

Collective Indigenous Approaches to Centring Pacific Voices of Leadership for our Futures

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Abstract

Education systems in western nations are often built on a long history of centralising the western canon of knowledge and colonial norms. These norms are perpetuated and reinforced via western research which amplifies the voices of the dominant, while working to silence the values, practices, and knowledges of minority groups. As a colonial nation, Aotearoa New Zealand continues to be impacted by its colonial histories, where colonial (read white) ways of being, knowing, and understanding dominate initial teacher education, schools, tertiary institutions, research, and our everyday lives. However, within education and research more generally, Indigenous and Pacific researchers and practitioners have been working hard to carve out space in institutions to challenge colonial hierarchies of knowledge and make space for Indigenous ways of being, knowing, seeing, doing, and feeling. This article contributes to the work being done by Indigenous and Pacific scholars in Aotearoa New Zealand by detailing our collective, relational approach to convening the special issue of *Shifting the System* for the *Ethnographic Edge* journal. Convening a special issue is not unique and groups of academics do it regularly across a range of academic journals and fields. However, our experiences of convening this special issue were quite different. Here we share the journey and reflect on how

our focus on privileging the often-marginalised voices of Pacific school leaders was underpinned by an Indigenous, collective approach embedded in the pedagogical practice of Indigenous Storywork. Employing collaborative critical autoethnography, we articulate the ways in which our engagement with each other and the authors within this special issue disrupted western power relations often present in interactions between ‘researchers’ within the university and ‘practitioners’ at the coalface. Furthermore, we demonstrate how engaging in relational practices builds a space that encourages the principles of respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy.

Keywords

Pacific, Collective, Voices, Leadership, Education, Indigenous Storywork

Introduction

Education systems in western nations are often built on a long history of centralising the western canon of knowledge and colonial norms. These norms are perpetuated and reinforced via western research, which amplifies the voices of the dominant, while working to silence the values, practices, and knowledges of minority groups. As Indigenous Māori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) articulated, “research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized” (p. 7). As a colonial nation, Aotearoa New Zealand continues to be impacted by its colonial histories, where colonial (read white) ways of being, knowing, and understanding dominate initial teacher education, schools, tertiary institutions, research, and our everyday lives. We can see this continuation in university settings in Aotearoa, where Indigenous knowledges, way of being, doing, and seeing are often relegated to the margins or positioned as illegitimate. As Smith (1999) explained when discussing colonising knowledges, “the globalization of knowledge and Western culture constantly reaffirms the West’s view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of ‘civilized’ knowledge” (p. 63). We can also see the dominance of the western canon in our compulsory mainstream education system. Tomlins-Jahnke (2008) argued that mainstream is a word that privileges the norm, the white way of doing things. He explained:

The term mainstream is a euphemism or code word for schools that privilege a western/Euro-centric education tradition. Mainstream schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand are controlled by those who have political, economic and cultural

power and where western values, knowledge, culture and the English language are the central focus of the school. (p. 6)

While our education system is built on colonial norms and privileges western knowledge system, there are Indigenous and Pacific researchers and practitioners who continue to carve out space in our institutions, challenging colonial hierarchies of knowledge. These leaders make space for Indigenous ways of being, knowing, seeing, doing, and feeling. For example, work by Bishop (2008) advocated for the reorientation of classrooms, as well as schools to allow for the aspirations of Māori as autonomous within the education system. This reorientation requires the “restructuring of power relationships to the point where partners can be autonomous and interact from this position rather than from one of subordination or dominance” (Bishop, 2008, p. 440). Work by Veikune et al. (2020) called for recognition of the depth and diversity of epistemological understanding present within Indigenous communities and their implications for teaching in schools within those cultural contexts. In addition, the work of Māori scholars in the education field such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Graham Hingangaroa Smith, and Melinda Webber as well as Pacific scholars such as Tanya Samu, Sereana Naepi, and Kabini Sanga have all led the way and inspired us to contribute to this important work of disrupting colonial domination and shifting systems for the betterment of all our students.

Within Aotearoa New Zealand, schools are challenging sites and spaces for Māori and Pacific students and their families. Stereotypes and deficit thinking are still entrenched in many educational spaces, and this can have a large impact on minority students, such as Māori and Pacific students (see Allen & Webber, 2019). A range of government policies and action plans have been produced to urge schools and the education system to change their practices in order to enable Pacific students to succeed as Pacific. The 2020–2030 Action Plan for Pacific Education holds a vision of Pacific learners and their families as feeling safe, being valued, and being able to achieve their educational goals (Ministry of Education, 2020). In addition, the Tapasā document aims to engage and support non-Pacific educationalists to engage in culturally responsive ways with Pacific learners (Ministry of Education, 2018). A growing number of 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 and approaches (see articles in this issue).

