together at the hull of vaka moana and share resources
pikipiki katea kae vaevae melenga	to bind or lash together the outriggers of vaka moana at the hull
popao	outrigger canoe
talanoa	conversation, sharing stories, creating dialogues
<i>Pan-Pacific</i>	
Pasifika	Peoples of the Pacific Ocean
va	relational space between
va'a	boat
vaka moana	seafaring vessels

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