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The currency of the post-covid gaze into Pasifika/Pacific education's trajectory

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Wayfinding waves and winds of change: The currency of the post-covid gaze into Pasifika/Pacific education's trajectory

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Abstract

The thematic currency of this paper is a post-covid concern. My talatalanoa sits alongside Pacific educators' voices in this volume of the Waikato Journal of Education, colleagues from Aotearoa New Zealand's Realm Nations of the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau. While adopting a place-based and Indigeno-centric Pasifika/Pacific gaze through talanoa-vā, an analytical lens centred on unpacking stories and insights, I share my motivations and concerns wayfinding the wave-like changes facing Pasifika/Pacific education's level of criticality and trajectory within Aotearoa New Zealand.

Keywords

Pasifika/Pacific education, post-covid, talatalanoa, talanoa-vā, stories, storying

Introduction

“Wayfinding waves and winds of change” is metaphoric, a symbol of navigating and negotiating today's global pandemic, societal changes and educational uncertainties. Renowned teacher educator and poet Konai Helu Thaman gifted the metaphor “Of waves, winds, and wonderful things” for a 2014 edited book, a collection of papers by Pacific educational leaders in Oceania as part of the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative for and by Pacific People (RPEIPP). Within the 2014 edited book, the RPEIPP as a “for-by” Pacific agenda began to look, sound and feel more like a “for-by-with” intention. This somewhat subtle shift to include “with-Pacific” began to widen our thinking and conversations as to who and what makes a Pacific person on whenua in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) that have and continue to endure ongoing historical settler colonial trauma. For-by-with Pacific is an ongoing concern for us in Aotearoa NZ, particularly when our own *to'utangata* (next generation, Tongan language) are of dual or mixed ethnic and racial identities. Similarly, the identities that constitutes “the local” is not only confined to educators and researchers of Indigenous Pacific ancestries but includes our non-Indigenous allies who have been welcomed by whānau (extended family, Māori language) and integrated into Aotearoa NZ society as part of our professional and local communities, clans, and villages.



The 2014 edited collection of papers was based on a 2011 RPEIPP symposium in Suva, hosted by the University of the South Pacific's (USP) Faculty of Arts, Law and Education (FALE) and the Institute of Education (IOE), as a celebration of 10 years since the Pacific-led initiative (the RPEIPP) was developed. In Thaman's (2014) foreword she wrote:

The appearance of this publication is timely not because of a certain doom and gloom that is gripping many Pacific educators as they grapple with so many innovations and their strategic advocates but because the time is right for Pacific conversations about Pacific educational issues. (p. v)

My purpose in this paper is to briefly story current front-of-mind educational issues and hopes, for Pasifika/Pacific education. At the same time, address Pasifika/Pacific education's criticality and trajectory as a transformative disciplinary field in Aotearoa NZ. Pasifika education as a priority began in the year 2000 via the Government's development of the first Pasifika Education Plan (PEP) (2001-2006), a high-level strategic policy designed to address Pacific students' disparities in Aotearoa NZ's education system from Early Childhood Education (ECE) through to tertiary education (see Tongati'o, 2010). Pasifika education fuelled Pasifika/Pacific Ministry of Education (MoE) officials as well as academics and educators, enabling them to (re)think ways of countering the colonial Eurocentric schooling structures and discourses embedded in Aotearoa NZ's education system (Samu, 2013).

Long serving Pasifika scholar Tanya Samu (2007) notes, "...the term Pasifika superficially (even cosmetically) originates from within this multiethnic grouping is of no small consequence, because being able to define ourselves is an issue of control...When the power to define and give meaning is in the hands of others (and not in the hands of indigenous peoples), then a group has lost power and control over their own constructions." (p. 138). Thirteen years later, the 2020–2030 Action Plan for Pacific Education (APPE) is a policy developed with Pasifika communities across the nation, seeking for systemic shifts (MoE, 2020). Past iterations of the PEP fell short of shifting school and classroom practices that continued to marginalise and undermine Pasifika knowledge and worldviews (Samu, 2013). So, what is different now? Has Covid-19 exacerbated or merely diverted our attention away from the existing inequitable practices and processes within formal schooling? What is the role of critical educators and researchers within Pasifika education? Although not all of the questions asked are directly unpacked in this paper, they are nevertheless positioned here to provide context for our ongoing *talatalanoa*.

Pasifika, Pacific, Moana: An Indigeno-centric post-covid concern

Naming focuses identity (Sanga & Reynolds, 2017). Names have genealogical origins and carries mana (i.e., authority, prestige, power, influence) and as such they are fluid, "...[not] static and can change over time" (Sanga & Reynolds, 2017, p. 199). Unpacking the terms "Pasifika/Pacific/Moana" is necessary because each carry whakapapa as well as whenua-based or place-inspired cultural politics. Each term shares connections yet carries diverse connotations and implications for minority peoples and communities, including their vision and drive for self-determination.