This article contributes to the work being done by Indigenous and Pacific scholars in Aotearoa New Zealand by detailing our collective, relational approach to convening the special issue of “Shifting the System” for the *Ethnographic Edge*. Convening a special issue is not unique and groups of academics do it regularly across a range of academic journals and fields. However, our experiences and approach to convening this special issue were quite different. We, as educators, heeded the challenge laid down by documents such as the Action Plan for Pacific Education that calls us to challenge systems to enable Pacific to succeed as themselves. This meant convening this special issue in a manner that reflected who we are as a collective of Pacific people and Pacific allies working together for the betterment of our students, communities and for the education system as a whole. Here we share the journey and reflect on how our focus on privileging the often-marginalised voices of Pacific school leaders was underpinned by an Indigenous, collective approach embedded in the pedagogical practice of Indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008). Employing talanoa, as well as collaborative critical autoethnography, we articulate the ways in which our engagement with each other and the authors within this special issue broadened our definition of what defines “Pacific” in Aotearoa New Zealand. Furthermore, our being-in-relationship together as Pacific and Pacific allies, through our place-based and ancestrally based connections and affinities, disrupted western power relations often present in interactions between ‘researchers’ within the university and ‘practitioners’ at the coal-face. We demonstrate how engaging in relational practices builds a space that encourages the principles of respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy.

Background of “Shifting the System”

The special issue, titled “Shifting the System”, was underpinned by a politic to privilege Pacific leadership experiences, and voices. This intentional privileging is important as, within research spaces and higher educational spaces, Pacific leadership experiences are often relegated to the margins unless they are part of official ‘research’ projects carried out and published within academia. This attitude of what counts as valid research or experiences, or what reflects worthwhile practice within academia is underpinned by colonial imperial norms of western empire that continue to reinforce and perpetuate dominant white values and systems (Smith, 1999). When research on Indigenous and Pacific populations are identified, they often positioned and represented people as Other, portraying deficit framings that perpetuate stereotypes. As Mara (2014) articulated, past research about Pacific learners firmly positioned them as “failures (to be targeted and fixed), as targets (for the allocation of public funds to

enhance achievement) and as consumers of what others have designed and implemented for them, on their behalf” (Mara, 2014, p. 102). However, amongst this backdrop has been a growing group of academics who are determined to centre Indigenous and Pacific ways of being, becoming, seeing, feeling, doing, and understanding.

In 2001 a colloquium of Pacific educators gathered at the University in the South Pacific to discuss the issues in Pacific education and begin to address them. They gathered under the assumption that the extensive Pacific education reforms over the last 30 years had largely failed to provide resources to achieve development goals (Pene et al., 2002). They argued that Pacific education needed to be reconceptualised in a way that reclaimed education processes allowing for a Pacific vision of education. This reconceptualization was actualised via the Tree of Opportunity which is firmly rooted in Pacific cultures, including Pacific processes and skills, knowledge, arts and crafts, institutions, languages, values, beliefs, histories, and worldviews (Pene et al., 2002, p. 3). It is important to note that Māori views, through the Māori educationist Wally Penetito, also contributed to the unpacking of the Tree of Opportunity (see Penetito, 2002). Today throughout the post-Covid space, Pacific educationists and thought leaders like Konai Helu Thaman, Kabini Sanga, Tanya Samu, Rae Si’ilata, Unaisi Nabobo-Baba, to name a few, continue to inspire the next generation of educators, school leaders, and researchers from Te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa to intentionally centre Indigenous Pacific paradigms/worldviews in colonial education systems and knowledge architectures that undervalue Pacific thriving stories and lived experiences (Wright, 2022).

Our convening of this special issue is rooted in the “Tree of Opportunity” and its privileging of Indigenous Pacific knowledge systems as well as decolonising practices, as we reconceptualised how to convene a special issue underpinned by Pacific ways of being, knowing, doing, seeing, and feeling. The special issue was our attempt at disrupting the deficit discourses around Pacific education, by calling out the system, positioning the educational system as the failure for our students. We did this by visibilising and privileging the experiences, pathways, and journeys of our Pacific leaders who are working in schools and highlighting the work they are doing to challenge a system that continues to underserve our students and communities. Convening this special issue is part of our continued collaborative work towards meaningful decolonisation.

Decolonization, however, does not mean and has never meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centring our

concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes. (Smith, 1999, p. 36)

Our contribution was not only through the proposal of a special issue that privileged Pacific leadership voices and bringing the manuscripts together, but also in the way we approached the process and development of the people we worked with. We explore these purposeful processes next through the principles of Indigenous Storywork (Archibald, 2008).

