



Le Moana Mua Award

Vijay Pillay

Pacific Healthcare Tutor  
Healthcare Programme  
New Zealand Skills and  
Education College

**“As a Pacific Healthcare Tutor, my goal is to prepare our Pacific students to develop, connect and achieve their success, which is the most powerful tool for excellence and freedom in their lives.”**

Vijay teaches in the Healthcare programme at the New Zealand Skills and Education College (NZSE). There are four New Zealand Certificate of Health and Wellbeing qualifications in the programme between level 2 and level 4. The programme is designed to provide and improve the physical, mental, emotional, and psychological wellbeing of both the individual and the whole community, and is carried out by trained health professionals.

Her approach is Pacific-centric and person-centred. This approach helps all her students, including Pacific students, feel welcome, respected, culturally safe, and provides a warm friendly environment for study. It enables students to settle in class well and be prepared to observe, listen, and take new challenges day-by-day until the course is completed. They can express their feelings, ideas, and knowledge to others and to her as their tutor. Her foremost expectation is to know her individual students' cultural and family background, and their expectations during the class sessions, so they can participate openly without feeling nervous, stressed, or overwhelmed.

The Healthcare modules of the programme are complex; the words and jargon used can be overwhelming, and can make Pacific students nervous, particularly those with poor literacy and numeracy skills. As a tutor, Vijay ensures the course materials for the Healthcare programme are about embedding everyday healthcare knowledge and practice at a level suitable for the students she teaches.

“I can prove the positive impact that her teaching and programmes have had on my own personal development. Through Ms Vijay Pillay's teaching styles, I have achieved a wider knowledge and critical view of healthcare.” (Graduate, 2021)

The challenges she faces while teaching Pacific students can be impacted by external financial and personal reasons. In class, Pacific students can also be hesitant or shy to participate in group discussions or presentations, due to their social and cultural norms.

To overcome these barriers and improve the input by Pacific students during group or individual presentations or discussions, Vijay incorporates a person-centred and

Fonofale model of teaching. This method of teaching has a deliberate focus on developing the whole person including intellectual, moral, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual dimensions and capabilities in an education setting.

Vijay creates a family-like environment. When a new cohort starts, she ensures all the cultures are mixed, so that they will communicate with and understand each other, rather than having individual cultures sitting together as a group and not communicating or participating during class. This approach results in high achievement rates for Pasifika students and a significant reduction in withdrawals during the programme.

She ensures that both Pasifika students and other students become group leaders, so all of them feel included and welcome in class. This leads to very good participation, particularly as the groups must organise themselves to prepare the topic and ensure each member shares their ideas with the group. As a result, there was improvement in punctuality, time management, organisational skills, and communication skills amongst Pasifika and other students during and after class sessions.

“My tutor, Ms Vijay Pillay, was always willing to answer questions and encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone. She challenged me, but was patient at the same time. She motivated me to bring out my potential and increase my confidence. She believed in everyone, we could do it, not to give up. I was able to complete this course through the support shown by my tutor and dedication she gave to each one of us.” (Student, 2022)

Vijay says it is important to apply literacy and numeracy in class with Pasifika students. As English is not their first language, these students have difficulty participating in activities and assignments. She encourages and guides them to enrol in Pathways Awarua and do self-directed learning at home to improve their literacy.

Vijay honours her students’ cultural identity and whakapapa by incorporating traditional Pasifika practices, stories, and language links into the curriculum and her lessons. This fosters a strong sense of pride and identity among her students, empowering them to embrace their heritage while excelling in their academic work.

In applying a Pacific-centric approach, Vijay must be creative and empathetic. When teaching a cultural competency module, she encourages Pasifika students to plan, design and present to the rest of class about their own cultural values, beliefs, customs, habits, language, and religion using the person-centred Fonofale model approach.

“Vijay ... makes sure that all her students are involved in whatever discussions or activities we did. She has been a source of motivation for all the students and especially for me.” (Student, 2021)

Vijay has also initiated other programmes. She has talked to high school students at twelve South Auckland schools, especially those with a high number of Pacific students, about the STAR (Secondary Tertiary Alignment Resource) programme in healthcare. This STAR programme is aimed at students interested in a career in the health sector and those looking for a career pathway. As a result of her efforts, 51 students will participate in the first offering of the health and wellbeing STAR programme in 2023.

The Careers Advisor of a mainly Māori and Pacific South Auckland school valued the input from a Pacific health educator:

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“I am writing in reflection of Ms Vijay Pillay’s outstanding performance with our school to inform and assist students’ decisions about career pathways, understanding ways to accumulate NCEA credits externally and building students’ confidence.”

Vijay has also worked with local aged care providers to organise industry placements for her students, but mainly focusing on Pasifika students, to provide real world, hands-on, experience in a healthcare environment.

She is described by the Head of School at NZSE as “an exceptional tutor” whose “... commitment to cultural inclusivity and academic excellence has made her a highly respected and sought after tutor within the Pasifika community and within NZSE.”