As described by Alfred and Corntassel (2005), "Indigeness is an identity constructed, shaped, and lived in the politicized context of contemporary colonialism" (p. 597). Similarly, Indigeness reflects the "oppositional, place-based existence, along with the consciousness of being in struggle against the dispossessing and demeaning fact of colonization by foreign peoples, that fundamentally distinguishes Indigenous peoples from other peoples of the world" (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p. 597). Indigeneity politicizes Pasifika/Pacific's place in–relationship–with Māori as ancestral whanaunga (kin) in Te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa as well as migrant settlers within Aotearoa NZ as a settler colonial nation bounded to the conditions of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. An Indigeno-centric view hones in on the centrality of grounding one's critical consciousness, a sense of being-in–struggle and the reflexive thinking being

with/in whenua/land/place. Adopting an Indigeno-centric view acknowledges the significance of relational positionalities and our socio-political as well social justice responsibilities. For Tongan and other Pacific migrants who have now settled on Aotearoa NZ whenua, appreciating and knowing our *tu'ufonua* (sense of belonging, sense of indigeneity and their impacts on other Indigenous communities) can help us navigate our social responsibilities in *tu'atonga* (outside of the homeland, the diaspora) (Manu'atu, 2017). This can be done in ways that reflects a mindful critical consciousness that seeks to minimise social injustice and the perpetual oppression of the marginalised within those already marginalised (Fa'avae, 2018; 2019). Feeling this way can elicit *ongomālie* (inspiration, hope) and lead to the *fakaivia* (empowerment) of one's transformative actions in *tu'atonga*.

Pasifika, as a term, is found in the Samoan and Tokelauan vernaculars. Pasifiki is Tonga's version of Pasifika. Polynesian people were the predominant Pacific population between the 50s and 60s which led to the coining of "Pasifika" by the MoE initially in the late 1990s and became "formalised in the early 21st century (Samu, 2010) as evidenced by the MoE's first [PEP] (2001) and Pasifika Development" (cited in Samu, 2020, p. 198). Prior to that, the terms Pacific Polynesian or Pacific Islander were the norm during the 70s and 80s (Samu, 2020), yet it did not always evoke an empowering inspiration for Pasifika educators and leaders who, at the time, began to position Aotearoa NZ as their home. The colonial history of the term "Pacific" can be traced back to the European explorer Ferdinand Magellan, who was of Portuguese heritage, and his European crewmates (Flynn et al., 2017). The Pacific label did not land well with NZ-born Pasifika who were educated during the intellectual era of decolonisation and Indigenous sovereignty, fuelled also by Graeme Hingangaroa Smith and Linda Tuhiwai Smith's critical discourses (Ferris-Leary, 2013; Smith, 1999).

Should it be Pasifika or Pacific education? If we valued the notion of whakapapa (genealogy in Te Reo Māori or Māori language) then both terms matter because each have historical significance and a specific story to tell. When the Labour government came back into power in 2017–2018, the name Pasifika took a backseat and Pacific was (re)centred in education policy documents directly linked to Pacific peoples' educational success (MoE, 2018). Some believe the term Pasifika is heavily Polycentric and the lived experiences and stories of migrants from the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati and Nauru, for instance, are sidelined, ignored, and can be misrepresented. Pacific education, however, seemed to be more inclusive of communities from Melanesia and Micronesia. The Associate Minister of Education at the time, the Honourable Minister Jenny Salesa, is believed by some as one of the central protagonists in (re)fronting the term "Pacific" within MoE policies (MoE, 2018; 2020). Cherie Chu (2018), an educational leader and researcher of Tahitian heritage, affirms the significance of acknowledging both Pasifika/Pacific, so long as people rationalise the use of each term in their writing and theorising.

Other key scholars in the field justify and articulate their application of either Pasifika or Pacific when framing and analysing the education of migrants and their NZ-born and raised generations in Aotearoa NZ (Rimoni et al., 2021; Taleni et al., 2017; Reynolds, 2019; Samu, 2013, 2020; Si'ilata et al., 2017). For them, both Pasifika/Pacific highlight educators' and researchers' mobile and shifting positionalities and responsibilities as they navigate and extend their educational services beyond the Aotearoa NZ borders and into Oceania and the globe. My intentional use of Pasifika/Pacific in this paper is an acknowledgement of both having relevance when describing the education context and the potentiality of the Pasifika/Pacific disciplinary field as a critical transformative space.

According to Sanga and Reynolds (2017), naming is claiming. Samu (2020) claims, the use of all terms to name and refer to vibrant and diverse groups of Pacific populations who continue to change over time in the diaspora is always contestable, "particularly when an uncritical, ahistorical stance is taken" (p. 199). When implementing either Pasifika, Pacific, or Pasifika/Pacific, it is necessary to ground each in its whakapapa and articulate each term within the context/s of use, the ethnic groups involved, and the intentions of the project or initiative at that point in time (Fa'avae et al., 2022). Doing this provides clarity for the next generation of educators and scholars entering the Pasifika education

discipline. The adage, “to know where we’re heading is to know where we’ve come from” continues to affirm Pasifika/Pacific’s relevance today.