Indigenous Storywork as a collective Indigenous pedagogy

Oral traditions are well documented and practised within a range of Pacific cultures (Vaiolati, 2013; Si'ilata et al., 2015). While our focus was on encouraging and working with Pacific leaders to share their stories and experiences of shifting systems, we also wanted to ensure we approach our interactions with them and the telling of their stories in a way that honoured the knowledge they were sharing. Some members of our editorial group had worked with Indigenous storywork before as a means of telling and understanding our own stories (see Pacific Early Career Researchers Collective et al., 2022). However, in this article, we focused on the way we employed Indigenous Storywork as a pedagogical framework to ensure safe, pedagogical practices while convening this special issue. Indigenous Storywork is a methodology and pedagogical process developed by First Nations scholar Jo-ann Archibald, who also employs the Indigenous name Q'um Q'um Xiiem. Her work is embedded in the fields of education and Indigenous studies, which focuses firmly on the importance of stories and meaning making with people via Indigenous lenses (Archibald, 2008). While Archibald is not ancestrally Pacific nor does she reside in the region, we employ her work here as it aligns closely with the aims of the special issue, is education focused, and reflects many of the processes central to honouring, and valuing Indigeneity and Pacific leaders' stories.

While Indigenous Storywork is predominantly employed as a decolonising methodology, it can also be utilised as a pedagogical framework. Pihama et al. (2019) articulated within their chapter focused on Indigenous Storywork through a Te Ao Māori, that *Ako* (pedagogy) is a way through which they can understand storytelling as a means of sharing learning and teaching for future generations. They explain:

Ako as a Māori pedagogical process is highlighted in *Te Ao Māori* as being an interrelationship, not only between learners and teachers, but within the range of

relationships of *whānau*, *hapū* (sub-tribal groupings), and *iwi* (tribal groupings). It is within these reciprocal relationships and giving regard to the *mana* of Māori knowledge that knowledge is both produced and transmitted. (Pihama et al., 2019, p. 142)

While none of the editors of this special issue are Māori, we all acknowledge our relationships with *tangata whenua*, the people who own the land which we and our ancestors have lived on, work on, and raise our children on. Therefore, we relate to the above articulation of the importance of interrelationships between people as well as across collectives as a form of pedagogy. From a Pacific or Tongan/Samoan perspective, interrelationships can be understood within the framing of *va/vā*. Archibald (2008) does not list *vā*-relationality as one of her core principles within Indigenous story work as she is not of Pacific ancestry but, for us as Pacific, it is central to all we do. Therefore, we begin unpacking our process of convening this special issue here by beginning with the Indigenous Pacific principle of *vā* and how it was reflected in our pedagogical process of convening this special issue. We then explore how Archibald's (2008) seven Storywork principles of respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy were reflected in our pedagogical approach to this special issue.

Vā relationality - creating space and time

Educational research over the past 10 years has highlighted more and more the importance of relationality, of building relationships between the school and home, the students and teachers, and between the school and communities (Boonk et al., 2018; Cunningham et al., 2022). How these relationships are built can look different and take different approaches. Tokelauan, Tongan, and Samoan people understand the relational space between people, objects, and environments through the concept of *va/vā*. The reference of both *va/vā* here is a matter of diacritics, i.e., the use of and absence of the macron which, though subtle, carry distinctions for particular ethnic groups and the way they value Indigenous meaning-making (Tualalelei et al., 2015). Samoan scholar and poet Albert Wendt describes the Samoan *va* as “the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things” (Wendt, 1996, para. 15). From a Tongan perspective *vā* is the relational space fashioned through the relationship between time-markers – beats, things, or people (Māhina, 2010). Ka'ili (2005) added that *vā* is not only the social space between people that connects them to one another, but is also a spatiality or space that relates and connects

groups to each other. Therefore, creating this relational space was important, not just for ourselves and our authors, but also for our authors and for the school groups and communities that they belong to.

