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### Talanoa Vā: Honouring Pacific Research and Online Engagement

Practising Pacific pedagogies during New Zealand's level four lockdown: Pacific early career academics and COVID-19

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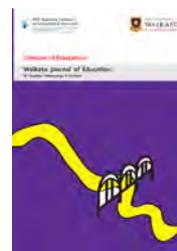
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## Practising Pacific pedagogies during New Zealand's level four lockdown: Pacific early career academics and COVID-19

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### Abstract

*During New Zealand's unprecedented level-four lockdown, opportunities to practise Pacific pedagogies in New Zealand universities required creative and innovative solutions from Pacific academics. This paper brings together the experiences of teaching during this lockdown from a cross-section of Pacific Early Career Academics (PECA) across a wide range of disciplines and schools at New Zealand's largest university. This paper argues that despite the challenges, PECA found ways to adapt Pacific pedagogical concepts through online delivery methods; however, their ability to effectively do this was severely influenced by existing socio-economic inequities that disproportionately impacted Pacific students. PECA continued to nurture the vā/wā with students in innovative ways, but they still encountered major challenges that will require more careful consideration of equity issues by New Zealand universities moving forward.*

### Keyword

Pacific pedagogies; COVID-19; Pacific academics; vā/wā; New Zealand; Pacific research

### Introduction

Pacific learners in New Zealand universities face many equity challenges to their learning and wellbeing, related to the socio-economic positioning of Pacific peoples more broadly within New Zealand society (Chu et al., 2013; Matapo & Baice, 2020; Theodore et al., 2017; Theodore et al., 2018). Pacific peoples in New Zealand experience many forms of socio-economic deprivation that reduces access to resources, presenting equity challenges in classrooms that under-serve Pacific students through learning frameworks informed by western pedagogies, resulting in an achievement gap (Cao & Maloney, 2017; Naepi et al., 2019; Teevale & Teu, 2018). Alarmingly, Pacific academics are also underrepresented in New Zealand universities (Naepi, 2019). This is problematic as Pacific academics offer role modelling for Pacific learners (Thomsen et al., 2021), which is key for Pacific student success (Benseman et al.,



2006). According to the Tertiary Education Commission's PBRF Review Panel (2020), based on current hiring trends, the Pacific share of New Zealand's research/academic workforce will not be commensurate with Pacific peoples share of New Zealand's population until 2150.

Furthermore, compared with non-Pacific learners, Pacific learners graduate with significantly higher student debt burden, are more likely to have financially dependent families and report higher levels of volunteerism (Theodore et al., 2018). Thus, for Pacific learners, a culturally inclusive learning environment informed by Pacific worldviews is imperative to facilitating and fostering academic success (Alkema, 2014; Chu et al., 2013; Leenen-Young, 2020; Luafutu-Simpson et al., 2015; Sterne, 2006). Pacific pedagogies are an important way to impart positive outcomes for Pacific student achievement in Western-oriented learning environments (Coxon et al., 2002; Luafutu-Simpson et al., 2015; Thaman, 2009). Pacific pedagogies are student-centred and highlight the positive and respectful relationship between learner and teacher that has been found to be imperative to Pacific student success (Allen et al., 2009; Theodore et al., 2018). At their core are Pacific cultural values that recognise that learning for our communities sits on the pillars of family, community, cultural capital, collaborative relationships and institutional support (Chu et al., 2013). Additionally, the New Zealand Government has recognised the importance and value of culturally responsive Pacific pedagogy through a range of initiatives since the 1990s, seen most recently through the Tapasā framework (Ministry of Education, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2020).

Central to enacting Pacific pedagogies involves creating a Pacific learning environment inside and outside the classroom for both Pacific students and lecturers built on the foundation of shared cultural values such as respect, humility, honesty, integrity, trustworthiness and reciprocity (Chu et al., 2013). Conceiving the learning environment through a Pacific worldview centralises the *vā/wā* within that space and determines the reciprocity of the teacher-learner dynamic, dismantling the traditional power imbalance of the lecture theatre and de-centring the teacher as the embodiment of knowledge (Reynolds, 2016). Pacific academics, despite their low number in New Zealand universities (Chu et al., 2013; Naepi, 2019; Naepi et al., 2020), enact, in practical ways, the values that reflect Pacific pedagogies (Benseman et al., 2006). This is because Pacific academics understand that relationships between Pacific learners and teachers are predicated on the need to *teu le vā/wā*, a Pan-Pacific concept of nurturing relational space that links and connects people laden with intrinsic value and epistemologically coded with mutual respect (Anae, 2010; Ka'ili, 2005; Naepi, 2019). *Teu le vā*, as both a philosophy and methodology, guides knowledge creation between learners and teachers and prescribes particular protocols, etiquette and behaviour(s) "to value, nurture, and 'tidy up' social and sacred relational spaces" (Anae 2010; Anae 2016)