The move to front both decolonising and indigenising within Pacific/Pasifika critical praxis in higher education spaces, including higher education research, is becoming more evident in discourses and research intentions across the fields of Pacific Education, Pacific Studies, and Indigenous Studies (Hoskins & Jones, 2022; Rubin & Fa'avae, 2022). Similarly, the concepts Moana and Oceania are visible in masters and doctoral theses generated by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars doing creative yet critical interdisciplinary work (Baice et al., 2021; Ferris-Leary, 2013; Naepi, 2019; Thomsen et al., 2021). During the late 1990s and early 2000s, Pacific Studies as a disciplinary field became popular amongst Pacific students in Aotearoa NZ universities. I was one of them. The late ‘Epeli Hau‘ofa’s (1994) seminal ideas associated with the Moana/Oceania and “Our Sea of Islands” continue to cross disciplinary boundaries and Pasifika educators and researchers engaged in interdisciplinary *talatalanoa* and interdisciplinarity work within and across Indigenous Pacific knowledge traditions.

Naming post-covid in this paper (re)focuses our attention towards the criticality of shifting cultural identity constructions and teaching and learning practices as a consequence of Covid-19. Post-covid is not a fixed category or a time-bounded era linked mainly to the end of the Covid-19 pandemic worldwide. To consider the post-covid era in this way emphasises an afterthought, a focus on the end outcome, a consequence which can then expel and dismiss living through the moments, insights, learnings and negotiations through the global pandemic. Grounding our lived realities throughout Covid-19 questions our subjective experiences linked to notions of “truth”, “logic”, “uncertainties”, and the human desire to return to normal life, a normality that somewhat masks systemic inequities impacting minority communities.

Through a critical Indigenous Pacific lens, the post-covid space enables an analysis of “normality” and “truths” and the negotiation of the inter-subjective realities associated with the education of Pasifika in Aotearoa NZ. Ka‘ili et al.’s (2017) time-space socio-temporal and socio-spatial propositions within *tā-vā* embraces the view that knowledge and learning for Indigenous Pacific people prioritises a “look back, to look forward” approach, emphasising the relevance of simultaneous relational negotiations of knowing-being-seeing-feeling-doing. In this paper, as well as through other co-published papers, we define post-covid as a dynamic and fluid space of possibilities that enable the inseparability of our past-present-future becoming, manifested and embodied by Indigenous Pacific communities through the mutuality of knowing-being-seeing-feeling-doing (re)presentations across spaces and places of education and socialisation in Oceania (Fa'avae et al., 2022).

Pacific peoples’ arrival in the 1950s and 1960s

Pacific people first arrived in numbers into Aotearoa NZ during the 1950s and 1960s. The expansion of the manufacturing and services sectors of the nation’s economy in the 50s and 60s “very rapidly exhausted the available supplies of local labour ... [searching] for new labour to [Aotearoa NZ’s] territories and former territories in the Pacific” (Anae, 2020, p. 120). Thousands from Samoa, Niue, Cook Islands and other Pacific small Island nations migrated across (Anae, 2020). For Melani Anae’s parents, she and the children of other Pacific migrants were the first Aotearoa NZ-born Samoan and Aotearoa NZ-born Pacific. However, the Dawn Raids in the 1970s exposed the systemic racism within the nation and the Polynesian Panthers provided a reason for NZ-born Pacific to exercise their activism and transformative practice.

Samu, who is of Samoan and Māori heritages, is one of our forefront scholars working in the Pasifika/Pacific education field. Her doctoral thesis highlighted significant questions about who we are as Pasifika people and how we negotiate our mobile and dynamic positionalities over time being away from our ancestral homeland, being in the diaspora on Aotearoa NZ whenua, and our sense-making of becoming “citizens of the powerful, ever-changing societies we have migrated and settled into” (Samu,

2013, p. 166). As Pasifika people increase in numbers in Aotearoa NZ, their integration into the landscape is becoming evident, visible through the number of Pasifika young people today who claim multiple mixed Pasifika and non-Pasifika ethnicities (Webber et al., 2013). Developing one's Pasifika identity is not clear cut anymore. Should educators continue to focus on cultural identities discourses or intentionally move *talatalanoa* into an engagement with thought and analysis frames like intersectionality and inter-subjectivities, the interchanging thoughts and feelings that shape our Pasifika identities and citizenship responsibilities as well as sense of becoming across education in Aotearoa NZ, the moana, and globally? Within the dynamic and fluid post-covid space of possibilities, questions linked to identities are not only about markers of ethnicity, race, and gender, but should also include dimensions of cultural mixedness, pluralities, nuances, and complexities.