Vā relationality was at the centre of our approach to this special issue. Recently, Ualesi (2021) stated that “A va relational approach includes the centrality of tautua, that is, to serve ... to nurture, relationships through alofa (love)” (Ualesi, 2021, p. 37). It meant that, first and foremost, we approached everything we did through a lens of relationality and service to experts in our community, those that are Pacific tumuaki and leaders within their educational contexts. This was reflected in a range of ways. For example, we employed our existing community of networks and contacted people individually, inviting them to write a piece for our special issue. Some of the editors went and met *kanohi ki te kanohi* (eye to eye) with some of the Pacific leaders to again invite them to participate and to answer any questions they had. We saw this move from a ‘call for papers’ to an invitation to participate as an important step and part of our relational ethics of care (Suaalii-Sauni, 2017). Samoan scholar and educationist Melani Anae argued that, for Samoan scholars a philosophical reference point of great importance is “*teu le va* – to value, cherish, nurture and take care of the *va*, the relationship” (Anae, 2010, p. 2). From a Tongan perspective, *tauhi va* reflects a similar meaning to that of *teu le va* articulated by Anae. *Tauhi vā* means “to care for, look after, tend, or nurture” (Suaalii-Sauni, 2017, p. 136). The purposeful move from a call to an invitation was one way we reflected this care for the Pacific leaders we would be working with. We took an approach that was personable rather than impersonal as calls for papers can be at times. This approach was similar to Iosefo (2019), who shared in her work that the spiritual connectedness and shaping is invoked working with and alongside our contributors, in this case our Pacific leaders. Even with this relational practice, not everyone accepted our invitation, although some Pacific leaders agreed to contribute to the manuscript, many were still hesitant as they questioned their ability to write ‘academically’, and we often heard a similar discourse around whether what they had to say was of any value. We realised through these initial discussions, that the creation of a collective, safe, and nurturing space was needed to encourage Pacific leaders to not only amplify their voices, but to also help build their confidence within this process which was alien to them. We had been involved in special issues previously as contributors and have known how isolating the process can be especially when being new to academic writing. We know that academic writing spaces are often uninviting and continue to privilege western notions of what counts and is valid. We understood we needed to figure out a way to engage our authors

in a relational manner that was welcoming as Pacific people and helped build their confidence as Pacific people. Milne (2017) argued that if we do not change the ‘colour’ of the spaces we inhabit, if we do not adjust the space to fit our students, then we are or in her example, schools are “still in the business of assimilation, relegating indigenous and minoritized children to the margins (p. 6). We needed to ensure that the space we were creating was one that continued to disrupt colonial institutional practices and centred our relational ways of being.

Talanoa with/in vā relationality - doing, conversing, engaging with/in space and time

Talanoa sessions were held over the nine weeks leading up to the initial submission date for manuscript drafts. Talanoa is a cultural practice which has a deep grounded whakapapa in the whenua/fonua/vanua/fenua (land) and languages of Polynesia within Oceania (Fa’avae et al., 2022). As one of the earliest instigators of talanoa in the politics and education research contexts, Halapua (2002) and Vaioleti (2006) coined talanoa as a dialogue and practice that aims to connect peoples’ aspirations, motivations, and intentions. Although scholars do not always name vā within talanoa engagement, it is a spiritual essence which determines the kind of talanoa that will take place or not. For instance, in the Tongan culture, talanoa engagement guided by vālelei is noted as an experience filled with harmonious and positive connections and relations (Ka’ili, 2017). Whereas talanoa engagement, fuelled by vātamaki (see Tu’imana, [this issue]), is often expressed as disharmonious and somewhat negative relations and connections. As a method of capturing stories or descriptive and narrative data through conversations, talanoa is largely defined as a “face-to-face dialogue that includes reciprocal telling of stories and experiences without concealment of inner feelings and without a rigid framework” (Fasavalu, 2015, p. 209). The key to talanoa’s purpose, function, and intent varies based on formal and informal contexts or situations of engagement.

The kinds of stories and descriptive or narrative data captured through talanoa therefore, can be shaped by the purpose and intentions of those involved in the engagement. Talatalanoa has also been named in research as a method of ongoing and continuous dialogue. Talatalanoa’s role varies and is dependent on the purpose and intentions of those involved as well as the topic, issue, and phenomenon explored (Fa’avae & Fonua, 2020). Rooted also in the ontological (nature of reality), epistemological (nature of knowledge), and axiological (nature of values, ethics, aesthetics) whakapapa of talanoa within an Indigenous Pacific philosophy and paradigm, e-talanoa has been named and articulated in education research as a method of

engagement and of capturing storied and descriptive narrative data via the online space utilising digital tools and platforms (Fa'avae et al., 2022; Faleolo, 2021). Across the variations of talanoa-rooted methods of capturing and sense-making stories and descriptive data, *vā* is a central theoretical construct that helps hold and govern the negotiation of ethics and ethical conduct and engagement for Pacific in ways that seek to honour and maintain peoples and communities' integrity, sense of humility and reverence, care and generosity (Suaalii-Sauni, 2017; Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014).