On 25 March 2020, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced that New Zealand would move into an alert level-four lockdown in an attempt to eliminate the spread of COVID-19. A range of measures were introduced, including the closure of educational institutions. Learning shifted from a face-to-face delivery method to an online format. For Pacific academics, the rapid move to online teaching meant that existing disparities in New Zealand's education sector were further exacerbated. These disparities exist across the tertiary sector in New Zealand, where Pacific academics in universities are particularly underrepresented in permanent full-time contracts (Naepi 2019; Naepi et al., 2019). As noted by Barber and Naepi (2020), COVID-19 will further embed inequities within academia for Māori and Pacific communities and jeopardise any gains made within our universities as "fairweather progressive gains ... in times of crisis revealed to be precarious and superficial" (p. 1). Although this conversation is ongoing, more Māori and Pacific voices continue to emerge who scrutinise the New Zealand government's universalising message that all New Zealanders are 'in this together'. They assert that this is an erasive claim that ignores pre-existing health, educational and social inequities amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic (Akuhata-Huntington et al., 2020; Espiner, 2020; Mcleod et al., 2020; Thomsen 2020b).

Furthermore, as Māori and Pacific learners in New Zealand face disproportionately higher barriers to success in university classrooms (Mayeda et al., 2014; Theodore et al., 2017; Theodore et al., 2018), the sudden and unprecedented shift into lockdown may have impacted their learning more severely than other students due to the digital divide, increased social and financial pressures and responsibilities, and possible workspace limitations in their home environment(s) (Fowler, 2015; Gibson, 2002). The digital divide is significant, as online learning requires access to a secure internet connection with high data caps and one or more devices, which students from low-income backgrounds may struggle to access.

Considering the centrality of nurturing relationships and holistic interpersonal connections in Pacific pedagogical practice, how, then, is their enactment sustained during a global pandemic when connections must be built on digital platforms? In this paper we draw on the experiences of Pacific Early Career Academics (PECA) based at New Zealand's largest university to explore how PECA navigated the complexities and challenges presented by COVID-19 and New Zealand's level-four lockdown. We gather perspectives in a written talanoa format (Naepi et al., 2020; Thomsen et al., 2021), drawing themes from the talanoa to provide commentary around how these experiences can best be leveraged to inform future research and Pacific pedagogical praxis. These experiences come from a cross-section of PECA who work in different schools and faculties, reflecting the diversity of perspectives and experiences with knowledge production and teaching that exist within the unifying label of 'Pacific'.

Drawing from these experiences, we argue that as PECA, Pacific pedagogical praxis is intrinsic to how we understand our researcher and lecturer identity (Thomsen et al., 2021). Due to this, and despite the limited warning of the shift online, PECA created innovative ways to nurture the *vā/wā* with their students through the virtual classroom. However, this work was impacted by equity issues that placed many Pacific students at a disadvantage and added further to the equity burden shouldered by PECA. These issues are structural and systemic, and the narratives shared here speak directly to why universities in New Zealand must actively include PECA perspectives as they develop future strategies for online teaching and learning.

## **Positionality statement and methodology**

Talanoa—the ongoing discussion in relational space—is an established Pacific methodology to maintain *vā/wā* (Anae 2010, Ka'ili, 2005; Thomsen et al., 2021, Vaiioleti 2006); moreover, it is a core part of how we, as PECA, relate, connect and engage with one another in our network. Our experiences are not discrete data, rather they are part of a larger weaving. This paper is a product of the recently established and formalised PECA network at our university. It was created in an effort to build supportive and collaborative relationships with each other as there are so few PECA across New Zealand universities (Naepi 2019; Thomsen et al., 2021).