The visible presence of young people with Māori-Pasifika heritages is noted by our leaders. The Ministry of Pacific Peoples Aupito William Sio named Generation 6Bs (Gen6Bs) to describe Aotearoa NZ-born Pasifika young as "...people who are brown, obviously, but they're brainy, they're beautiful and bicultural. They're bilingual, and they're bold" (Vaka'uta, 2021, 1.24). Koro Vaka'uta, a Radio New Zealand (RNZ) Pacific journalist, himself of Māori and Tongan heritages describes the emerging group as a brown, bi-cultural generation changing the face of New Zealand. During the interview, Minister Sio told Vaka'uta, two-thirds of NZ-born Pasifika now had Māori whakapapa as well. Will this wave-like shift in Māori-Pasifika intersectionality aid in more Māori scholars affirming their affinity to being Pacific, a position Te Punga Somerville (2012) claims. My view is that Gen6Bs will be able to provide more clarity in ways to navigate their sense of connections as Māori and as Pacific in Pasifika education and Oceania in general.

The Pacific peoples' ethnicity grouping is becoming more diverse since I was a high school student in the late 1990s. The population of Pacific peoples in Aotearoa NZ continues to increase over time. I have opted to include the New Zealand Māori 2018 census population data, 775,836 (Polynesia), rather than in table 1 (see Stats NZ, n.d.). Based on the 2018 census data (Stats NZ, n.d.), the individual breakdown of each individual ethnic group within the Pacific peoples group were noted at: 80,532 (Cook Islands Māori), 19,722 (Fijian), 429 (Hawaiian), 795 (Indigenous Australian), 3,225 (Kiribati), 135 (Nauruan), 30,867 (Niuean), 990 (Ni Vanuatu), 1,131 (Papua New Guinean), 216 (Pitcairn Islander), 981 (Rotuman), 182,721 (Samoan), 777 (Solomon Islander), 1,737 (Tahitian), 8,676 (Tokelauan), 82,389 (Tongan), 4,653 (Tuvaluan), and 2,724 (Pacific peoples, not further defined).

Table 1. Pacific Peoples Ethnic Groupings Based on Aotearoa-NZ 2018 Census Data

ETHNICITY	POPULATION	GEOGRAPHICAL REGION IN OCEANIA
COOK ISLANDS MĀORI	80,532	Polynesia
FIJIAN	19,722	Melanesia
HAWAIIAN	429	Polynesia
INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN	795	Australasia
KIRIBATI	3,225	Micronesia
NAURUAN	135	Micronesia
NIUEAN	30,867	Polynesia
NI VANUATU	990	Melanesia
PAPUA NEW GUINEAN	1,131	Melanesia
PITCAIRN ISLANDER	216	Polynesia

ROTUMAN	981	Melanesia
SAMOAN	182,721	Polynesia
SOLOMON ISLANDER	777	Melanesia
TAHITIAN	1,737	Polynesia
TOKELAUAN	8,676	Polynesia
TONGAN	82,389	Polynesia
TUVALUAN	4,653	Polynesia
PACIFIC PEOPLES, NOT FURTHER DEFINED	2,724	N/A

The predominant voices in Pasifika education largely reflect those from Samoa and Tonga, the two Pacific ethnic groups with the most population in the nation (see Table 1). This can have implications on decision-making and question the impact of effective policy and practices that truly seek to serve our Pasifika/Pacific communities.

Rubin and I wrote a recent paper unpacking the curriculum content in a literacy paper within a university-based Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme (see Rubin & Fa'avae, 2022). *Tapasā* (MoE, 2018) is a policy document that addresses the cultural competencies of teachers of Pasifika learners. The inter-cultural space is highlighted in terms of the ways in which teachers bring their own cultural understandings to light and connect with the cultural understandings of Pasifika learners via their classroom pedagogical practices. Pacific students' success as Pacific is a key outcome of the *Tapasā* policy (Dyck, 2021). Because a majority of the teaching profession are of European origin and the education system itself is “constructed on a European-origin model, teacher education relevant to Pasifika education takes place in an inter-cultural space” (Reynolds, 2019, p. 22), the art of teaching Pasifika/Pacific learners appears complex and challenging.

The 2020–2030 Action Plan for Pacific Education (APPE) deliberately looks to shift practices within the education system and structure (MoE, 2020). Despite the presence of the *Tapasā* policy which addresses teachers' cultural capabilities within teaching and learning in the classroom, schools and school leaders themselves ultimately choose what counts and whether it matters, particularly if their Pasifika student population is very low. My school practicum visits of ITE students have highlighted the diverse ways in which schools and teachers themselves respond to ethnic cultures—some are overt, others subtle, some totally ignore. Although my visits during practicum reflect only a few schools in Auckland and Waikato, I am ultimately concerned because it is the same way I felt about Aotearoa NZ's schooling system prior to our move to work in Tonga and the wider Pacific from 2014–2020. Of primary concern is that the formal schooling structures/architectures and teaching and learning spaces continue to carry across and perpetuate colonial and racialised knowledge, tendencies, processes, ideals, practices, and ways that are harmful and unsafe for Māori and Pasifika, at the same time antithetical and unbalanced with the deep ethical and relational ideals, ways and worldviews of Indigenous Pacific (MoE, 2020).

