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## A vaka journey in Pacific education: Become an academic mentor

**Cherie Chu**

Victoria University of Wellington

### Abstract

*Education for Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand is a contentious issue and for a long time has focused on the negative experiences Pacific people face in school and in higher education. The purpose of this article is to detail the key experiences I have endured as a Pacific student and academic, and the observations I have made of them. The nature and purpose of Pacific education remains full of challenges, but I contend that it is also a space where younger Pacific peoples can mark their ground if supported well. As part of the vaka journey through this article, I provide a brief description of some of the educational achievement issues for Pacific education. Then I explore my interest in the topic of leadership, the rationale for the personal mentoring journey I outline. Finally, I propose a clearer understanding of how educators can more fully develop mentors and mentoring initiatives for Pacific students that will lead them to more successful engagement in higher education institutions in New Zealand.*

### Keywords

Leadership, mentoring, Pacific education

### Introduction: The vaka begins its journey

Historically and still at the time of writing, the umbrella term ‘Pacific’ has been used by the New Zealand government to describe the ethnic makeup of people migrating from the Pacific Islands to Aotearoa New Zealand (Cook, Didham & Khajawa, 2001). The use of the term has often led to broad generalisations about a group of people who are extremely diverse. The university students that I teach often ask which term they should use when referring to Pacific people? My answer usually rests on the importance of their rationale for the selected term, rather than finding the ‘correct’ term to be used. One document that has been used by students and academics extensively, known as the Pasifika Education Research Guidelines (Anae, Coxon, Wendt-Samu & Finau, 2002), was developed for the Ministry of Education in Aotearoa New Zealand, and provides one definition of Pacific peoples. At the time of development, it made reference to the six Pacific nations of Samoa, Tonga, Niue, Cook Islands, Tokelau and Fiji. In this context, ‘Pacific people’ is exclusive of Māori and in the broadest sense covers peoples from the Island Nations in the South Pacific, and in its narrowest sense, Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand. The research guidelines go on to clarify the issue of Pacific people



as being a heterogeneous group with different inter and intra-ethnic variations in the cultures. Variations include New Zealand-born/raised, island-born/raised Pacific people and being recognised as diverse groups. Cognisant of the demographic changes of the Pacific peoples' population and as a teacher of Pacific education courses at a university, I use the term 'Pacific', rather than 'Pacific Island' as not every Pacific person comes from a Pacific Island. Some people come from atolls (for example, Marshall Islands) or mainland countries such as Papua New Guinea. The term 'Pacific people' has wide acceptance as seen in the Inventory of Pacific Research at Victoria University of Wellington 1999-2005 (Davidson-Toumu'a, Teaiwa, Asmar, & Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2008). The inventory uses 'Pacific' to mean people who can "trace descent to and/or are citizens of any of the territories commonly understood to be part of the Pacific (i.e., Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia)" (Davidson-Toumu'a, Teaiwa, Asmar, & Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2008, p. 11). For me, the term must reflect the diversity of Pacific students that come to our university to study in education and also to reflect the diversity of the wider Pacific region.

### **Pacific tertiary education: My interest**

My interest and experiences of Pacific education lie within post-compulsory forms of higher education, which has had its fair share of negative attention for Pacific learners throughout the last three decades. Some of the barriers to participation that Pacific students faced in post-compulsory education were highlighted by AC Nielsen in 1997. These included:

- The high cost of post-compulsory education and training;
- unrealistic cultural demands from families;
- little or no access to private study areas or private study opportunities in extended families;
- english literacy;
- lack of assertion by some cultures;
- lack of culturally familiar courses;
- Lack of role models and mentors (AC Nielsen, 1997, p. 27).

More recently Chu, Samala Abella and Paurini (2013) have identified three broad themes and sub-themes as factors that would benefit Pacific students in tertiary settings namely:

1. Appreciative pedagogy that includes family support in education, personal commitment to success and the learning village at the institution.
2. Teaching and learning relationships exhibited through respectful and nurturing relationships with students; recognition of cultural identity, values and aspiration; the creation of Pacific physical spaces; incorporation of students' learning needs; insistence on high standards; opportunities for students to pursue higher education; learning relationships between students and; mentorship as a learning relationship.
3. Institutional commitment demonstrated by a firm level of institutional support, active institutional engagement with the Pacific community, strong and supportive leadership and significant Pacific role models.