Our PECA network is founded on three key pou or pillars: 1. Individual and collective research programme development 2. Career progression and mentorship 3. Community building and advocacy. This is meaningful for the authors, as neoliberal values drive measures of academic capital that are centred on individual output (Olssen & Peters, 2005), which can sit in opposition to Pacific values of collaborative, relational and culturally appropriate ways of knowing and working. As PECA, we challenge the divisive nature of academic spaces by dialoguing with each other and with research by our Pacific academic elders, to collaborate on research, career and skills development as well as building meaningful relationships despite differences in disciplines, schools and faculties. All members of our network, including all named authors of this paper, are of Pacific heritage, with the majority born in New Zealand. There are a total of eight participants from our network who have contributed to this paper, with a gender balance of six women to two men. All statements from participants have been disidentified as we not only wish to preserve a small sense of confidentiality for our members but are

also aware that any form of educational research that critiques institutional responses carries a risk for any marginalised academic.

Similar to other articles our collective has produced, PECA respond to questions within a collaborative document; a process that we have likened to a written talanoa (Naepi et al., 2019; Thomsen et al., 2021). All members of our network were invited to participate, and those with capacity to participate were given access to the document to write their responses to the questions. In a written talanoa, respondents are given the opportunity to build on their responses based on other responses, making the document an iterative live record of people's thoughts positioned in conversation with others. The eight participants provided responses to questions centred around adaptations of teaching methods during New Zealand's level-four lockdown, what challenges were encountered in doing so, and how the *vā/wā* was nurtured with students online. PECA were also asked what they thought New Zealand universities could learn from their experience. The personal responses that were received by eight network members were collated, coded openly and then arranged into themes, axially coded and then underwent a thematic analysis that is presented here as a thematic talanoa (Thomsen, 2019; Thomsen, 2020a; Thomsen et al., 2021). The key themes identified were 1) adaptability and innovation, 2) the impact of equity challenges on practising Pacific pedagogies online, and 3) opportunities and challenges to nurturing the *vā/wā* digitally. A thematic talanoa deploys participants' experiences to construct themes around personal narratives (Thomsen 2019; 2020a; Thomsen et al., 2021). Building on, yet distinctive from a thematic analysis, a thematic talanoa constructs complexity in the analysis through centring participant excerpts as a form of storytelling, while building theory and interpretations around them (Thomsen 2020b). Therefore, the themes are unfolded through a narrative that follows Pacific ways of generating and disseminating knowledge. The paper concludes by arguing for greater institutional acknowledgement and meaningful inclusion of Pacific academic voices when designing online courses as New Zealand universities fix their gaze towards more online teaching.

## Thematic talanoa

### Adaptability and innovation

The sudden move to online teaching presented major challenges for PECA as it required nimble movement between Pacific-style pedagogical praxis delivered face-to-face to an online format without formal training or prior preparation. What PECA responses demonstrate is that they encountered confusion at the beginning of the lockdown, which they subsequently troubleshooted on their own. Central to these problems was finding ways to maintain processes of relationality and culturally informed and embedded pedagogy in an online environment. This required them to be adaptable and willing to innovate using technologies that sometimes were not provided by the university. In many cases, PECA drew on networks they had outside their departments and faculties to gain the support they needed.

A lot of trial, error, experimentation, upskilling across software, platforms and Zoom. So. Much. Zoom. I trialled for the semester a software not supported by the university, creating interactive classes. Some of the teaching I do looks at questioning conventions using embodied knowledge. This requires a lot of student engagement. So, at the time, I assumed it would be useful to explore software created for creative collaboration.

I looked outside of my faculty for support. I turned to institutions that had been doing online with Indigenous students somewhat successfully for a while and took their advice

when adapting my course. I am also a new hire. I had very few people to reach out about the process. I was lacking a teaching community that I could reflect on processes with.

In general, for PECA, their classes were taught mostly through Zoom. The university expressed a desire for asynchronous teaching where classes were pre-recorded online, condensed into smaller digestible chunks, and with online drop-in sessions used in lieu of tutorials. For PECA, this was a common practice, but there were unique ways in which they navigated these online platforms by leaning into Pacific values that reshaped some of the ways they practised this, such as changing lectures into dialogues. There were very mixed outcomes, as PECA felt that they were successful in some respects, whilst the efficacy of these adaptations was sometimes difficult to gauge.