Why talatalanoa?

Talatalanoa is a valued cultural practice in parts of the Moana (Oceania). As a derivative of the *talanoa* methodology and method (Vaioloti, 2006), *talatalanoa* provides a method to capturing “ongoing conversations, to discuss, to dialogue” (Ka'ili, 2017, p. 159) in higher education. As an oral tradition, *talatalanoa* is a practice linked to engaging in stories, storying, and storytelling—of concerns, issues,

inspiration as well as motivation—the things that matter to individuals and their communities. The inspirations, motivations and concerns I story and share in this paper are part of an ongoing *talatalanoa* with my Pasifika colleagues, educators and researchers with heritage links to Aotearoa NZ's Realm Nations—Tereapii Solomon (Cook Islands), 'Ioane Aleke-Fa'avae (Niue), and Lealofi Kupa (Tokelau) (Fa'avae & Fonua, 2020). Our *talatalanoa* within the post-covid intellectual space is the active storying and sharing of their voices that can inspire, empower and transform ethnically specific Cook Islands, Niuean and Tokelauan ways of knowing–being–seeing–feeling–doing (Fa'avae et al., 2022).

One word can have multiple meanings in Pacific languages. There are root words in the Tongan vernacular that carry multiple meanings when coupled with other words (Ka'ili, 2017; Manu'atu, 2017). Such root words are significant in grounding meaningful sense-making and knowledge-generation across time, places and contexts. For instance, *loto* (inside, internal, heart, soul), *noa* (any kind of, common, ordinary, zero, unable to speak), *tala* (to tell, story), *tā* (to draw, to beat, to mark, to perform, to present, time, time marker), *vā* (connection/s, space/s between, relationships, relatings), *tu'u* (to stand, to come to a standstill, to be, to be situated, to be in existence, to arise, to come into existence), and *tuku* (to hold firm, to stop) (Churchward, 2015). There are prefixes that have been useful in my research within Pasifika/Pacific education, for example, *faka-* (prefix denoting likeness or causation), *vei-* (like the *fe-* or *fei-* prefix denoting doing habitually, doing vigorously together, doing to each other), and *fie-* (prefixed verb, to want or desire, to wish, to imagine oneself to be, to desire to be treated as) (Churchward, 2015). The root words and prefixes activate grounded meaningful sense-making and meaning-making in *lea faka-Tonga* (Churchward, 2015). When the root words and prefixes combine with other words, the meaning changes based on their noun, verb and adjective characteristics.

Talanoa–vā: Analysis of stories, storying, storytelling

The coupling of *talanoa–vā* intends to simultaneously activate the root words *tala*, *noa*, and *vā* during analysis. *Talanoa–vā* is an analytical framework deliberately developed by Pasifika/Pacific scholars seeking to do critical analysis work that does not result in others losing face. Meaningful *talanoa* (i.e., discussion, conversation, storying, storytelling) is dependent on the nature and condition of *vā* within peoples' social connections, the context/s of the interaction, and its intended purpose. Meaningful *talanoa* is governed by the assemblage and arrangement of living and non-living entities within the *vā* space, observed through the distanced or closeness in connections between people, people and place, or people and spirit. Contrastingly, unproductive *talanoa* is often a consequence of distanced or broken *vā*, expressed in the form of disharmonious relational connections i.e., *vātamaki* (see Tu'imana-Unga, in press). Māhina (2017) and Ka'ili et al. (2017) affirm the inseparability of *tā–vā* (time–space) in the shaping of relational connections and their harmonious and disharmonious forms of expression in reality (i.e., *vālelei*, *vākovi*, *vātamaki*). *Talanoa–vā* is a framework that meaningfully interrogates the conditions and nature of productive and unproductive discussions, conversations, relational connections, storying and storytelling.

In academia, the ethics of generosity and care through the spirit of *tauhi vā*, *tausi le va*, or *teu le va* (Anae, 2016; Koloto, 2017) are not always visible when academics engage and interact with each other; this includes educators and researchers of Pacific heritages. My initial *talanoa* in 2020 with Samoan scholar and mentor Tamasailau Suaalii-Sauni provoked our interest in the intentional coupling and utilising of both the cultural practice of *talanoa* and the eco-relational philosophy of *vā*, bringing to action in writing Jones and Jenkin's (2008) framing of the Indigene–coloniser working hyphen (–). *Talanoa–vā* is positioned in this paper as an Indigenous Pacific approach that explores relational inter-connections, inter-sectionality and inter-subjectivity by interrogating *vā* as a socio-spatial, socio-temporal and socio-political analytical lens and practice. Similarly, a *talanoa–vā* analysis unpacks the implications of socio-spiritual and socio-digital spaces on the ethical practice of engaging and interacting well collectively.

