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ATTRACTING, ENGAGING & RETAINING **MĀORI & PASIFIKA** IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

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RESEARCH PROJECT: Craig Rutledge

Presentation Synopsis

Engagement, Success and Retention of Maori and Pacifica Students

Background:

What we do.

One of the main Carpentry programs we run at Unitec is the Certificate in Applied Technology – Carpentry. This is a full time Pre-trade program, 32 weeks long, for those wishing to enter the construction industry and become qualified carpenters/builders. During the 32 weeks the students build a 3 bedroom dwelling from start to finish. The theory and practical are interlinked and follow the sequence of the house build to reinforce the theory and use their new learnt knowledge practically.

We take in approx. 200 students during a year into this program, 80% of which are under 20 years of age and in the past two years 50% of those are of Maori and Pacifica heritage.

From the Certificate course the student then has to enter an apprenticeship in industry to complete to become qualified over the next 3 years while completing the theory component one day per week at Unitec. There is a team that run the apprenticeship scheme and do help the student to obtain employment in as we run the Itabs Apprenticeship scheme in Auckland through Certified Builders.

This is an interesting dynamic to work with as most new applicants have little or no knowledge of building, mostly they are straight from school and have attained to NCEA level 1, some to level 2 with minimal credits. They also bring all the issues associated with transitioning into adult hood, family dynamics, some with English as a second language, and the peer pressures associated within their social lives.

There has been a shift over the past 5 years of the ethnicity of those applying for the course and also the continual generation shifts that occur that have to be catered for in the design of a program. The number of Pacifica students has increased significantly especially over the past two years and Maori has as well but to a lesser degree.

This has led to me, as the Curriculum Leader for the program, having to look at how we teach, the mode and the best ways to help these students engage to successfully complete the program. There is also their life, personal and technical skills to be catered for, so the students can be confident when gaining employment.

Unfortunately there does not seem to be one strategy to accomplish these outcomes so there is a certain amount of trial and error to get the approach right so as to maintain and increase the success of the students as a whole.

I have put strategies into place for the team to be able to try different ways to enhance the students learning and then as a team debrief what does work, what didn't and why. We then can look at what changes can be made or discard as the case may be.

A lot of what we do as 'Providers of Knowledge' comes down to being able to adapt different forms of delivery to cater for the diversity of today's students.

One form of delivery does not fit all and in my opinion this is the hardest part of forming a curriculum to satisfy all the student's needs, compliance issues and outside influences for the student to complete a qualification.

MAORI & PACIFICA STUDENTS ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION

MAORI ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION

SHORT TERM THINKING – Not looking forward far enough to see the benefits Education can provide.

IDENTITY - Financial needs have sent individuals City bound

- This has caused several issues: Breakdown down of Whanau (family)
 - Less involvement in the Maori Culture
 - Loss of Identity - Te Reo - Te Ao Maori
 - Easier access to drugs and alcohol
 - Government policies – Benefits

CULTURE - From a Tribal Culture with its own values to a society with a multitude of cultures and values a young Maori student struggles to find their place in this new environment.

In a rural environment the Whanau has strong ties and is supportive in continuing the cultural values of Te Reo, Te Ao Maori (Maori World), the history (Treaty), status and Mana (pride).

In the City environment all these values tend to become weaker and can lead to a loss of identity and this in turn creates a void and lack of direction in their lives.

WHANAU - With the younger Maori often having to move from their home environment to be able to study, the loss of the extended family environment can often lead to a feeling of loss of identity. Even for those born in a city, the Whanau is smaller, often single parent and is not as culturally active.

PACIFICA ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION:

The direction for the younger generation to become educated comes from the Fanau (family) and more from those that have been educated to a higher level themselves.

CULTURE - Revolves around heritage, family and for most their involvement and commitment to their religious beliefs have a strong influence to maintain their cultural beliefs. The Pacific People tend to be able to hold on to their culture and identity to a greater degree in an urban environment.

FANAU - This is a very strong part of the Pacific people, family and heritage come first in the list of priorities above everything else. Religion also has a strong influence on the life of these learners.

IDENTITY - This is closely associated with the fanau and Culture. There is a close tie with their Island Heritage and with extended fanau still living in the islands.