What I did do was that instead of recording lectures in front of slides that I had prepared, I organised a series of conversations with other staff members over Zoom. This was the best way I found to recreate the feeling of dialogical learning and developing meaningful talanoa. Any material for the course that needed to be delivered would be discussed between myself and the guest lecturer. This at least kept many students engaged.

I set up learning spaces that then corresponded to break out rooms for the students to discuss, as well as collaborate in real time. I also used this software to trial master's supervisions with a thesis Dia-Map (diagram-map) that had resources linked to Google folders with online sources for thesis writing. It took a significant investment to build these classes, which was fine, but I found that I could not so much understand if the students had a comparable learning experience. I was motivated by Pacific pedagogical principles to trial alternative approaches; however, it's less easy to get a read on these more slippery areas when it comes to the evaluation metrics.

### Impact of equity challenges

In their responses, PECA overwhelmingly highlighted their concerns around the impact that existing socioeconomic disparities had on their Pacific students, which were further exacerbated with the global COVID-19 pandemic. As Pacific families have the lowest median incomes in New Zealand, financial issues "inevitably loom greater for Pacific students" (Benseman et al., 2002, p. 156). For universities, how to best retain and engage Pacific students amidst these socio-economic realities is an ongoing policy and strategic concern (Benseman et al., 2002). Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to traverse the myriad socio-economic issues affecting Pacific students in higher education, vis-à-vis lockdown, the most pertinent equity concerns PECA through their own experiences knew were internet access, availability of technological resources, suitable living arrangements, family responsibilities and employment pressures. Thus, for PECA, the overarching concern during alert level 4 was ensuring Pacific students could remain engaged in their studies for the duration of online learning. However, PECA were cognisant that many Pacific students often shared their technological devices with other family members in their household, did not have a suitable home 'office space', and might prioritise employment to financially support their families through the economic recession.

Further to this, for PECA this was not only an issue of access but one that impacted their pedagogies. As Pacific academics, the need to nurture relationships with Pacific students in healthy and safe spaces forefront their teaching praxis (Thomsen et al., 2021). Thus, equity issues became an area of concern that created anxiety not just for students, but for Pacific academics as well. Equity issues impact many strata of society, but every PECA raised this as the issue that they were most concerned about during the lockdown period. This was especially in relation to Pacific students whom they felt a particular duty and responsibility toward due to their own shared lived experiences of marginalisation.

Online teaching has taught me that it is possible to adapt, but there are systemic issues that need to be sorted to ensure that we all have access to the resources necessary to participate. There is an assumption that a home environment is suitable for learning. The expectations our university has on students is to dedicate approximately 10 hours per week for each course—this is not always possible within Pacific homes.

I believe that the university needs to do a better job to ensure that students are well-supported if they have to move to learning and working from home. I had a number of students, who were all Pacific, email me in the last lockdown saying that they didn't have a laptop or adequate internet access. I then put them in touch with those responsible for sending out laptops. There were then major delays in communication between when the student first made contact to when they actually received the laptops.

If I were to propose something that did not work, I would venture: the normative frameworks which were implemented to capture data. I lost track of the number of Pacific students who were not accommodated well with the various university's forms for assistance, with hardware or otherwise. I also found that students found ways between them to support their needs where the institutional support was either intimidating or just not culturally informed so as to feel relevant to their experience. I would say this reflects on how systemic equity issues still need more investment.

These systemic issues related not just to technological access, but also to the way data was captured and access was set up. This was not the only way PECA felt a disconnect between institutional interventions and Pacific realities. For PECA, equity issues were also felt through the disproportionate distribution of equity labour that many felt Pacific academics bore the brunt of (Naepi, 2019). Many speculated whether non-Pacific or non-Māori academics felt the pressure to respond to students in the same, relational, way. Moreover, for PECA mothers, this shift online made it increasingly difficult to be productive, as juggling work and parenthood took on a new context that literally brought students into their homes.

I think we also need to consider the burden on Pacific teachers to shoulder the responsibility of all things 'Pacific learner centred'. Much of the work we do is to advocate for the inequalities our people face and that, in itself, is trauma work.

