

EDITORIAL: PACIFIC EDUCATION: RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

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He hōnore, he kōroria ki te Atua, he maungarongo ki te whenua, he whakaaro pai ki ngā tāngata katoa.

Tēnei rā te mihi atu ki a koutou katoa e pānui nei i ngā whakaaturanga o tēnei pukapuka. Ko te tumanako, ka hua mai he māramatanga i ngā mahi rangahau o te pae tata, o te pae tawhiti.

Honour and glory to the Almighty, peace on earth and goodwill to all.

Greetings to you all, the readers of this edition. The hope is that insights will be gained from the multiple sites of research reported here.

Early in 2003, a group of staff and students of the University of Waikato involved in Pacific education formed an interest group. The group is still active and consists of Pacific peoples, Māori and Pākehā (Palagi). The aim of the group is to promote Pacific education, including teaching and research and, as has eventuated, publications. With this in mind, a symposium was organised and people were invited to present. Those papers were then published as symposium papers and a number of them appear in this special edition (Kana & Tamatea; Vaioleti; and Sharma). It has become a key function of this special edition to support our Pacific colleagues in the research and publication process.

It was the original intention that this special edition be a truly cooperative enterprise and focus on Pacific and Māori authors, editors and content of the articles. However, the reality was much more difficult than that. So, the production of this special edition, in particular the editorial process, has not been as inclusive as was originally intended. I guess it is an illustration of how best intentions get disrupted by other obligations.

The editorial experience has, however, made me reflect upon the situation at several levels. I have realised that we need to be cognisant of the different responsibilities and obligations that Pacific peoples have to their families and communities that are experienced in ways that are different to those of us from other cultures. These commitments are very important and can leave little time and energy for the time-consuming writing and publication process. Life (both personal and professional) happens and sometimes that gets in the way of best intentions.

Throughout the voyage from the symposium to the final publication, as a Palagi I have struggled, and continue to struggle, with where it is appropriate to situate myself within Pacific education. Indeed, do I have a place at all? I am a feminist academic with a passion for social justice. However, some indigenous

critique has alerted us (me) to the colonising effects of white, middle class feminism on indigenous women. We share some experiences as women marginalised in the education system and, as New Zealanders, marginalised to the world. However, my white, middle class experiences and culture are different to those of my Māori and Pacific colleagues. As a feminist I am committed to challenging oppressive systems and practices, to speak out against the many 'isms' (e.g., racism and sexism) but I cannot speak for Māori or Pacific peoples. I am not of their world, or they of mine; and it is not the purpose of this editorial to speak for others.

In recent years, I have worked extensively in Melanesia (Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands). My work has mainly been focused on working alongside the indigenous peoples of those countries to support them in the directions they choose to take and the decisions they choose to make. I have had important questions asked of me by colleagues from the Pacific, tangata whenua and Palagi alike. Why do you work there (in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands)? What are your motives? Aren't you just perpetuating colonisation? The questions made me think about what I was doing and my motives for engaging in this work. I reflected on Bishop and Glynn's (1999) model for planning educational activities: who initiates; who benefits; whose cultural reality is represented; whose realities and experiences are legitimated; and who is accountable?

An identified need by my Ni Vanuatu colleagues was building research capacity. To write informed gender equity and women's human rights policy (which was part of my work) I first needed high quality information on which to base that policy. Several research projects followed that always involved local researchers who initiated and assisted with the design, implementation and writing of the research. Many have gone on to present at conferences and to publish their work. My research work in Vanuatu is not yet finished but I am hoping that very soon I will achieve my goal which is to 'do myself out of a job'. So, I guess that is my position with respect to how I place myself in Pacific education.

Those of us who are academics work in a PBRF climate which does not discriminate among people; Māori, Pacific and Palagi academics are all affected by it. It places an obligation on experienced researchers to mentor new researchers. New Zealand has a strong presence in Pacific education, and Pacific communities have a strong presence in New Zealand schools. The *Tertiary Education Commission PBRF Guidelines* suggest that Pacific research is an inclusive concept and discourses on Pacific research are emerging. We are also reminded that

... opportunities for publication of Pacific research in mainstream journals are limited. Pacific research is reflective of the traditions of the past, as well as the present and future. It often embodies different paradigms, perspectives and critical stances that are not always captured in mainstream research. The impact of Pacific research on educational practice is particularly important, reflecting a commitment of Pacific researchers to benefit their communities through their research. (Tertiary Education Commission, 2003, p. 2)

This special edition presents an eclectic mix of papers from experienced researchers and those new to the game. The publication process is a game with rules that are sometimes baffling and a jargon all of its own. It can be an off-putting process, especially for new researchers, and especially for those with extensive community obligations. It is important that the process be transparent and demystified and one that encourages and supports new researchers. Most importantly, it must give voice and visibility to and value Pacific knowledges, values, ideas and beliefs. It must also be inclusive of the many ways that people choose to express those knowledges, values, ideas and beliefs, whether it is through empirical research and formal academic writing or though story telling, poetry and/or visual and performing arts.

