

## Editorial

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### Shifting the System: Battling uncertainties and activating agentic school leadership practices

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### Kia ora, Mālō e lelei, Talofa Lava, Kia Orana, Bula Vinaka, and warm Pacific greetings

Welcome to the special issue of *The Ethnographic Edge*, titled, *Shifting the system: Battling uncertainties and activating agentic school leadership practices*. We, the editors of this special issue, hail from a range of islands in Te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa (the Pacific). We are children of the Moana (Oceania) and, as such, we include our ancestral ties to the Moana in our affiliations at the beginning of this editorial and the articles within the special issue. Tongan scholar Tevita O Ka'ili (2017) articulates in his book, *Marking Indigeneity: The Tongan Art of Sociospatial Relations*, the sharing of ancestral kin ties allows us to bring to the forefront the various kinship branches or relations we carry. This is important as it allows us to reflect on who we are, our position, and the ancestral stories we carry with us. It also provides a means of connecting with one another and with you, the reader, through our critical and creative educational articulations. As we walk with our ancestors daily, we welcome you to this special issue and its opening editorial.

Our implementation of Pasifika/Pacific in this editorial deliberately positions the historical and educational aspirations and challenges our people have faced in their wayfinding across the diaspora as well as negotiations of their shifting identities in Aotearoa whenua (land) (Iosefo et al., 2020; Samu, 2013). Our academic leaders Si'ilata et al(2017) have advocated for the dual use of Pacific/Pasifika as identifiers because to ignore one is to ignore our migrant struggles and aspirations in Aotearoa and the wider Pacific region. Throughout the special issue, the authors utilise Pasifika and Pacific when referring to peoples that have cultural affinity to places in Te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa.

We convene this special issue from Aotearoa New Zealand, a whenua with a long colonial history that has impacted, and continues to impact Māori, its tangata whenua, the Indigenous people of this land we live on. While our intention is not to go into the long and violent history of colonisation and its impacts on tangata whenua, we wish to draw attention to the use of *Indigenous* and *Indigeneity* in this special issue because it has ethical and political ramifications on critical voice and agency. The term Indigenous can be a highly contested term, with debates focused on tensions of belonging. Although Indigeneity's contested terrain is not unpacked in detail, we foreground the complexity present in the term itself and how it is employed in this special issue. The United Nations articulates that,

Indigenous peoples are inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment. They have retained social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live. (United Nations, n.d., para. 1)

However, what we highlight here is that the terms Indigenous and Indigeneity hold meaning and histories that are contextualised in particular place-based politics and criticality. Alfred and Corntassel (2005) argue that, there are a range of differences among Indigenous peoples throughout the world and these differences are often made and remade in relationship with colonising settler societies. The term Indigenous as it is often used appears to homogenise 'native' experiences throughout the world under the umbrella of colonisation. This homogenising is a new form of colonial legacy that attempts to dismiss Indigenous experiences "through the erasure of the histories and geographies that provide the foundation for Indigenous cultural identities and sense of self" (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p. 598). We can battle this form of erasure by being purposeful in our use of the terms Indigenous and Indigeneity, by engaging critically within our settler colonial societies with debates focused on the employment of such terms. A key consideration by the editors of this special issue focuses on how we engage with/in these terms, whilst being Indigenous to 'a land' in the diaspora yet living on settler colonial whenua in Aotearoa New Zealand. These wonderings continue to impact our thinking and work within this space.

Currently, the world is still coming to grips with the ongoing impact and effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. This has been accompanied by the unsettling attacks this year by Russian forces on the Ukraine, as well as the United States of America launching attacks on the reproductive rights of its population with uteruses, by overturning the *Roe vs Wade* ruling. The special issue is grounded within this contemporary backdrop, where uncertainties continue to pervade our thinking, doing, and living in a society impacted by such upheaval. Government mandates for mask wearing and a range of Covid restrictions have been removed, which has left some in our nation fearful, while others are happy to see our nation return to 'normal'. Despite attempts to counter Covid-19 impacts, the ways in which diverse peoples and communities respond and interact have highlighted societal issues that may not have been visibly obvious to most people. Racism for one, inequitable access and distribution of resources (Kidman & Chu, 2019), issues of privilege and social class indifference across communities even within the same cities have exemplified in visibility. Yet in spite of these societal concerns, Māori and Pasifika/Pacific have intuitively taken on board their collective responsibilities and leadership, urging and disseminating information, working together to protect and nourish their whānau and wider communities. Consequently, we raise the questions: is the global pandemic the main issue or has Covid-19's presence amplified the inequalities within our society that have already existed for a long time, to surface and become more visible to us? What do the intuitive practices look like and how were they operationalised in the community?