I had an interesting experience with a palagi colleague who asked, "What if the students, because they had nothing else to do other than their school work, benefited from the lockdown?" and I was enraged because I had spent the lockdown hearing from Pacific students how hard they were finding it, and how they were especially finding it difficult seeing how hard they, their peers or the younger ones in high school in South Auckland were doing it, many taking up jobs to help their family, and not returning to school.

I have two small children and being able to live and teach for two hours straight uninterrupted was not going to happen. However, I made sure to send the students emails every week that opened with checking in on them and their loved ones, noting the different things each level let us do and acknowledging it was super stressful etc. This seemed to be what students appreciated and commented on—feeling that somebody cared about not just them but their whole family.

For informants, these issues of equity are also related to cultural safety. They believed the ability to create culturally safe spaces of learning for Pacific students, in particular, could not be addressed by culturally responsive pedagogies alone. The pedagogies needed to be practised by Pacific academics or

staff (Chu et al., 2013). Thus, a key component of developing safer spaces will be bringing Pacific academics into conversations around reshaping university classrooms and pedagogies.

I also feel that using Pacific pedagogies, which places emphasis on building meaningful and culturally appropriate relationships with students, is key to providing them with comfortability to question, probe and develop critical thinking skills. A key component of my teaching praxis and pedagogy is allowing students space to feel safe to question some of the inherent reifications that follow our cultural identities around New Zealand. This cannot be achieved by a non-Pacific person in a culturally safe way. And central to effective Pacific pedagogies are them being practised by Pacific lecturers, so how will we achieve this as we move more and more toward online teaching?

### Opportunities and challenges in nurturing the *vā/wā* in lockdown

Despite not being face-to-face with students, PECA felt that they could still nurture the *vā/wā* with students in innovative ways. The key, in their opinion, is to understand that *vā/wā* is about meaningful connection and relationship building (Anae, 2010; Ka'ili, 2005; Naepi, 2019). To achieve this online, it required leaning into the principles and values that guide Pacific pedagogies. There was also a sense that nurturing the *vā/wā* online is not something unfamiliar to Pacific communities, as there have been prior examples of online relational space building between Pacific peoples taking place across borders on the Internet (Lopesi, 2018; Salesa, 2017). This makes intuitive sense, as Pacific/Moana/Oceanic peoples are distributed inside and all around the edges of our great ocean. Despite the digital divide, online technologies do provide many opportunities for our peoples to connect, especially our youth.

To a degree, I think Pacific people have practised digital *vā* since the internet became available to wider society, likely extending on the telecommunication *vā* that was so much of the diasporic experience. I am thinking about some early Web 2.0 forums that hosted Pacific discussions around culture like the Kava Klub. Especially for the Pacific diaspora, perhaps motivated by relational Pacific value systems, I tend to think that this [online teaching] was something I could do because I have grown up with an adaptive attitude to digital *vā* practices. To take care of the *vā*, irrespective of the medium, I would pose is very Pacific and, by extension, underpins Pacific pedagogies. I would make a case that we have life experience in making relationships meaningful and enriched where technologies are adopted to enhance our relational worlds, and that having that attitude to technology as something that works towards relational values—rather than, say, capitalist principles—is a Pacific value.

There was also a sense that online teaching provided nuanced ways in which connections could be built through the strangely unfamiliar yet personal snapshots students and PECA were given into each other's home life. Central to Pacific pedagogies is knowing who your students are and this situation allowed new points of connection to be made (Chu et al., 2013; Thaman, 2009).

I felt I was able to nurture our *vā*, but in a different way. Because we were 'in' each other's homes, it had an essence that felt more intimate. Instead of talking about our families, we could see and hear each other's families. We could share a laugh about someone's mum yelling in the background, someone's child popping onto the screen, someone's cat demanding attention, someone rushing to take the boiling pot off the stove, me apologising for not having had time to fold the laundry in the background. These seemingly mundane events carried with them a sense of authenticity that allowed us to see the quirks in each other's lives that we could connect with.

Online teaching was weirdly super personal. My students were being quite literally invited to my kitchen table and got to see aspects of my life that they maybe wouldn't have if it wasn't for the lockdown. At the same time, I was being invited into my students' lives, seeing family photos, posters they chose to put up, framed pictures of Jesus, degrees framed on the walls, memorabilia etc. There is something to be said for how COVID enabled this type of insight into each other's lives.