The first two papers focus on research methodology from differing perspectives. In the first paper, Fred Kana and Karaitiana Tamatea share their experiences of researching within their own iwi. They offer six Māori understandings which explore and extend our knowledge of research and highlight the important role whakapapa plays in accessing their communities and the information that the research participants were willing to share. Similarly, Timote Vaioleti interrogates qualitative research methodology through a Tongan lens. He challenges the appropriateness of traditional research methodologies when researching in Pacific contexts. Timote argues the “need for a highly interactive, informal, flexible and ecological approach [to research] where researchers will engage more meaningfully”. To this end, he offers Talanoa research methodology.

Tanya Wendt Samu calls for teachers to be responsive to the “diversities between groups of learners as well as within groups of learners”. Too often, Pacific peoples are treated as a homogeneous group yet, in reality, Pacific peoples are very diverse, with many different languages and cultures. I am reminded of an article I read recently about how schools need culturally competent teachers and leaders. I shared this with a class of students who are training to be secondary school teachers. One young man commented that to be culturally competent was not good enough; we needed to be better than that. He saw competence as mediocre. There’s a challenge for us.

Mere Kēpa and Linitā Manu’atu take us on the journey (sometimes painful) they traveled as they worked as part of a team to introduce a new Diploma in Early Childhood Education, Pasifika at Auckland Institute of Technology (AUT). From a dual Tongan and Māori positioning, they explore how they navigated a pathway through the different, sometimes conflicting, Pacific interests. They introduce us to FetuakiMālie as a way of “understanding educational transformation” and valuing the many Pacific cultures involved in the development of the Diploma.

Fran Cahill alerts us to the difficulties that Samoan adolescents have in trying to live within the traditional Samoan culture of home and the “confusing mixture of competing, sometimes appealing and often contrary values around them at school”. Her research focused on what (Samoan) parents understood of the difficult journey their children were taking. She found that while parents have very high expectations of their children because they themselves do not have qualifications, they had little knowledge of how the education system worked and they believed that schools (teachers) were racist and did not understand Samoan culture.

Val Podmore, Ene Tapusoa and Jan Taouma present the findings of an action research project that investigated the “innovative practices related to Samoan language immersion at an early childhood Centre of Innovation [A’oga Fa’ā Samoa]”. What was found is very encouraging, in terms of children’s increasing fluency in the Samoan language, teachers taking on further study in immersion and bilingual education, and parents’ satisfaction with their child’s progress at the A’oga Fa’ā Samoa.

Sashi Sharma’s research looked at the ways in which students at a Fijian-Indian high school made sense of probability. Sashi’s research underscores the influence of students’ socio-cultural experiences in the teaching and learning process. She found that, when thinking about probability, students were strongly influenced by their culture “such as one’s fate being pre-determined”.

Jenny Young-Loveridge has analysed the performance and progress of 30,000 Pacific students on the Numeracy Development Project (NDP) in New Zealand. The findings suggest that the numeracy performance gap between European and Pacific students is closing. While Jenny does not claim that the NDP can take total credit for the improvement, she does suggest that perhaps the use of an oral assessment tool “with an emphasis on explaining strategies used to get answers ... may help to explain the positive outcomes for NDP students”.

Echoing a call from a number of the authors in this journal (in particular, see Tanya Wendt Samu’s article), Robbie Atatoa asks that we understand the uniqueness of the many different Pacific cultures. Robbie is from the Cook Islands and researched the “diverse experiences of six Cook Islands university students (including myself)”. Learning academic English was a huge challenge for them all. Robbie suggests that the University of Waikato needed to employ a Pacific peoples liaison officer to help students understand the university culture and to support them in their studies. The University of Waikato has just made such an appointment (funded by the Pacific Student Supplementary Grant Committee), not before time. As a result, it is hoped that Pacific students will be better supported.

In the final article *Life, the Crocodile, the Pisikoa and the Wind*, Nesta Devine explores how teachers and teaching are “represented in Pacific thinking”. She has chosen the fictional work of three Samoan writers, Ruparuke Petaia, Albert Wendt and Sia Figiel. Some of the representations include the teacher as an instrument of colonisation (Petaia), the arrogance of European teachers (Wendt) and the teacher as “a tragic figure of local ignorance” (Figiel). Although Nesta cautions against generalising, both Palagi and Samoan teachers are given a hard time by these authors.

I hope you, the reader, enjoy and find informative this special edition on Pacific education. I also hope that there are increasingly more like it so that we can all be better informed and enriched by Pacific scholarship.

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