The prefix "un-" indicates opposites and opposed meanings that force us to feel disoriented and somewhat disheartened. Uncertainties suggest the state of not knowing the certainties in life has led to our feeling uncomfortable and disoriented. Mātauranga Māori and Indigenous Pacific ancestral knowledges have always encouraged an appreciation of one's place in relation to all things in the world (Ka'ili, 2017). As such, one does not rely on one's own thinking, but on the understanding that he/she/they are part of something bigger, beyond them, and often beyond this world. Such an appreciation provides a comforting feeling, a sense of collective reliance, embracing one's presence in relation to, and in and amongst things and entities in the world (Mika, 2017). Carl Mika eloquently proposed the unknown (including uncertainties), though mysterious, have a place in settling our minds, thoughts, and hearts, collectively.

Nationally, the schooling architectures within New Zealand are challenging sites and spaces for Māori and Pacific ākonga and their whānau. The 2020-2030 action plan for Pacific education (Ministry of Education, 2020) and Tapasā (Ministry of Education, 2018) urges schools and the education system to shift and change their practices in order to enable Pacific ākonga (students) to succeed as Pacific. A growing number of Pasifika/Pacific and non-Pacific school leaders have advocated and implemented

leadership change in their own schools to disrupt the systemic and colonial architectures that condition, enable, and constrain cultural practices that resonate with Pacific knowledges (pluralities) and approaches.

Sanga et al. (2021) argued for leadership analysis and understanding that gets beneath the skin. This special issue of *The Ethnographic Edge* privileges the voices and experiences of Pasifika/Pacific education leaders across Aotearoa, and the detailed, lived experiences of their struggles and motivations to uproot the system in which their young are educated in Aotearoa. It highlights the work they are doing to not only challenge the system but to shift systems towards more equitable outcomes for Pasifika/Pacific students, families, and communities. We have extraordinary school leaders, working in our schools, who demonstrate a commitment and determination to making a difference within and across the educational sector. However, historically, academic publications have been a space reserved primarily for those within academic institutions and research spaces. Literature within our initial teacher education programmes often privileges the voices of published academics, while the voices of Pasifika/Pacific educators working on the ground in our schools and communities are relegated to the position of ‘participant’. As a means of challenging this positioning and relegation to the margins, we not only centralise Pacific leadership voices in this special issue, but deliberately interrupt forms of languaging as a means of disruption, for instance with the use of Indigenous with a capital and western with a lowercase letter. This special issue and our purposeful positioning of words is a step towards disrupting educational colonial spaces and providing a platform for Pasifika/Pacific leadership to be centralised in academic writing, and in our initial teacher education programmes.

For the editors of this special issue, our goal was to open up space and invite Pasifika/Pacific school leaders and practitioners to share their experiences and stories of leadership in their school sites and communities. Tongan educationalist Konai Helu Thaman (2002) argued that,

... any discussion about education by Pacific people is necessarily autobiographical and about culture. This is because most of us are products of our learning experiences in formal educational institutions as well as outside of theses, in our homes, communities, and countries.  
(p. 22)

The sharing of these stories was important – as educators, we know the prominence and dominance of western literature in our schools and institutions. Therefore, this was an opportunity to add our voices and stories to this space, prioritising our values and what is important to Pasifika/Pacific leaders from a strengths-based position. The addition of Pasifika/Pacific practitioner voices, from throughout Aotearoa, from the practitioners’ perspectives is powerful and works to challenge dominant (western) discourse and practices of leadership. As Nigerian novelist and poet, Chinua Achebe, articulated, “until the lions have their historians, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter” (Achebe, 1994, para.

10). This is an opportunity for Pasifika/Pacific leaders to tell their own stories in their own ways, for their own and their communities' purposes.

We have 13 articles in this special issue (Volume 6) with authors sharing their experiences across the Motu. The call for this special issue focused on Pasifika/Pacific leadership, which is also inclusive of our Māori cousins from the Pacific. We have authors with genealogical ties and whakapapa to, Aotearoa, The Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Tahiti, and parts of Europe. While as Pasifika/Pacific people we have similarities, we also have differences and nuances across our cultures within the Pasifika/Pacific. Through the writing in this issue, the authors highlight some of these differences and how culture and context shape the work they are doing.

The special issue is arranged across three key themes that were central to the work Pacific school leaders are enacting in their schools.

## **Relationality**

The special issue begins with an open manuscript authored by Jean M Uasike Allen, Melini Fasavalu, Fetau Iosefo, Toleafoa Yvonne Ualesi, David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae, and Emma Cunningham. The article titled, *Shifting the System: Collective Indigenous Approaches to Centring Pacific Voices of Leadership for our Futures*, explores the way the editors have taken an Indigenous, collective, relational approach to convening this special issue and working alongside school leaders.

In the next chapter, Matalena Tuiloma and Kay-Lee Jones have composed a positional piece titled *The equity I see is different for you and me*. This article explores the authors' experiences as wāhine educators, students, mothers, and as Māori and Pasifika navigating education in the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. They draw on pūrākau, talanoa and poetry to detail their experiences with reference to their dual/multi heritages, those of their children, and the additional responsibilities and expectations that are often placed on the shoulders of Māori and Pasifika wāhine living in the Canterbury region.

