

# EMBEDDING PACIFIC CULTURE INTO CURRICULUM

## Design for Learning: Enhancing Pacific student success in a first-year course in the Bachelor of Social Work programme.

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### Background

There are numerous benefits in attaining a university degree, not only for the graduate but also their families and wider society. Such benefits include earning a higher income, enhanced skills, increased networks and access to further career opportunities. For families and wider Aotearoa New Zealand, graduates make an important contribution to civic, cultural, local community, and economic life (Universities New Zealand, 2017).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, ensuring Māori and Pacific learner success is critical, featuring in central government priorities (Ministry of Education, 2018; 2020). By 2038, approximately 30% of the population will be of Māori and/or Pasifika descent (Stats NZ, 2013). These communities are a strategic priority group for the University of Auckland. In 'Taumata Teitei - Vision 2030 and Strategic Plan 2025', the University has pledged its commitment to improving the retention and progression for Māori students and Pacific students.

Any worthwhile attempt to support Māori and Pacific learner success **must** address both structural and procedural factors within the learning environment. For diverse Pacific learners, seeing their identities, languages and cultures in the classroom contributes to academic success (Ministry of Education, 2019). In addition to exploring individual student success factors (Koloto, et al., 2006), there also must be a review of educator and institutional structures and processes (Chu, et al., 2013). As leaders in higher education, how are we ensuring our courses and programmes are linguistically and culturally responsive to our diverse student body?

This project aims to increase the achievement outcomes of Pacific students enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programme. Over the last ten years the BSW has attracted a relatively large proportion of Pacific students. In 2020, 60% of first year BSW students were of Pacific descent. This 2020 Fellowship enabled a multi-disciplinary team of Pacific educators to undertake a full course redesign of a first year social work compulsory course.

### Approach

Pacific student learner success is dependent on a range of factors, including the learners personal characteristics, external factors - i.e. family and friends, and institutional factors – academic / University (Reremoana et al., 2018). Although this 2020 Fellowship focuses on the full redesign of a compulsory first-year social work course, institutional factors, policy and political environments, research and teaching pedagogies play an equally important, yet often unexamined influence on student learner success.

### Practice

#### Educators - Course Design team

A multi-disciplinary course design team consisting of 3 Pacific educators was formed. These educators, of Samoan, Tongan, Māori and NZ European descent, provided unique yet complementary professional skillsets that spanned social work, secondary teaching and digital technologies.

#### 1st year Course Redesign

The team undertook an intensive course redesign modelled on Skilbeck's Situational Design Curriculum Model (2011). This model locates curriculum design and development firmly within a cultural framework, where the context of the learner is critical.