PECA also recognised that there was an onus on themselves as lecturers to acknowledge that they were responsible for shifting their own praxis to support students as there is an inherent power imbalance between student and teacher. Innovative ways to tauhi vā/wā or teu le vā/wā needed to be engaged. This also meant that lecturers themselves placed students' need to feel comfortable as a priority, as many students were literally existing in survival mode. It also resulted in extra labour, but PECA felt it a necessary task.

I knew that moving online was going to require a different approach to nurturing the vā with students. I knew I had to be comfortable with the comfort of my students. This is the message I sent to them on Canvas about some online etiquette: "When on Zoom, you are welcome to have your video on or off, as you please. If your internet connection is unstable, then turning video off can help. If you're not comfortable showing your bubble, you are welcome to keep your video off, or you are welcome to use a Zoom background (have fun with these!) I appreciate seeing you all—it does make it a bit easier to speak—but this isn't a requirement. Do what feels most comfortable."

I felt that it was important that I continued to make myself available to them at the end of the hour to convey that I wasn't just interested in their success at university but in their lives more generally. Of course, this required a lot of time and emotional labour.

Despite this, and perhaps related to the earlier issues identified with the ambiguous nature of measuring pedagogical efficacy this new teaching environment presented, PECA still experienced difficulties navigating the online space. In particular, PECA discussed challenges associated with trying to create and foster meaningful exchanges with students online. As such, the added, often emotional, workload, associated with practising Pacific pedagogies was intensified.

I truly believe that I was not able to do so as effectively as I would have been able to do so in the classroom. I felt that because students more often than not didn't have their cameras on. It became quite a lonely experience talking to what felt like myself on many occasions. I don't believe you can nurture or hold the vā/wā when one person feels this way. I hated teaching by Zoom, and I really don't know if anything I did worked at all for the students.

Was I able to nurture the vā? No—I had redesigned both first year and third year courses that I was teaching in 2020, attempting to gain mastery of this material let alone adapting to an online format. It was extremely challenging. I was just trying to stay on top of teaching, preparing, assessment redesign for online delivery, energy levels (as I was super exhausted)—I felt that I did not have adequate time to connect with our Pacific students in a way that I had wanted to and I was responding to those students actively seeking responses (predominantly Pākehā students).

## Developing inclusive online learning

Considering the intrinsic understanding of the value of Pacific pedagogical praxis for the achievement and wellbeing of Pacific students, PECA truly believed that Pacific academics and experiences need to be fore fronted and included as universities move ahead with plans to create more online learning spaces. Many expressed this in not just the collation of experiences, but also in embedding values of relationality, respect and meaningful engagement to online pedagogies across the university. In particular, it was believed that these values would help to create safer spaces online and Pacific academics, as pedagogy knowledge holders, could help to reshape these conventionally unsafe spaces for all learners, not just Pacific.

I think we need further discussions around what a 'culturally safe virtual space' looks like for a Pacific teacher. What does a 'culturally safe virtual space' look like for a Pacific student? What values underpin this? How do we operationalise Pacific values in a virtual learning space? Pacific cultures are relational and so we have to position ourselves within the space first before we foster any type of inclusive learning environment.

We have likely years, possibly decades of data on digital *vā* in learning spaces, either institutionally created or community initiated. This is not the first time Pacific people have seen and faced challenges in learning spaces and emerged with processes and learnings that support our communities' resilience to external pressures. If there is insight I have gained from this recent experience, it is that Pacific pedagogy is well placed to support transforming learning spaces that better prepare everyone, not just Pacific students, for a post COVID world.

Further to this, PECA believed that the university's response to equity issues, although well-intentioned, needed more institutional resourcing and input from Pacific learning communities and academics themselves. This was evident in the multiple points at which the institutional support systems failed not just the students but PECA, too. This included a perceived perception that not enough was done for marginalised students and that communication of strategies and plans were less than desirable. PECA acknowledged that this was inevitable considering the crisis mode university systems were operating under. These experiences varied across different schools and faculties.