The processes associated with talanoa, talatalanoa, including e-talanoa, are guided by *vā*'s grounding and movement across *tā-vā* (time-space) (Ka'ili et al., 2017; Māhina, 2010), seeking to endure and be expressed in forms through inter-connections that are either *vālelei* (harmonious relations) or *vātamaki* (disharmonious relations). As a school leader herself and an author in the special issue, we acknowledge Tu'imana's [this issue] scholarly work and critical leadership because it will help Pacific educational practitioners and leaders broaden their appreciation of themselves, their voices and lived experiences as critical agents of change as well as understanding *vā*'s various forms within the context of Pacific (and Pasifika) education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Similarly, Mel Fasavalu's critical leadership as a member of the guest editorial team and as an inspiring principal making change in South Auckland has enabled collaborative talanoa, talatalanoa, and e-talanoa that have inspired those of us striving to find our own place in the contentious contexts of university settings and the western academe. In our paper, noting that the hierarchies and power contentions are very much contingent on the negotiations of *vā* as socio-relational ethics with/in talanoa, talatalanoa, and e-talanoa conversations, engagement, or practice. Therefore, developing and articulating the nature and conditions of *va/vā* was a central intention of our talanoa dialogue sessions.

The first talanoa session was convened at the University of Auckland's Tai Tonga South Campus. We saw the hosting of such a collective Pacific event in South Auckland as important, as South Auckland as a community has a large number of Pacific peoples (Allen, 2015) and can be understood as a central Pacific hub. On the first night, we had a large number of Pacific leaders attend, some educators who had declined our invitation to contribute to the special issue still came along to hear our talatalanoa about the project and to connect with other Pacific leaders in Auckland. We also had authors from the Wellington and Canterbury regions showing a keenness to contribute to the special issue. Our first night of in-person talanoa, Pacific school leaders and guest editors also zoomed in from around the motu which allowed us all to also e-talanoa with them. During the initial session we provided space for us as a collective to begin

building our relational *va/vā* with one another and connect with our environment, creating a sense of community for this project. While we had come together to participate in the creation of this special issue, in the spirit of *talanoa* we allowed the conversation to flow and naturally progress into areas the group wanted to take our conversations. This resulted in people not only communicating their genealogical *whakapapa* through their introductions, but also talking about their journeys as Pacific leaders in schools, their concerns for our children and also their aspirations for the future. Many times, humour and laughter helped us move through some contentious moments where hard questions were asked of us as an editorial team of predominantly higher education academics and our intentions to share the leader's knowledge through academic publication in ways that felt culturally taxing for our already busy school leaders. For example, we were questioned about payment for writing academic publications, and we were unsure as to how to respond appropriately to the school leader's query. As academics we were used to writing journal articles and not being paid, but our Pacific leaders had a valid point, that they were contributing their knowledge and expertise to the special issue, and in the spirit of reciprocity wanted to know what they would be getting in return. Reciprocity will be discussed later in the article, but Smith (1999) articulated the tensions that often occur and negotiation that needs to happen when those working in university institutions also work within their communities. This tension was most evident here and we were thankful that we could engage in *Talanoa* face to face with our community of authors and discuss these tensions. Our ongoing presence together and working through the tensions and learning to find ways to accommodate the needs of the authors as best we could, aided in strengthening our relational ties.

As part of our ongoing progress of care and support we provided our authors weekly optional *talanoa* sessions – both in person face to face, and online. We alternated these between face-to-face sessions on *Tai Tonga* Campus and online zoom sessions. We hoped by doing this we would allow all authors the opportunity to engage with the editors regardless of physical location. As educators, issues of equity and access are concerns we are all too familiar with. Therefore, we wanted to ensure that all authors had access to engage us and other authors in a collective manner over the weeks as they worked on their manuscripts. Hunter et al. (2016) argued that disengagement from education for Pacific youth is often directly linked to “the structural inequities they encounter which cause a disconnect (and dismissal) of their cultural values, understandings, and experiences” (p. 197). We wanted to ensure that our authors were engaged, that their cultural values, understandings, and experiences were central to this project,

and important for our communities. Along with these talanoa sessions, we continued to work one on one with the authors who had accepted the invitation to this scholarly Kaupapa, offering advice, reading drafts, engaging in further one-on-one Talanoa, and providing support. Our approach was embedded in vā relationality, where we worked together to form a “mutual reality” (Wilson, 2008, p. 71). Our pedagogical approach to convening a special issue also reflected other values that can be seen in Indigenous Storywork. These will be explored next.