Stories and ways of storying are sources of knowledge and information intentionally shared, negotiated and sense-made collectively with and within the *kāinga* (extended families) and *to 'utangata* (generations). The stories (sources of information and knowledge), told through particular ways of storying (processes and practices in which the stories are shared), can result in feelings that are *ongomālie* (inspiring, hopeful) (Ka'ili, 2017). When feelings of *ongomālie* are embraced, the stories are likely to be shared and transmitted to others by the receiver, through a form/s of storytelling as (re)presentations and expressions of knowledge and information in ways that resonate with the teller.

Talatalanoa 'oku ongomālie: Inspiring and hopeful stories and ways of storying

Talatalanoa 'oku ongomālie is closely connected with conversations that are *fakaivia* (empowering and transformative), given the “waves and winds of change” as a consequence of the global pandemic. Because stories and storying can evoke *loto vā-māfana* (heart-warming feelings) ignited through the *loto* (heart, soul), they are intentionally shared with others within the collective, particularly the next generation (Ka'ili, 2017; Manu'atu, 2017). Similarly, within such heart-warming stories of resilience consist of struggles and challenges as a consequence of disharmonious relations (i.e., *vātamaki*, see Tu'imana-Unga, in press). *Talatalanoa 'oku ongomālie*, as empowering and transformative stories and ways of storying reflects the enduring ways in which Pacific individuals and communities have overcome the challenges faced during covid-19.

During my teacher training in 2006, my intention was to give back to my community in South Auckland, expecting nothing in return. It was a spiritually inspired decision. *Loto tō* (humility), *loto fiefoaki* (generosity), and *loto 'ofa* (love and care) were key to my whys within teaching. Upon reflection, thinking that way kept me going in the secondary school classroom from 2006–2013. But not all teachers at the secondary schools I had taught felt the same way. Quite often, I preferred to work with the young people in the school rather than my colleagues. Within the schooling system and structure, I learnt to find cracks within structures and processes. It was there that I was able to offer alternative solutions to problems that administration and middle management were looking for but had not thought about at the time. It was risky, and I turned to my students and the few colleagues and senior leaders who showed a willingness to try something different, for guidance and support. There was nothing to lose other than maintaining the status quo which I was not willing to continue.

Affirming and honouring *mātauranga Māori* (Māori knowledge, wisdoms, and worldviews) and *te ao Māori* (the Māori World) is a priority in higher education research and in education curriculum. The refresh of the NZC also prioritises *mātauranga Māori*. Being involved in the NZC refresh work in 2022 has given me the opportunity to learn and get a feel for the changes and share insights into Indigenous Pacific knowledge, concepts and worldviews and their meaningful connections to *mātauranga Māori* and the proposed NZC refresh and changes. The Pacific Studies shift from unit standards to a National Certificate in Educational Achievement (NCEA) achievement standards (AS) subject at levels 2 and 3 has given me hope and inspiration. Working with other Pacific Studies subject experts has inspired my appreciation of intergenerational learning across Pasifika cultural groups.

Online learning has had diverse impacts across low socio-economic communities compared to more affluent ones. During my 2021–2022 practicum visits to high schools in South Auckland, Pasifika students' attendance continues to be a major challenge for schools. In a senior history class at a predominantly Pasifika school, a colleague noted less than a third of students regularly attend. Most have to work to support their extended families. Contrastingly, my practicum visits to affluent high schools in another part of Auckland showed the opposite. Online learning and the use of digital tools and platforms during the Covid-19 context have shone a light on issues of inequitable access in low decile schools (ERO, 2021). In some schools, the responses to Covid-19 have highlighted a digital divide and a widening equity gap between low socio-economic extended families compared to families in more affluent neighbourhoods (ERO, 2021). Although laptops were provided to schools by the MoE, having

only one laptop in an extended family household with a range of school-age children plus having none or limited Wi-Fi bandwidth perpetuated challenges for Pasifika families (ERO, 2021). Being part of my church social services group, I observed our leaders' interactions with the MoE and other social and health service organisations. A recent MoE funding has called on church groups and community organisations to assist Tongan secondary students' low attendance in schools.

The socio-digital space is an inter-section in which ways of relating socially is pushed and extended beyond our in-person face-to-face norms of practice. For emerging scholars of Pasifika/Pacific heritages, Thomsen et al. (2021) share their thoughts on how community can be developed online using social media platforms. A key point they note is:

sites like Twitter offer a digital interface where routes and connections between Pacific peoples around and through our region, interrupted through colonialism and empire, can be re-established and produce real life friendships, relationship, and kinship affective ties that transfer into real life (Thomsen et al., 2021, p. 140).