Today's students are not sent down career paths from earlier education, they are not sure on what they want to achieve or a clear idea of a future career. They do not leave secondary

school with the knowledge they need to have an easy transition into tertiary education. [as mentioned by several other presenters] and as tertiary education providers we are left to fill the void.

What has worked for our Carpentry students at Unitec?

What have we done in the Carpentry Program at Unitec to help these groups engage in Education?

Maori & Pacifica Carpentry Scholarships –

These scholarships have been in place for Maori/Pacifica for 9 years. Originally the students selected for this were put into one class and taught separately from the mainstream groups doing the same course.

Success and retention of this group was paramount as the fees associated with the course were paid by the scholarship with no monetary responsibility behind the student to complete.

The class S & R with this process in place was between 50 and 60%.

This model worked in the early stages of the Scholarship and was very successful, but there was a generation shift in the later stages, from a student wanting to engage to one whom less likely to engage which lead to the model not working as it had been.

To try and lift the S & R we decided to do two things:

1. Do away with the individual Scholarship class and integrate the students in the regular mainstream classes.

Even though research studies tell us this should work, we felt with the dynamics of these two groups, having them singled out as 'special,' the scholarship students felt they were not part of the regular program, did not have the same responsibilities and were not succeeding as well as others because of this.

This strategy worked to a degree but not to the extent we thought possible as the retention was still a problem. The ones that we retained on the course did improve in their results.

Within this there was support in place from our Maia and Pacifica Centres for these students on a regular basis to help them with any issues.

2. Require the students to obtain a 'student loan' then on successful completion of the program, the scholarship is awarded, and the course cost paid back to studylink.

This did have a desirable effect on the success and retention with the successful completion rate increasing by 30%

With these strategies in place last year we were able to go one step further and use any scholarships from students who had left the program to advantage Maori or Pacifica students who may have been losing focus on completing to give them a goal to aim for.

"Complete successfully and you will receive a scholarship"

This worked for all 4 students offered this opportunity; they then had a goal to aim for that was achievable.

A closer working relationship with Maia and Pacifica within the department has proved beneficial for the tutors, students (not only scholarship) and the leadership team so there is a consistent theme around getting the students ready for employment, gaining the technical knowledge required and helping them with the any issues they incur in life's journey.

The most critical pivot point here is the Tutor, with their ability to gain the students trust, the passion to drive the students to succeed and to maintain the students involvement of the support groups in place. From more of a Pacifica perspective we have found that the more involved the families are with what the student is doing and achieving, the better the result, especially the under 20 age group.

Having an evening to meet with the tutors, students and families on campus strengthens the ties and motivates the students to succeed at a higher percentage. This type of thing needs to be done 3 – 4 times a year to keep the momentum.

From a Maori perspective we have found that the Unitec Maia hub to be a success. This is a place where Maori students have a space to go and study with computers, tea and coffee, microwave etc available and also by appointment; mentoring, pastoral support, financial and industry advice. All this support is undertaken by Maori Academic staff solely engaging in this area. There are also a modern Marae on site and Puukenga.

The reason for the success of this Maia Model is the dual structure in place, the 'Drop in centre' side and the more formal 'Support fundamentals' that are relevant to the individual student's needs.

Student Interviews:

In 2009 I put student interviews into place for all the applicants who met the entry criteria. There were numerous students applying for the course but when the start day arrived a large percentage either did not show up or were not prepared for what they were entering into.

As there was no personal contact to give a face to the initial engagement, which I felt was important, to give the new students a point of contact that they had dealt with before starting the program, we also had firm student numbers to work with.

For the Pacifica students this proved to be very successful as most of these students brought a family member with them which gave us that initial tie to the fanau.

It also informed the students on the pathway they were about to enter into and gave them a clear understanding of expectations. We could also suggest alternate pathways within Unitec if this one did not meet their expectations before they committed.

Engagement, Success and retention overall has increased because of this process and has contributed significantly to the increase of S & R of Maori/Pacific.

Curriculum Management:

As mentioned earlier, there have been significant shifts in the makeup of the students entering the Program. With the increase of Pacific students, and as they are more of a Kinesthetic and a Visual learner, (this does apply to most ethnic groups in this age group and the type of person that looks to a hands on profession) adaptations had to be made to the course delivery for theory.