Respect

Respect is a concept that canvases a range of spaces, cultures, and interactions. It is a concept that can be contentious, as it can be reflected in a range of ways and thus, there is no universal understanding of respectful practices. From a tā-vā lens, doing respect in the form of *teu le va* or *tauhi vā* is linked to time–space understanding. In addition, from a decolonial lens, respect is not only enacted between people, but also within the growth of our collective consciousness as we engage with the land, oceans, and hearts of people and places (Archibald et al., 2019). Due to this level of consciousness and engagement across tā-vā, in practice, we experienced moments of uncertain vā during our initial talanoa through the challenges of our own privilege as academics, reflecting engagement associated with feelings of *vākovi* or *vātamaki* (bad connections). But through our ongoing storying and iterative dialoguing (i.e., *tala-tala-noa*), the moments of uncertainty swayed towards feelings of *vālelei* (good relations and connections) (Ka’ili et al., 2017; Tu’imana, [this issue]). Archibald (2008) highlighted this nuance in her work but resisted the urge to define what respect and respectful practices are. Rather she provided examples from her own work that demonstrate respectful interactions between a range of people, spaces, and groups. In our work on the special issue, we demonstrated respect for the authors in a range of ways. As mentioned before, we developed approaches that invited people into the space in a respectful manner that was welcoming. We also made sure we respected authors’ knowledge and experiences.

While we were respectful in our pedagogical approach working with Pacific leaders, this does not mean our interactions were without tension. Engaging Pacific leaders in writing how they were shifting systems within their own schools within an academic journal raised tension. For the editors we were often in an in-between space of encouraging our leaders, while also being aware of the academic expectations of journals. Sometimes this meant having to navigate a shift in our relationships with the authors. Many of the authors held positions of significant responsibility in their *kura* (schools), as they were the leaders in their respective spaces. Starting a project of this nature was very new for a number of them, part of the process in this

mahi (work) included making themselves vulnerable when they had to ask questions or respond to our written feedback. We took care as editors to give feedback in a way that honoured and respected the author's work and contribution to the knowledge landscape. This space between the authors and editors was an interesting one where we ourselves had to battle uncertainties and negotiate relationships of power as people within university settings working with practitioners on the ground. While uncertainties can be stressful, Rose (1997) argued that “in these different kinds of uncertainty lie possibilities for other strategies for situating knowledge” (p. 318). We were lucky that we had found the *Ethnographic Edge* journal that was premised on exploring a range of ways of writing and knowledge creation, so our negotiating and pushing of boundaries allowed us to navigate this space in a respectful manner, more so than other journals may have.

Responsibility

Lee-Morgan (2019) argued that “as Indigenous Peoples, we know that revealing what is on the ‘inside’ is risky business, especially in research” (p. 152). We understand this within university settings, and as researchers, that there is a vulnerability in sharing our knowledge, in sharing our expertise, especially considering the way Indigenous knowledges and practices have been stolen and appropriated throughout history (Smith, 1999). Therefore, we understood the great responsibility in convening the special issue. We understood that, not only were we responsible for publishing the stories of our Pacific leaders, but as kaitiaki or guardians, we were also responsible for the caring of their stories, the care of them as leaders, as well as ensuring that their knowledge was shared and hopefully would have an impact on those in initial teacher education and beyond for the betterment of our students and communities. This responsibility and care is central to the values of Indigenous researchers (Bennet, 2022; Ka’ili, 2017; Na’puti, 2019; Pacific Early Career Researchers Collective, 2022; Smith, 1999; Trask, 1999). Smith (1999) argued,

I use the term “sharing knowledge” deliberately, rather than the term ‘sharing information’ because to me the responsibility of researchers and academics is not simply to share surface information (pamphlet knowledge) but to share the theories and analyses which inform the way knowledge and information are constructed and represented. (p. 16)

As Smith argued, part of our responsibility is also to engage our leaders in reflection and analysis of their stories. This needs to be done in respectful ways that do not diminish their

knowledge but help contribute to their practice as leaders and educators. Wilson (2008) referred to this practice and responsibility as “relational accountability” (p. 71), where interactions with one another are relational and developed together through our interactions.

Reverence

As articulated previously, there is a vulnerability in sharing of stories as our stories are intertwined with our knowledges, ancestral ties, cultures, and histories (Ka'ili, 2005). Greg Sarris, an Indigenous storyteller, articulated in Archibald (2008) the importance of being respectful and reverent of stories, that there is a spiritual aspect present in storytelling that we must be aware of, but he also highlights a tension present in Storywork. He questions:

In creating narrative for others about our histories and religions, in what ways are we not only compromising those histories and religions but at the same time compromising our identities that are largely dependent upon these, as well as our resistance to the colonizer and dominant culture? (Sarris, 1993, p. 68)