However, while these points need to be addressed, central to the educational success of students is the connection and communication between the student, the community and the institution. I develop this point in this article using the example of my own journey as evidence for this claim.

### **My mentoring and leadership development journey: My own story**

My initial interest in the topic of leadership and mentoring developed over a number of years, firstly as an undergraduate student, then as a postgraduate student and then progressing through to an

academic position at the university. During my time as an undergraduate student, I had not thought of myself as a leader. It was not until 2003 when I was termed a leader that I began to think seriously about what had led me to that point, and why. Was I ready to be a leader and accept the challenges and commitments involved in leadership? Denning (2007) argues that becoming a leader can be disruptive, involving stressful new responsibilities, venturing into the unknown, making mistakes and learning from them. Thus, potential new leaders may have to decide 'Am I ready to tackle this challenge at this time?' On my journey, I was aware of mentoring and the benefits that could be offered to people but I had not realised the mentoring connection to leadership.

My parents came to Aotearoa New Zealand as immigrants from Faa'a Tahiti and Canton China. They married at a young age. My mother had had five children by the time she was 25 years old. My parents had very little schooling with my father only reaching standard four. My mother had never been to school. After living in Auckland for many years, my parents and my five siblings moved to Wellington where I was born several years later. My brothers and sisters had completed their school years and I was the 'baby' of the family. My schooling experience up to the intermediate years (aged 11) was the highlight of my education. However, the college years were a period of turmoil for me, as I did not enjoy the style of school I was at. It is important for me to reflect briefly on the early years of my growing up, as these years were critical to my perspectives on learning and education. For me being the youngest, learning was extremely significant as I had my parents and older brothers and sisters to learn from. This is where I learnt my culture, language, values, and beliefs that have provided me with the necessary foundations for developing other relationships.

A student at Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) since the start of my undergraduate Bachelor of Arts degree in the 1990s, I then moved through to the higher levels of postgraduate study. During my undergraduate years I did not have a high level of support from services or programmes or from individuals. There were 'pockets' of support for students generally, but the services which stretched out to groups of minority students were minimal. My own interest in the topic of mentoring stemmed from personal experience of being mentored by different individuals through the course of my tertiary study. As an undergraduate student, I struggled to focus my interest on any area of my degree. I had neither vision nor aspiration to achieve beyond the undergraduate degree. I was also unsure of my career path. All I knew was that I had ambitions to do well and I enjoyed helping other people.

After I completed my undergraduate degree, I was encouraged to embark on a one-year Honours programme. One of the academic staff encouraged me to apply for a tutor position as she considered that I would not only be suitable, but the experience would give me new skills and a range of opportunities to assist my development. I successfully obtained a tutor position, and I was very nervous and excited about taking on such a role. During this stage of my academic programme, I did not realise how significant the impact of the tutoring would be in my future. I learnt many new and valuable skills from working closely with the senior academic staff who employed me as a tutor in their courses. As I began to gain more skills, knowledge, and confidence, I was offered more roles. These were as a head tutor, course administrator, guest lecturer, and course coordinator, all of which led to further learning. Now that I look back on my experiences, the mentorship and training which was specifically given to me at this time led me to develop leadership qualities as well. In each new role, the academic staff member concerned fully encouraged and supported me. As I furthered my work experience at the school, I was also encouraged to consider furthering my postgraduate studies. I firmly believe that the experience of working within the school connected strongly with my studies.

During my time of being a tutor, I was assigned to a somewhat 'specialist' tutor position with the Pacific students, which encompassed an extension of pastoral and social responsibilities. In this position, I had the opportunity to develop good relationships with many of the Pacific students. Over the span of three years, I was able to 'get-to-know' Pacific students, their families and communities. In some ways, this was not a typical tutoring experience, in that I was able to build some solid foundations with families and communities outside of the university. With these experiences in the

postgraduate and academic world, I engaged with students from different backgrounds, not only Pacific. As I began to grow in my roles, mentoring relationships began to develop between myself and some of my students.

Reflecting back, I know that I had positive experiences of engagement and collaboration with senior staff members who played a significant role in facilitating my personal and professional development. Essentially, it was this type of experience which enabled me and taught me the power of such positive influences which have enabled me to help mentor, encourage and support those around me. People who have helped me to realise my potential have in fact played an important part in my life. From this type of mentoring, I incorporated the idea of mentoring into my work with students and other people around me.