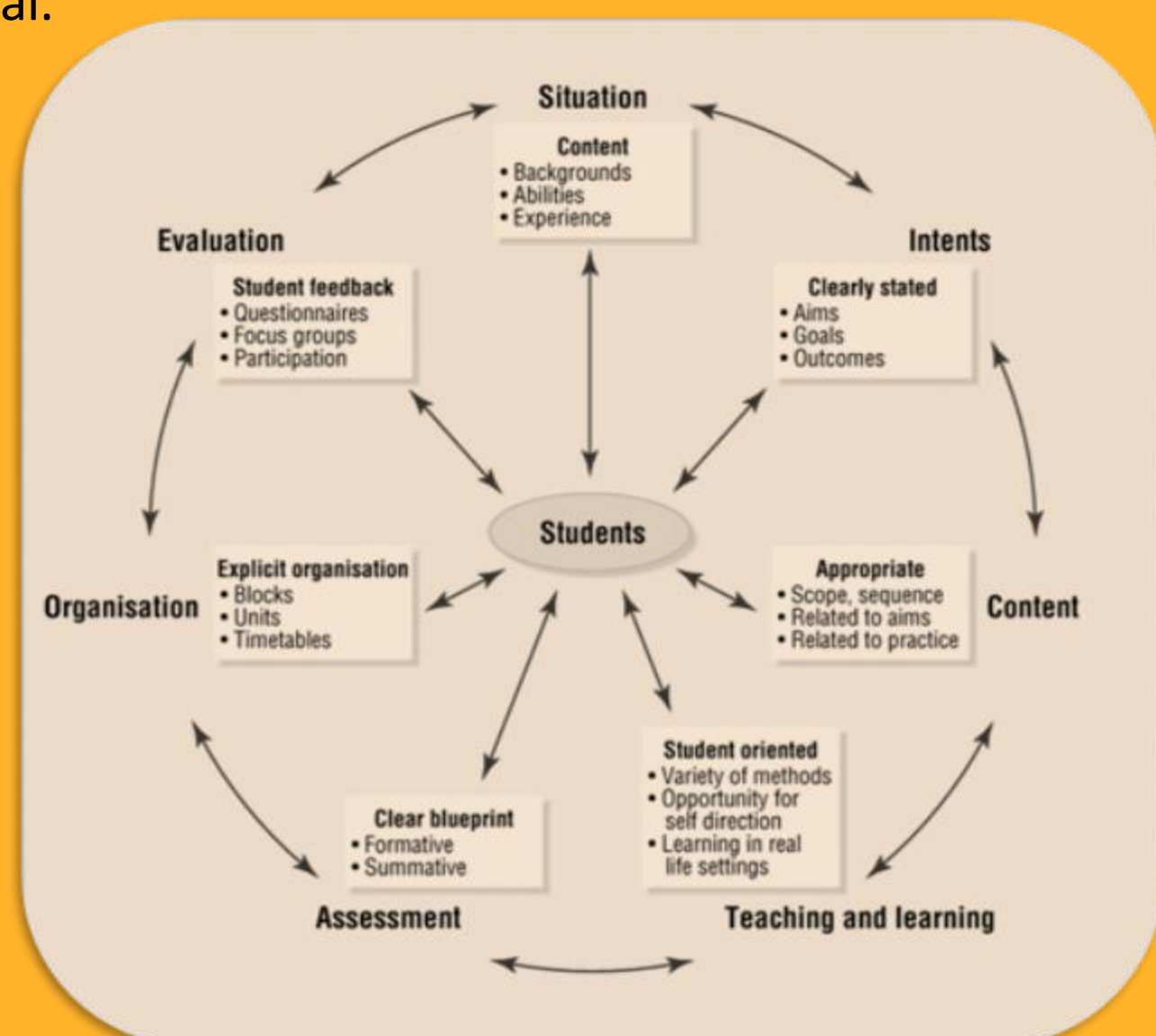


Figure 2: Skilbeck's 'Situational Design Curriculum Model' (Prideaux, 2003, p.267)

In the Situational Design Curriculum Model, the 7 design steps can be undertaken in any order. The design team committed to the ongoing cultural process of *talanoa* (Vaiotei, 2006), with regular reviews of the learning situation. In refining the overall intent, the course learning outcomes were refreshed to account for the attainment of social work knowledge and skills, whilst simultaneously privileging cultural (Māori) and local perspectives (Pacific). Core academic literacies were embedded and assessed through the course.

### Implications

Although the world is still in the midst of a Covid pandemic that continues to cause major disruption, implementing this first year course redesign proved invaluable. The shift to online learning and the resulting decrease in Pacific learner engagement signals the need for further research, in particular, how educators and institutions can establish and maintain meaningful connections with diverse learner communities.

Providing quality teaching and learning for Māori and Pacific learners requires a review of educator practices, and institutional structures and processes. Replicating this course redesign with a new first year cohort would provide educators with valuable insights, specifically the impact that an in-person learning and teaching approach has on Pacific learner success.