We attempted to hold this tension while being reverent in our interactions. For example, providing opportunities to come together to engage in this project and verbally share stories face to face allowed members of our collective space to share who they were, as well as voice questions and concerns. All introductions were carried in a manner that reflected their genealogical links to family, to nations, to communities. Furthermore, we demonstrated reverence for our Pacific leaders by ensuring that we positioned them as the experts of their own stories and experiences of shifting systems in educational settings. Our feedback and suggestions focused on the conventions of writing, but the heart of the story, the spirit in which it was shared, was respected and held in reverence by the editors.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity is a core value of Indigenous and Pacific peoples throughout the world. It is linked to *tautua* or service (Iosia, [this issue]; Fasavalu, 2015; Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014). Reciprocity is valued across a range of contexts and is an important aspect of *vā* relationality as it allows for the building of relationships between people. Within Indigenous Storywork, Archibald (2008) articulated that reciprocity can be reflected in the idea of mentoring and working with people. She shared: “I also realized that reciprocity was essential to our working together. As learner, I needed to listen carefully and think ‘hard’ about the meanings in Vincent’s personal stories and his words” (p. 50). Like Archibald, we also realised

that part of our reciprocity was not just about the outcome of the special issue and the articles, but also listening to the Pacific leaders, learning from them as they were learning from us. Many of the authors had never written a journal article before so we worked with them, guiding them through the process, as they taught us about the important work they were doing in classrooms and schools. Often there can be tension between those working in universities and our teachers or practitioners on the ground. Dominant discourses from practitioners can often reflect an attitude of positioning researchers or academics as sitting in ‘ivory towers’, not knowing the actual realities of being in classrooms and schools. While teachers in classrooms, can often feel isolated or unwelcome within university spaces due to not feeling academic enough, or believe that they had nothing to contribute as some of our authors shared with us (see Iosia, [this issue]). For the editors of the special issue, bridging this space was important and part of the reciprocity developed with our authors. Bridging this gap involved sharing power, centring the work being done in schools, validating these knowledges and experiences needed in university and academic spaces. Archibald et al. (2019) argued that “Indigenous storywork harmonizes the often fraught and contested experience of operating between the super-privileged spaces of higher education and the fourth world suffering of Indigenous Peoples and our communities” (p. 11). We do not mean to imply that Pacific leaders are suffering, we do believe that developing reciprocal relationships through working together on this project, allows for the sharing of knowledge about education and educational settings, while also providing mentoring for one another. These developments are deeply important to Indigenous story work and also to Indigenous understandings of relationality.

Holism

Too often our education system requires our children to leave who they are, their family ties, and values at the door before entering our classrooms (Si’ilata, 2014). Within the process of convening the special issue, we ensured that our Pacific leaders could come into our writing spaces with their whole being. This included, not only bringing their culture, values, and languages into the space, but also by feeling free to invite their friends, colleagues and family as well. On more than one occasion we were contacted by our leaders, asking if it would be ok if they brought a friend along with them who was interested in the work we were doing. Not all of the ‘friends’ wanted to write into the special issue, but they wanted to come along for the collective space that we had developed, where they could come, talk, write, and engage in talanoa with other Pacific leaders. Archibald et al. (2019) affirmed that holism, the practice of bringing our whole self and our relationships with our environment, enhances our

abilities to make meaning of stories as Indigenous Pacific leaders. This makes complete sense within Indigenous and Pacific worldviews, as we understand entities in our worlds as relational parts of a whole rather than as individual and separate. As articulated in Pacific Early Career Researchers Collective et al. (2022) by Dr David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae:

Relationality is a big thing for Indigenous peoples. Knowledge is the understanding that you're a part of a whole. The whole-ism. And we're not separated from the land or the moana...our languages tell us that; those songs tell us that, so [it's] that kind of...understanding. Most people don't get it. If you don't grow up in it, you know, in that kind of community. You won't get it. But it's a deeply philosophical thing. (Pacific Early Career Researchers Collective et al., 2022, p. 7)

Interrelatedness

Interrelatedness is underpinned like many of the principles of Indigenous Storywork and our work here within the special issue, by relationality. Archibald (2008) articulates that while interrelatedness can be understood as being between people, within Indigenous Storywork, interrelatedness is also between the storyteller, the text of the story, and the person reading the text. It is through this interactive relationship with stories that meaning and a connection to the story is made. The sharing of Pacific leader's stories is meaningful and our engagement with their stories, the telling of them, and sharing of them via articles has impacted our being as well, allowing us to build community where we can relate to one another across of range of identities, as Pacific people, Pacific allies, as educators, and as authors. In her book, Archibald (2008) reflected on the words of fellow storyteller, Greg Sarris, who argued that Indigenous stories have the power to encourage the reader to engage critically with their own "historical, cultural, and current context in relation to the story" (p. 32). It is our hope that, through convening these stories, readers and the authors themselves are able to engage with the text in a critical manner that encourages them to think about their own teaching practice and ways they might be able to challenge educational systems.