I wish the university had shown the same commitment to supporting staff as they did to supporting these students. In our faculty, in the two days prior to the lockdown, IT services set up an IT station for staff members to bring in their personal devices to get equipped for the move online. Laptops and other devices were also offered to staff members without a device at home, or those who had to share—these efforts were organised in short notice and I wish this same commitment was shown to students.

It was encouraging to see how some faculties and the central university quickly mobilised IT support for students, couriering laptops and Wi-Fi routers to students within that first week of lockdown. For the university's Pacific students, the Pro Vice-Chancellor Pacific's office swiftly distributed IT devices to any Pacific student in need. That was incredible. However, the communications about this assistance were not well marketed from the central university. In the week leading up to level-four lockdown, our team pre-empted the inevitability of online teaching and collected, somewhat haphazardly, information about our Pacific students' technological needs. This involved calling, texting, and emailing students to ensure they had adequate IT resources. There's an obvious paradox that digitally disadvantaged students often don't have access to

online surveys/posts asking what they need, so there were definitely students that missed out simply because we couldn't capture them early enough. I hope that, in learning from this experience, the university can address these resource inequities before a crisis hits. This would not only benefit Pacific students but every student.

The university and my department felt like they were scrambling to prepare 'the most appropriate response'. The communication was overwhelming, with constant emails filled with so much information that it was difficult to condense. However, I don't hold this against my school or university. It was definitely a reaction to something we had not encountered before. In trying to support us, they inadvertently made things more hectic for us. I felt like I knew what my students needed, but with all the racket the university was creating, it felt like I would be talking into a blizzard. So I quietly went about preparing what I felt would be best for my students instead of being constrained by the uncertainty of the university. I know what my material is and how best it can be delivered.

## Conclusion

PECA narratives and experiences of teaching during lockdown demonstrate the relational ways they negotiated teaching in the virtual classroom. As Pacific academics, their research and teaching identities are tied inextricably to their Pacific heritages, making their approach to pedagogy Pacific-centred (Thomsen et al., 2021). Consequently, this motivated them to not only find ways to efficiently move their classes online, but also to centre Pacific values in the virtual space. For PECA, the need to nurture relationships with students in healthy and safe spaces was at the forefront of their teaching praxis. Strategies included leaning into the personal, making themselves more available to students beyond classroom hours and building on shared lived experiences.

There was also optimism where PECA felt that the inherent resilient and adaptive nature of Pacific pedagogies makes for an effective framework for creative, more inclusive virtual classrooms in the future. PECA experiences from across various disciplines and faculties in applying Pacific pedagogies reflect the diversity of perspectives and experiences with knowledge production and teaching and thus emphasises the utility of Pacific pedagogical frameworks.

Their experiences bring light to how Pacific values, such as relationality, underpin their teaching praxis and is what makes PECA uniquely adaptive, in response to the changing education landscape. COVID-19 presents challenges in how we deliver material and engage meaningfully with our students, and thus it is important to recognise the value of Pacific pedagogies in creating culturally safe and inclusive online spaces for students.

The cautionary tale here is the pitfalls of not having adequate representation of Pacific voices, as well as other marginalised groups, around the table when conversations are being made about how interventions and pedagogical approaches should be designed for the classroom. What PECA have highlighted is the interconnected nature of equity issues and the ability to teach effectively in an online environment. It was clear from PECA responses that they were just as concerned with equitable access to resources as they were about the nature of the teaching delivery methods. Students cannot be expected to connect and meaningfully engage with any educator if they do not have stability in their living environments. There was a sense that PECA, through shared lived experiences, felt they understood these challenges more so than non-Pacific colleagues did. With the significantly low number of Pacific academics, PECA often felt compelled to support and guide non-Pacific colleagues in adapting their teaching to foster an inclusive online learning space. This highlights the equity burden in which early

career academics, particularly those of Pacific and Māori descent, must shoulder, which most often limits their own capacity to grow within the academy.

Therefore, a strong recommendation of this paper is that PECA as well as Pacific academic elders need to be included and engaged meaningfully, not just consulted, as universities begin to draft future online teaching plans and strategies. They also need to be part of the execution plan and delivery team, not just spoken to and excluded from the core decision-making circle. It will be critical for New Zealand universities to take up this task in meaningful ways or risk exacerbating existing educational and socioeconomic inequities that disproportionately hinder the achievement potential of Pacific learners and overburdens Pacific academics.

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