For me, teaching is an art and is somewhat performative. Creative yet critical practice and knowledge sharing in ITE has confronted the validity and usefulness of the socio-digital space and my inept capacity to operationalise appropriate digital tools in online and lecture-room teaching. Turning to digital *vā* helped me prioritise the ways of learning that mattered to the young adults in my ITE classes. Despite the availability of tools within my institution, I also utilised tools shared by my 12-year-old son as part of his online learning at our local high school. Coggle, a user-friendly collaborative mind map tool, was used to capture undergraduate students' understanding of their academic readings. Mentimeter was another online programme adopted to make my presentations and *talatalanoa* more interactive and visually pleasing.

Within the post-covid context, the e-talanoa in the digital *va* space is an approach worthy of utilisation, interrogation and unpacking (Fa'avae et al., 2022; Thomsen et al., 2021). Negotiating the ways in which we grapple with our creative pedagogies online requires risk taking and *talanoa-vā* is a framework that can be utilised as a meaningful frame of analysis. Rather than be a classroom teacher who focuses more on the strict and monotonous application of tasks and activities without the willingness to try something different, something I saw teachers focusing more on, I wanted to find a balance between the creative heart-driven and critical academic practices, skills and processes that evoked and centred on *vā-māfana* (heart-warming) plus *ongomālie* (feeling inspired and hopeful). Finding a balanced pedagogical flair required risk taking and the heavy lifting of young hearts so that they too beat with your own. Convincing young minds and hearts forced me to up my game. This led me back into postgraduate studies.

My services and responsibilities to Pasifika/Pacific education spans beyond Aotearoa NZ's borders into and across the Moana (Oceania, ocean). The critique of the colonial past being an era tainted by the outsiders' gaze researching the Pacific region, a role held by colonisers outside of local communities, have somewhat shifted. The gaze into and of the Pacific is now led by those who are "inside/within" the local communities themselves, trained in dominant Western research traditions within higher education (Fa'avae, 2018; Thomsen et al., 2021). The responsibilities Pasifika/Pacific educators and researchers hold today can be quite heavy, culturally taxing, yet inspiring and fulfilling. Some opt to leave higher education (Naepi, 2019) when generosity and care are not evident in the *tauhi vā* or *teu le va* spaces of relating and connecting. Others find ways to build and strengthen their networks, knowledge and skills to alleviate the challenges within their own university faculties and tertiary institutions (Baice et al., 2021).

Talatalanoa 'oku fakaivia: To empower and transform, feel empowered and transformed

Fakaivia means to empower and transform, and to feel empowered and transformed given the changes and impacts as a result of today's changing society. After returning from six years serving through the University of the South Pacific's (USP) Institute of Education (IOE) in the Pacific region, the ITE space within universities still looks and feels the same. Pasifika/Pacific scholars holding tenure academic positions are very few in number (Naepi, 2019). Why are there very few Pasifika/Pacific associate professors and professors in higher education let alone the education field? If equity and access are prioritised by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), why are Pasifika still absent from academic and leadership positions in ITE? These concerns continue to fuel and *fakaivia* (empower and transform) my work.

What makes Pasifika/Pacific education a critical and transformative disciplinary field? I raise this question because despite the various PEP plans, the successful outcomes of Pasifika/Pacific students in Aotearoa NZ's education system remains a strategic priority for the MoE. The APPE policy (MoE, 2020) was developed to strategically disrupt the education system, structural architectures and processes, as well teaching and learning spaces that have maintained practices that undervalue and undermine Pasifika/Pacific peoples' worldviews. Si'ilata et al (2017) and Samu (2020) identified four progressive phases in which the MoE have led and contributed to the development of Pasifika/Pacific education and the critical interpretation of students' educational outcomes: (1) grappling with high disparities, (2) responding to diversity, (3) embedding system development, and (4) deeper engagement. For Samu (2020), phase four requires us to engage deeply with APPE, the Tapasā cultural competencies framework for teachers of Pacific learners (MoE, 2018), and how Pasifika/Pacific education responds and critiques racism and its direct and indirect implications on teaching and learning practices. The four phases noted above need to always be front-of-mind in our development of curriculum, pedagogy, and research and deliberately utilised in advancing the critical and transformative nature and potentialities of the Pasifika/Pacific education disciplinary field in Aotearoa NZ's sectors of education.

Over 30 years ago Alison Jones' (1991) seminal research "At School I've Got a Chance" explored the inequalities in schooling and the ways in which schooling sites valued, rewarded and (re)produced the cultural and social capital of Pacific and Pākehā girls. Jones found that in the urban school context, schools reproduced the cultural capital of the *palangi* (people with European heritage in Tongan) students in the form of academic qualifications and jobs that were paid a lot more. The cultural capital of Pasifika girls, however, was valued differently and did not have the same currency as that of their *palangi* counterparts. In today's post-covid context, the issue of the school site producing and (re)producing inequities based on ethnicity, social class, socio-economic status still exists but may look, sound and feel different. Although Jones' (1991) findings are not unpacked in detail here, my intention is to (re)turn our thinking to the relevance of cultural capital concerns, given the variability, fluidity and mixed-ness of Pasifika/Pacific cultural, economic and social capital. The push to disrupt and shift our education system requires research and analysis that build on Jones' (1991) work to capture the kinds of cultural capital that are taking form and shape within post-covid contexts of teaching and learning.