The first 4 weeks of the course is now concentrating on life skills, numeracy and literacy along with initial practical skills required to transition the new learner into the Tertiary environment.

We have transitioned from a totally question based assignment to more of a knowledge based assessment basis in the form of a portfolio of evidence collected by the student to prove their

knowledge. We encourage them to work in groups with all ethnicities and this comes more evident in the practical component of the course, as building is a team effort.

The integrity of the knowledge required has been retained in the program as it is externally moderated and cross credits back into unit standards for the qualification.

The team are teaching students where to find information, how to understand it, put it into practice and keep up to date with that information in the future.

This has improved the success and retention of all the students (12-15% increase), but with the Maori and Pacifica students their success increased by 23% with the new format.

This is mainly due to a majority of these students not responding well to answering questions especially in a 'test' type environment. Also lengthy submission dates were done away with and the course streamlined to accommodate 1 – 2 week time spans for submission of work. All course work is done electronically through Google plus, the students are electronically savvy and we have found this is easier to monitor how the students are performing, there is instant feedback to the students on their work and the work is marked as you do this feedback. Also this regular feedback and monitoring of the students' progress has identified 'at risk' students early and helped lift the success rate by 12%.

Also there are no piles of assessments to go through and be marked by the tutor after final submission date.

Looking to the future: to encourage higher learning and completion of Degrees etc. I feel that more of a 'Stepping Stone' approach is required instead of long pathways to accomplish that end.

I have found that with our Maori and Pacific Certificate students- once they have completed the first year of study – placing them in employment for 6 to 12 months and then bringing them back to continue their studies after that period achieves a higher success rate going forward, than them continuing straight into higher levels of study. It strengthens their resolve; they gain real world knowledge, maturity and increase their skill levels to be able to complete at a higher level of study.

In the Diploma there is a specific exit point for the student in an apprenticeship to finish their practical component and then they can return when they are ready to continue their studies in the Diploma or Bachelors

I also feel that the relationship between the theory and the practical aspect of any pathway of study has to intertwine so there is relativity between them. Work integrated learning is critical to these learners [as stated earlier] these groups are Kinesthetic learners.

A continual process of curriculum development is required as every intake brings a different set of students. What worked last year may not work as well for the next.

What we have found that does Not Work.

Large Assessments

Assignments that have a lot of questions requiring several paragraphs of writing to give the answer. This tends to daunt most students, especially the Maori/Pacifica; they put it in the too hard basket, submit minimal content or nothing at all and fail because of this.

Also completion dates of more than 4 weeks do not work, they think at the start there is plenty of time, all of a sudden the time is gone, no work completed and the same result, a fail.

Praise

A Pacific student does not like to be singled out and be praised for what they are doing in front of their peers. We have had several instances of Pacifica students excelling at what they are doing, being praised in front of others for this, and then going backwards because they want to stay in the crowd. If this is handled on an individual basis the problem is far less evident.

Change

Relates to changing Tutors during a Course; this can affect all students, but in particular Pacifica students as they seem to do better with stability more than any other ethnic group, it takes more time to form a bond and trust with their tutors.

There is also a problem in this when you have two different papers with different tutors on the same day; there is a definite reduction in the number of students that attend the 2nd paper no matter how interesting or critical it is, over a period of time.

No Responsibility

There must be some sort of responsibility to give motivation and a focus for the student to complete successfully at the lower levels of the education process. This comes back to Goal Setting and sticking to those goals. This can be in the form of reward, self-esteem or the kudos from their peers that success can bring. This needs to part of the education process as well to be effective.

For the Pacifica group at an age range of 23 – 26 their focus changes, their thirst for learning increases.

For the Maori group at an age range of 27 – 30 the same applies.

With this change of focus, a purpose and direction takes hold and as a result we have found successful completions at 90% or better.

Three practices are identified as contributing to an enhanced learning environment ([McCaw et al., 2012](#)). These are:

- encouraging students to keep culture at the centre of their learning
- encouraging students to work together in groups
- Valuing the importance of students' own identities.

This excerpt from research by 'McCaw, Wakes and Gardner' was based on the Maori learner but I feel this is relative to both Maori and Pacifica learners as there are similarities to the way they both engage in education.