An important paper provided by brothers Joseph and Christopher Houghton titled *Walking between worlds: Critical reflections on navigating the negotiating change for Pacific within secondary schools in Aotearoa*, draws on the experiences of two Cook Islands leaders, teachers, and researchers located in the Canterbury region. Their article aims to outline Pacific values-based practices that work to disrupt western models of education and schooling within the secondary school context in the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand.

*Tauhivā Ako: Engaging Indigenous relationality in school leadership* is authored by 'Emeline Tu'imana and explores what leadership means through a Pacific lens. Employing the concepts of vā, tauhivā and

vātamaki specifically from a Tongan lens, Tu'imana explores how cultural relational approaches, both the harmonious and disharmonious relations can be employed together in the primary schooling context to shift schooling systems in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In the next paper, Samoan principal Galumalemana Pelu Leaupepetele together with Katie Batchelor focus on challenging colonial systems of domination through the development and implementation of a whole-school approach to relationship building titled *Lalaga: Connecting beyond the name*. In their article, they share the development of a whole-school approach within a South Auckland Intermediate school context, highlighting tensions along the way and how enacting an Indigenous approach to relationship development has created a strong culture of belonging at their school.

## Leadership

The opening article under the theme of leadership is titled *Telling tales on the tail*. This article by Samoan school principal Taupa'ū Melini Fasavalu focused on the journey of turning her Master's research into practice within an Intermediate school in South Auckland. The author takes us on a journey through the development of her research and how this impacted her leadership capabilities as a Samoan Intermediate school principal. Her piece challenges the deficit thinking that is often still present around our Pacific students and calls for teachers to do better.

In his paper titled *5 W's and 1H: A reflection on educational leadership through my Pasifika lens*, Bertram Fa'afetai Iosia presents a somewhat confronting account of his schooling journey as a student through to his positioning now as a tumuaki (principal). He focuses on how culturally aligned leadership has influenced his leadership style as a school principal and calls on all educators to strive towards having a positive impact on students for meaningful change.

An important contribution to this special issue is provided by Samoan-Pālangi principal Stan Tiatia in his article titled *Intentional leadership and vā critical shifts: A Samoan-Pālangi school principal's talanoa*, where he provides a descriptive account of his intentional practices, stories of his lived experiences, and contextual learnings focused on shifting systems so that Pasifika students succeed as Pasifika.

The final article in this themed section is a reflective piece by first-time principal, Bernice Mata'utia. *The journey of leadership through relationships* explores the journey of the author from her beginnings as a Samoan student living in Ōtara, South of Auckland, through to her positioning as a primary school principal. Mata'utia highlights how throughout this journey the development of relationships and other key values were central to her leadership development.

## Pacific Excellence

In their paper *Te Vaka Pokaikai – Voyage to excellence*, Tereapii Solomon and Teokotai Tarai from Tokoroa High School located in the Waikato region of the North Island, articulate the ways in which they are intentional in their planning, conversations, and actions as a means of prioritising their cultural knowledge, values, and practices to enable change. They offer insight into the creation of their cultural framework Te Vaka Pokaikai and its five key components of Orama – vision, Kite – knowledge, E Tiki’anga – connections, Piri’anga – relationships, and Te Au Irinaki’anga – values. Employing this cultural framework is intentional and positions cultural knowledge as central to educational approaches and student success.

*Effective teaching for Pasifika learners – Know me, teach me!* by Va’ai Sililoto explores the need for responsiveness and diversity in education. She explores what effective teaching for Pasifika learners looks like through a detailed policy analysis of key documents, the “Pasifika Education Plan 2013-2017”; “Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030”, “apasā Cultural Competencies framework for teachers of Pacific learners”, and “Our Code, Our Standards of Professional Responsibility and Teaching”.

Lastly, as secondary school leaders, Natalie Faitala, Sinapi Taeao, and Maria Lemalie provide a paper that connects their experiences of being part of the organising bodies for the secondary school Polyfests across Aotearoa New Zealand, in both the North Island and South Island. In their reflective piece titled *Polyfest – Polysuccess: Collaborative critical autoethnographic reflections of Pacific cultural festivals and the success of Pacific students in Aotearoa New Zealand*, the authors argue, the Polyfest experience provides a platform for Pacific students to develop and share cultural expertise, exhibit pride in their cultural identities and cultivate leadership skills. Polyfest, as a critical entity and site, can provide a lever that encourages Pacific students to engage positively with school and experience improved academic success.

The work and experiences of this collection of papers provides examples of the varied and important work that is occurring on the ground in our schools in Aotearoa. It highlights the way Pasifika/Pacific leadership is taking place, in reflective ways to challenge, shift, create, and promote systems of, and for, change. The work, as we read, is challenging, but it is also rewarding and demonstrates a pedagogy of care, collectivism, and responsibility that is at the core of the work Pasifika/Pacific educators in this volume are engaging in. It is work that is grounded in building a hopeful future with endless possibilities for generations to come.

**Mālō ‘aupito, vinaka vakalevu, fakaaue lahi, meitaki maata, fakafetai, faafetai lava.**

Jean, Melini, Emma, Yvonne, Fetui, and David

Guest Editors

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