Prior to my current position as a lecturer at VUW, I held the position of Mentoring Coordinator of Manaaki Pihipihinga. In this role, I was responsible for developing the first ever formal mentoring programme for first year Māori and Pacific students studying in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS) and the Faculty of Commerce and Administration (FCA). Along with developing a formal mentoring programme for Māori and Pacific students at VUW, tutoring and other experiences have allowed me to develop skills important in my professional and personal life. Ultimately, these experiences led to my current position as an emerging academic. Individuals who were my mentors and/or role models also passed on ideas about how to support students in their studies and personal development. Within my current role as a lecturer, I have continued to be mentored by senior colleagues who have created opportunities for my development. These experiences have been beneficial not only for my professional development as an academic but also for my personal growth in confidence, self-esteem and perspective as an individual who always aspired to be a ‘better person.’

### **Leadership and mentoring development: Two stories from my own experience**

The year 2000 marked a significant change in education for the Pacific region. Three key leaders in the Pacific came together literally under an umbrella in the rain. Dr Kabini Sanga, Dr Konai Helu Thaman, and Dr ‘Ana Taufe’ulungaki were waiting for the rain to stop, and, as they huddled under the shelter of the umbrella in the Wellington wind, they came to a point where they decided that it was time for some dynamic changes in Pacific education. As a result of the umbrella discussion, the three leaders brought together other key leaders and educators, Pacific and Māori, in a colloquium to begin the rethinking of Pacific education. From the colloquium, participants began to identify the issues, challenges, needs and areas of attention for their Pacific countries. Papers were produced and edited into a book, the *Tree of Opportunity* (Pene, Taufe’ulungaki & Benson, 2002). The Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative (RPEI) can be identified as a significant and positive turning point for Pacific education in the Pacific region. The official government aid development agency of New Zealand (NZAID) became the principal funding organisation for the initiative. RPEI initially began mobilising and engaging with an initiative in Vanuatu. I became connected to this group.

I recall that at one meeting of Pacific education leaders, I was asked by my mentor to sit in and listen to the discussion. The group had been called together during the Rethinking Education Aid Conference (2003) in Nadi, Fiji. I listened to the discussions which included one of the women leaders asking what would happen to her position when she retired. Another leader directly told her that she should be taking time to mentor someone younger to ensure that the good work would be continued. The discussions on the concerns for mentoring of younger people and leadership development served as a call for attention to these areas. As I listened further to the leaders’ discussion, it was clear that many of them were concerned that there was a gap in the mentorship of younger people and students into positions of leadership. Across the Pacific region, not one of the leaders was in the process of mentoring or guiding or encouraging young people to aspire to be leaders. My academic mentor asked the other leaders why they had not invited their students to the conference. This question furthered my interest in the area of mentoring. Why was mentoring of younger people a priority concern for the leaders in Pacific education? What were the reasons for

this? What strategies could be put in place to ensure mentoring for younger people took place? What was meant by mentoring for leadership? And so, began the birth of the topic.

The Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative (RPEI) was formally initiated and developed in 2001 by a group of Pacific educators and leaders who wanted to see some significant changes occur in education for Pacific Island countries (Taufe'ulungaki, 2002). A few years later, RPEI had the 'Pacific people for Pacific people' added onto it, so that it became RPEIPP. The main focus of RPEIPP was for Pacific peoples to rethink education in, and for their own, communities. Various activities initiated by RPEIPP have been directed at strengthening leadership development within the Pacific Islands. However, as Sanga, Niroa and Teaero, (2003) reported in their evaluation of RPEI, Pacific education leadership was an area which still needed more attention. While there had been some positive developments with younger Pacific people being involved in RPEI activities, there remained the need for more development and training of younger Pacific leaders. As a result of the attention to leadership, the vision was developed that '1000 New Generation Pacific leaders will be developed by 2015'. Pue (2005) points out that a vision can be viewed as a goal that people can strive for. Specific strategies and initiatives are then positioned with the support and agreement of people in order to meet this vision or goal. At a symposium in Suva, Fiji (May 12-14, 2008) entitled *Rethinking the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative by Pacific for Pacific People*, it was clear that leadership development was happening and was highly successful because of the approach and understanding engendered (Johansson Fua, 2008).