Si'ilata et al (2017) argue, there is a way in which the funds of knowledge from home can work alongside the dominant practices and processes within schooling. The drive to matter Pasifika languages in Aotearoa NZ education has been an ongoing battle by communities, educators and leaders (McCaffery & McFall-McCaffery, 2010). The Pasifika ECE sector was fundamental in driving the revival of Indigenous Pacific languages (McCaffery & McFall-McCaffery, 2010). However, the ECE programmes at the University of Auckland and University of Waikato are no longer as big as they used to be. The drop in the student numbers enrolled in ECE have resulted in institutions letting go of a number of Pasifika staff. For masters and doctoral students engaged in Pasifika/Pacific-related research, not having

access to supervisors that have both Pasifika/Pacific cultural and research knowledge and expertise can impact their supervision experience and success in higher education.

Si'ilata developed the Va'atele Framework to show Pasifika learners' journey through the Aotearoa NZ education system, making specific links to additive bilingualism and language learning (Si'ilata et al., 2017). Despite the presence of Pasifika bilingual language tools, the Education Review Office (ERO) noted schools chose to focus more on the "English language to prepare learners for latter years of schooling" (cited in May, 2019, p. 40). There are a number of primary schools with a high population of Pasifika/Pacific people that offer Pasifika bi-lingual units. In high schools, NCEA Cook Islands Māori, Samoan and *lea faka-Tonga* are offered as achievement standards (AS) and can be counted towards University Entrance (UE). Alongside Pacific Studies, the Gagana Tokelau and Vagahau Niue will soon be added to NCEA AS, the government's commitment to its Realm Nations and Pacific people's population (Hipkins, 2021).

Covid amnesia is a phrase used to describe people's use of the global pandemic as a diversion from the deeply embedded issues that continue to fester in our Aotearoa NZ society. Issues linked to structural and systemic racism (both the overt and subtle), for instance, and the social and economic inequities that impact particular schools and minority communities (MacDonald & Kidman, 2021). I first came across covid amnesia within the context of an education *talatalanoa* associated with work around the refresh of the NZC. Covid amnesia can relate to the ways people use the global pandemic and associated national lockdowns as an excuse, an aversion and distraction from the existing inequitable practices, structures and processes in Aotearoa NZ. This led me to ask: what role does education serve Pacific learners? Do they still have a chance at school? How has Covid-19 compounded or intensified the learning of Pacific learners who were already on the back foot in western formal schooling in the nation?

The criticality of Pasifika/Pacific education as a critical disciplinary field is dependent on a range of questions. I outline four questions for us to continue our (re)thinking and collaborative *talatalanoa* within our places of employment. First, as identified in the 2001-2006 PEP, is the field of Pasifika or Pacific education today doing its job to help "reduce the disparities and improving the well-being of Pacific peoples in the New Zealand education system[?]" (MoE, 2001, cited in Samu, 2013, p. 138). Second, is the academic pathway made clear, obvious and transparent to Pasifika/Pacific researchers/educators/scholars coming through? Third, are the Pasifika/Pacific cultural research and pedagogical approaches disseminated widely across institutions and is it advancing knowledge generation inter-disciplinarily within the post-covid for our realm nations of Cook Islands, Tokelau, and Niue? And, finally, what is the role and responsibility relational approaches like *talanoa-vā* and Indigeno-centric conceptualisations of education and teaching and learning in Aotearoa NZ?

Conclusion

The thematic currency of education in today's post-covid reality is contentious and linked to both uncertainty as well as hope. The trajectory of Pasifika/Pacific education as a critical disciplinary field is dependent on the creative Indigenous Pacific approaches and concepts utilised within education research and analysis. The questions raised in this group *talatalanoa* is a response to the "waves and winds of change", the contextual issues and concerns as a consequence of the global pandemic and today's changing society and education context. The *talatalanoa* is an ongoing conversation with my colleagues from the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau, which are unpacked further in their individual papers within this *Waikato Journal of Education (WJE)* volume. Our brief conversations and interactions have been dutiful, providing an opportunity for each to ground and share their stories of hope, motivation and concerns. Being open about the state of Pasifika/Pacific education is an opportunity to (re)think anew possible solutions to the problematic conditions within schooling that is required to shift the system in ways that activate *ongomālie* (inspiration, hope), *loto vā-māfana* (heart-warming) and *fakaivia* (empowering and transformative).

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