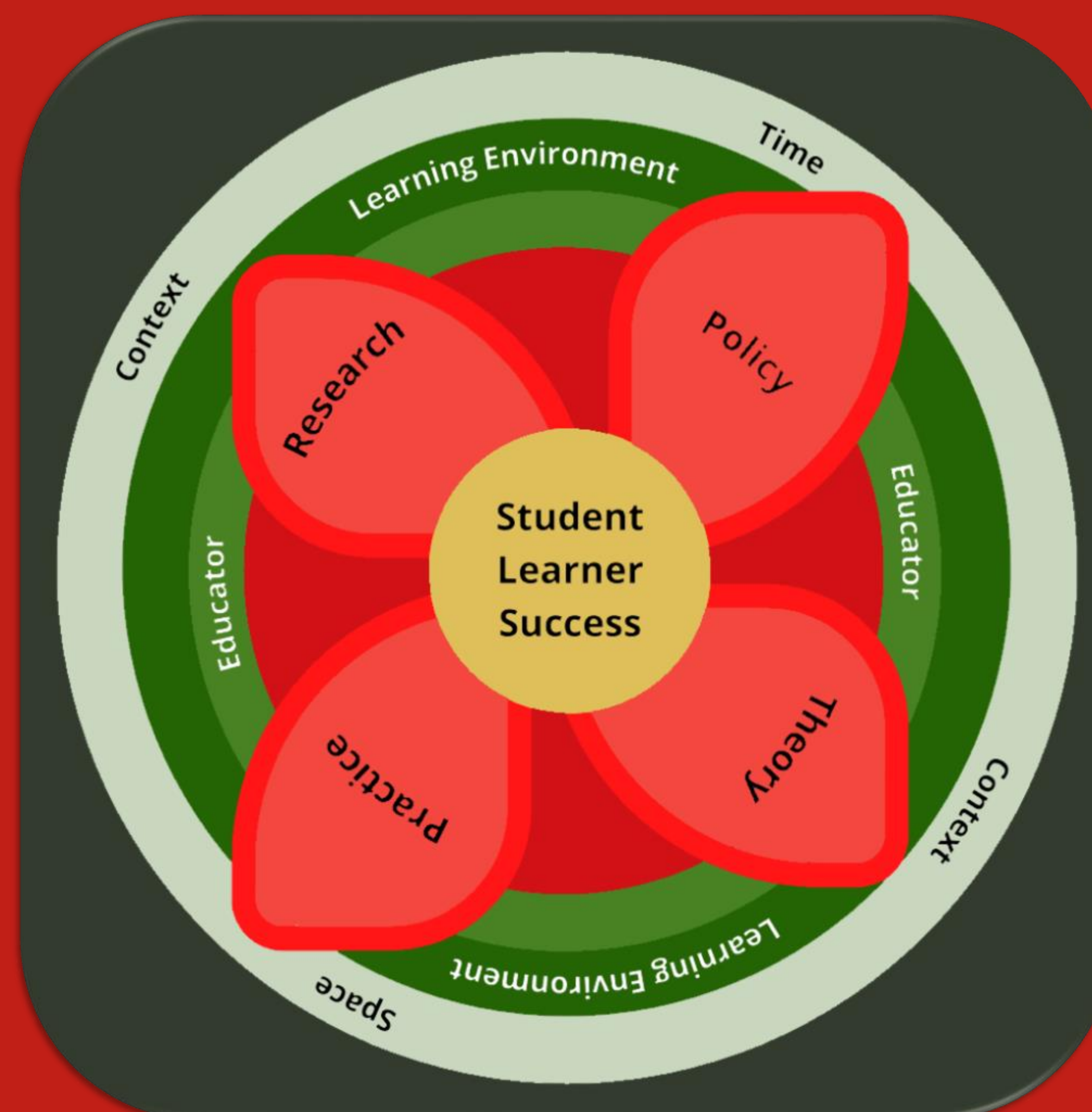


Figure 1: Educational Systems Approach for supporting Pacific Student Learner Success

#### Content & Organisation

A key goal was ensuring students became confident in articulating key principles and values within 3 core Social Work frameworks: the Core Competency Standards (SWRB, 2015), the Code of Ethics (ANZASW, 2019), and the Kaitiakitanga Framework (TWVSW, 2016). The course structure mirrored the 10 competencies, whereby each weekly lecture focused on a specific social work competency.

#### Teaching and Learning

Cultural upbringing and experiences are influential in shaping epistemologies of learning (Raturi & Boulton-Lewis, 2014). Our teaching practice draw on our Pacific cultural principles, such as *va fealoaloai* (relationships) and *tāua o le pululimatagau fa'atasi* (meaningful engagement). These approaches align with *Tapasā*, the cultural competency framework for teachers of Pacific learners (MoE, 2018). Didactic teaching methods complemented the academic literacy exercises and activities. The assumption was that lectures, assessment instruction and support would be provided in person.

#### Assessment

Four formative assessments were designed that assessed social work knowledge and the attainment of academic literacies within a social work practice context. The weighting for the final summative assessment (exam) was reduced to acknowledge the scaffolding nature of the assessments.

### Impact - When the unexpected occurs

During week 4 of a 12 week teaching semester, Aotearoa New Zealand entered an unprecedented national lock-down in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The University of Auckland shifted its learning, teaching and assessment to an online format for the duration of the semester. This was a foreign experience for first year students and the teaching team – resulting in rapid and intense efforts by the teaching team to further repackage course teaching material and assessments in ways that were easily accessible and refined.

#### Online delivery – Equity and Inclusion

The shift to an online mode of teaching delivery drew increased attention to the digital divide. While the pandemic affected all learners, the impacts have been uneven, resulting in increased inequities in the education system for groups of learners, including Māori and Pacific (ERO, 2020). In an online mode of learning students must possess digital competencies and technologies. In this first year course, we observed fewer numbers of Pacific students engaging with Zoom teaching sessions and the Canvas platform, when compared with attendance in class in the first four weeks.

As a teaching team, our energies were spent providing pastoral support and guidance to students presenting with heightened emotional, physical and psychological issues. The inability to connect face to face with students, particularly with Pacific students who were reluctant to connect through online platforms, had a detrimental impact on learner success.

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