## **Mentoring one-to-one**

The influence of the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative had a major impact on my development and the philosophical underpinnings led me to develop into a mentor with my Pacific students. The one-to-one mentoring relationships provide key learnings and principles that helped to build strong learning relationships. As a mentor these learnings and principles help me to better understand mentoring and what it can be for Pacific people. These learnings include the fact that transcending diversity is a skill and that individual relationships need to be consistently strong.

## **Transcending diversity is a skill**

When the focus is on developing strong relationships, and there is a high level of trust and respect from mentor to student, anything is possible. By this I mean that cultural boundaries can be navigated, gender differences put aside and age is not an issue. As a mentor, I have discovered that being able to transcend diversity is a skill and requires an in-depth understanding of an individual's background and knowledge. The following story taken from a past experience is outlined below as an example (pseudonym used).

Eti was a student from Bougainville, Papua New Guinea (PNG). He had come to VUW to study for his Masters of Education degree. Eti had secured a New Zealand Aid (NZ Aid) scholarship for two years and his wife and son joined him in Wellington. Eti was enrolled in Dr Sanga's Master's classes and began to form a relationship with him. My office was adjacent to Dr Sanga's office and I noticed Eti would quietly come by and quietly leave at various times of the day. One day as he was creeping up the stairs passed my office, I heard him ask Eti to please come in and meet Cherie. I noticed that Eti was somewhat shy and did not say very much. He preferred to nod his head in response. I had not had too much experience in relating to Melanesian men before, aside from what Dr Sanga had explained to me in terms of Melanesian culture, but I was keen to get to know Eti further. Dr Sanga explained that there were distinct separations between Melanesian men and women, depending on their roles. Over time, Eti and I began to talk more and share some coffee breaks together. Eti opened up as a student and before long we became good friends. We shared a common interest in leadership development, as well as being connected to

other students who shared the same interest. The same Eti who used to creep passed my office without making a sound had changed and was sitting in my office having a cup of coffee. During his two years in Wellington, we shared a mentoring journey by attending conferences, being in the Leadership Cluster and Leadership Development Programme, sharing our visions of leadership and being engaged in mentoring initiatives together. The lesson of this story, is this: cultural boundaries that are in place should be recognised and supported. It is also possible to build a solid mentoring relationship full of strong values such as respect, integrity, trust and honesty.

As a Masters student, Eti had never presented his research work to an audience beyond his class. But in seeing the potential in him and in the value of his work, there was an opportunity to present to New Zealand and international educators at an annual educational research conference. By nature, Eti was a softly-spoken and shy Papua New Guinean man who preferred to remain as the ‘reluctant leader’. This was a term he used himself. His preference was to remain the observer and be quiet in large group situations. Eti’s mother tongue was PNG pidgin, thus English was his second language. However, he was encouraged by his mentor to write up an abstract and submit it to the conference committee. Eti’s abstract was accepted and he was scheduled to make a 40-minute presentation. The conference was a plane ride away from Wellington where he was residing. He had to make his own way to his accommodation and spend a night away on his own before his mentors arrived. This might seem an easy task for many people, but it is not so when everything appears relatively foreign and different from your own culture. It was an entirely new experience for Eti and a challenging one as he was missing the company of his wife and son. Prior to his conference presentation, Eti had been mentored with careful preparation for his presentation and had presented to other students in his class. I believe that the experience of presenting to his peers helped Eti to establish the initial skills and confidence required to present to a bigger audience.

When it came to the day of the conference, Eti expressed how nervous he was but well prepared for his presentation. I observed that a diverse range of people were filling the room. Eti had loaded up his power point presentation, and he was all set to go. Eti delivered an outstanding presentation. He displayed confidence and a high level of proficiency on his research topic. Watching him get into his presentation with enthusiasm was heart-warming and a proud moment for his mentors. The student from Papua New Guinea, who once called himself the ‘reluctant leader’, was now the leader who had developed and was in the front of people.

Throughout this story, his mentors provided positive encouragement to keep motivating Eti. Every time he was negative in his thinking about his presentation, we kept reinforcing his key strengths and abilities, focusing on his knowledge. This story shows that providing a specific opportunity which the student has not encountered before can be a beneficial and effective learning experience that brings out the best in a protégé. Identifying the potential of the protégé is important and this comes with an appreciation of their knowledge, skills and capabilities. Eventually, Eti returned to PNG with his family and we constantly keep in touch through e-mail and by telephone. We still share the same leadership passion, and aspirations. While we may not see each other, our relationship has remained strong and connected over thousands of miles of ocean.

### Individual relationships need to be consistently strong

One of my key learnings was that, in mentoring for leadership, individual relationships needed to be consistently strong. I came into contact with many students all year round. Some perceived me just as a lecturer and so we never developed much more than a lecturer-student relationship. In this formal

lecturer-student relationship, I have been the teacher and the student has been the learner. This is the way the university has traditionally set up lecturer-student relationships. With many Pacific students however, I have managed to develop close relationships beyond the formal lecturer-student process. I use the example of a young man, who I became connected with over a period of six years at the university, to illustrate the need to build strong, individual relationships. (Pseudonym used).

I first met Fetu as a young student who came into my tutorial group. He had transferred from Auckland with his family. As the tutorial classes progressed over the weeks, I noticed that Fetu attended all of the classes and was a quiet student. He successfully completed all of the assignments required for the course and in the following years, Fetu enrolled in my courses. As a lecturer, I observed students' progress in class. In particular, I became concerned with some of the Pacific students' progress. I noticed that Fetu and his friend consistently made it to lectures and were attentive during the lecture hours. While I tried to talk to Fetu after class, he was often shy and quiet. He did not say much to me. This quietness changed one day when Fetu came to see me in the office. He wanted to talk about his future options for study upon completion of his undergraduate degree. The conversation was a turning point for Fetu and me. As we talked, we shared parts of our lives with one another and laughed over jokes together. From this point on, Fetu regularly visited my office to talk about his studies, ask for advice or to have a coffee.

Fetu and I developed a relationship where he sought my advice and sometimes used my office space to physically rest. When he completed his undergraduate degree, he was keen to pursue postgraduate study and as he took on these studies our relationship grew stronger. Fetu talked to me about any problems or challenges he faced or asked for assistance with his coursework. I introduced Fetu to various opportunities. He attended the Pacific Students' Leadership Development Programme, and he was a tutor in the education courses I coordinated. He also attended conferences at other New Zealand universities with me and other students. It was clear that with every new experience, Fetu grew more confident and was able to speak out in front of large audiences, for instance. Fetu had changed over the six years I got to know him. The change was positive, and while he had started off by being the shy and quiet student who sat in the back row of the lecture room, he had become a leader and a mentor of others. He had the ability to mobilise the youth in his church. In his tutoring role, he spent hours outside the classes helping Pacific students who were struggling with essay writing. Fetu took the initiative to apply for part-time work at another university. He was successful with his job application and secured the role. From a mentor's perspective this was pleasing to observe, as I could see that Fetu had developed his self-confidence to an extent where he could further his career and education.

### **Discussion: Further thoughts from my own experience**

I have used the stories of Eti and Fetu as examples of development that can occur from strong mentoring relationships. Other students I have mentored have had both different and similar experiences during, and as a result of, the mentoring relationship. Many of the students I have mentored have become tutors at the university. This has allowed me the opportunity to guide and facilitate their growth and thus the relationships have developed further. In the remainder of this article, I briefly touch on other mentoring-related points that have emerged from my practice in this area.

My experience has shown that building a relationship based on solid foundations of respect for one another underpins the success of the mentoring process. However, to build this solid relationship means that it will take a lot of time. This time cannot be confined to a number of hours, days, weeks,

months, or even years. It will take as long as it takes for two individuals or more to build and maintain a strong relationship. Sanga and Walker (2005), contend that leadership is a relationship. Relationships of influence are created by giving time and investing energy in other people. Skills need to be developed in communication and conflict resolution. Furthermore, for relationships to develop there should be community cultures that support common purposes and the common good. Traditionally, the university system has not supported community cultures for Pacific students well, but a mentor within the academy can create a community culture for the students. There may be few resources or physical spaces available outside a formal mentoring programme like *Manaaki Pihipihinga*, but I have not allowed these challenges to prevent me from focusing on building relationships with Pacific students. A mentor makes the effort to connect with people and is ready to empower them by bringing out the valued knowledge and skills they have.

From the time I meet many of my students I ensure that I connect to them in some way, which often results in their desire to be in my classes over a long period of time. This is further encouraged by me being approachable and familiar to the Pacific students. This is necessary because of the retention issues in the university where Pacific students (and Māori students) are more likely than other groups of students to drop out. Building a strong relationship involves making a commitment to your protégé. It is important that mentors let them know they are there for them and that they will help support them. From a mentor's perspective, being committed to people changes your priorities and actions. For myself, it gives more purpose to my being an educator in a university. Believing in your protégé is part of building a relationship. It is the mentor's responsibility to establish trust and foster hope in the protégé. Further, a mentor should ideally be accessible, especially when the mentoring relationship first starts. It requires face-to-face interactions. As protégés begin to develop confidence in themselves and in the relationship, they will require less personal contact. The story of *Eti* exemplifies this point.

In a mentoring relationship, the mentor does not expect anything in return. Helping a protégé and seeing good things happen as a result should be the return a mentor expects. As a relationship evolves, the mentor provides opportunities for the protégé to flourish. A mentor nurtures them and they become strengthened. For instance, giving students tutoring roles and guest lecturer experiences helped many of the Pacific students to focus on their communication skills and develop their self-confidence. Building a relationship is about being a life-enhancer (Maxwell & Dornan, 1997). Mentoring involves helping people reach their highest potential.

Pielstick (2000) states that authentic leadership is concerned with high-quality relationships that are shared, two-way, collaborative, and collegial. It has been evident to me, that building a relationship has been an on-going process. The process has been concerned with learning about one another, what drives an individual, what constitutes an individual's beliefs and values. The building of the relationship has extended beyond the university context. Being engaged in an individual's life has led to being involved in activities outside the university. Getting to know family members has been important in building relationships. Family members have become involved in understanding mentoring and leadership. Many of the students' parents have placed trust in me as a mentor to 'look after' their son or daughter while they are at university. This has also allowed families to become connected to the university and better understand the implications and expectations of studying for a degree. For most Pacific communities, life remains centered and structured around the family unit. Most often, the family unit has involved members of the extended family such as aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins. Building a mentoring relationship means that the relationship does not solely rest with the individual; it must also encompass their family. Usually, this is non-negotiable. Pacific students have identified that the family is the most significant form of support for them. Those who are interested in developing Pacific students must first understand their family collective. This is considerably different from other forms of mentoring in organisations where a senior colleague mentors a junior colleague in a purely professional sense and the relationship stops there. In the

development of a mentoring relationship, the Pacific student's life and influencing factors must be considered, recognised and integrated into the relationship.

Alongside the importance of the family unit in a student's life, is the institution of the church. Understanding the meaning and significance of the church community and culture is important. Where the students show a keen interest in leadership development at the university, they are more likely to have a significant leadership role in their church and/or their community. Further to understanding commitments to the church, the church also encourages specific values in the lives of the students and their families.

Developing an appreciation and understanding of the different churches and religions that influenced the students' lives helped my relationships to develop. Understanding the meaning of these different contexts significantly facilitates the building of a mentoring relationship, because of the insight it gives. Zachary (2000) supports this point and states that contexts help people to understand the values that drive behaviour and emotions. Since mentoring relationships occur across contexts such as the university, church, sports team, and family, it is useful for the mentor to know how each context relates to another. This also supports the relationship because the student then recognises the mentor is interested in their lives. In turn, this creates trust and respect for one another. Each individual is treated as an individual. Understanding contexts means that as a mentor you begin to see the potential influences on the mentoring relationship. Being open to the influences and being constantly aware of them allowed me to develop relationships that worked.

## **Conclusion: The vaka sets sail**

Educational challenges for Pacific students have been around for a long time in Aotearoa New Zealand. Research, policies and support programmes are some of the provided solutions in advancing the achievement rates of Pacific learners. I know that my growth over 20 years as a student and academic has left me with a mandate to make sure I 'get it right' for these students. We do not want to be starting the same story again. I hope this paper will add to the discussion to provide a glimpse of a clearer understanding of how to develop mentors and mentoring initiatives for Pacific students, using what is known to work. If the desire is there to grow Pacific students to fill academic positions in this country, this study can help to inform the process. Furthermore, if universities in New Zealand and around the world are keen to develop students as leaders, then there is much to learn from this study. Students also have something to learn in that mentoring can further their academic and professional career journeys. Let the vaka be launched on its significant journey.

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