These interrelated interactions, while allowing us to make connections, also highlight our differences and nuances as Pacific people and for the authors as Pacific leaders. This nuance within our interrelatedness is important, as far too often Pacific and Indigenous people have been presented and re-presented in ways that continue to reinforce deficit theorising and categorisation of large ethnic groups as homogenous (Samu, 2015). Indigenous research and

projects must benefit our people and our communities to be 'valid'. As C. Smith (2016) argued, our checks and accountability comes from our own people, from our communities, from engagement with them. But it also comes from a process that "requires compulsory self-disclosure of where you are from, whose family you belong to, and what interests you have in the research" (p. 95). This engagement with identity and place was evident in the way we built relationships with the authors of the special issue, and through purposeful positioning of ourselves and our authors in relation to their village ties at the start of each of the articles.

Synergy

Holism and interrelatedness in Indigenous Storywork complement each other to create synergy which is understood as "powerful storywork understandings that have the power to help with emotion healing and wellness" (Archibald, 2008, p. 10). During our interactions with Pacific leaders, over time we developed a level of synergy that, through the building of relationships, encouraged our leaders to share their experiences and stories of leadership. At the beginning of the process, many Pacific leaders expressed that they felt they did not have anything valid or worthwhile to share. However, through our ongoing talanoa and interactions with one another, Pacific leaders grew in confidence and developed their voices as Powerful leaders. Many of their stories were moving, some even heart-breaking, but through Indigenous Storywork and the special issue they were able to find a space to raise their voices, knowing what they had to say was important, and meaningful, not only to themselves, but to their families, their communities, and for the betterment of the students they teach. Smith (2019) reminded us that "the right, the space, the voice to 'tell our own stories from our own perspectives' has been an important aspect of decolonizing knowledge" (p. xi). Synergy is about not only providing this space, but also about the process, the power in our stories, the power in sharing them with others, and also the power in engaging with others' stories. We hope the future readers of the special issue find such power and synergy in Pacific leader's stories.

Conclusion

Educational institutions within Aotearoa New Zealand and other colonial nations, are built on the premise of perpetuating and reinforcing the central position of western knowledge as infallible and powerful. However, Indigenous and Pacific researchers and practitioners have

been working hard to create space in educational institutions that challenge colonial hierarchies of knowledge and make space for Indigenous ways of being, knowing, seeing, doing, and feeling. The development of the special issue “Shifting the System” was premised on the importance and necessity of centralising and amplifying Pacific voices. Pacific peoples are often relegated to the position of participant within research. We wanted to ensure that Pacific people and, in this case, Pacific leaders, were provided opportunities to articulate their stories and share their knowledge in ways that are unapologetically Pacific. Being unapologetically Pacific in our approach required repositioning, a reorientation that centred relationality and tautua/service (Fasavalu, 2015; Iosia, [this issue]; Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014). Indigenous Storywork provided a pedagogical frame which articulated the importance of storying from the heart in a manner that engaged with key principles of respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. Engaging with these principles is vital in working with, and in service to, Pacific communities. It is within the spirit of tautua/service that we hold high hopes for the future, of not only education, but for Pacific peoples. It is for the future generations that we are doing this, and it is part of our effort to shift systems that have often excluded us and other minorities. For future generations, we close this article with a poem. We draw on examples of Indigenous researchers, such as Shawn Wilson (2008), who employed ceremony and the writing of letters as a way of centring Indigenous being, doing, knowing, and thinking within research. Hence, we close this article with a poem for those who come after us, who continue this important work, for a brighter future for our people.

To the future Pacific dreamers,

Those still to come,

The dreamers of a better world.

The future wayfinders, who are born to voyage, negotiate and navigate excellence in ways and waves that we cannot conceive nor dream of.

The creators and innovators who will walk between and through worlds, enacting change for people everywhere and for us, in Aotearoa, our collective.

The weavers, who will Lalaga across space, place, cosmos, and time, connecting
beyond who we are, who we were and embracing the names we carry, of those
whom we walk with and honour.

To the wise, words and worlds through stories, through telling tales, we yearn for
more, learning, insight, for making new rules and journeying beyond their tail.

To the different, I see, we see, they see, you and me, the need for equity, we believe.

Intentional practices for us by us through our communities, leadership creating
critical shifts.

Our success, through poly ways of being and knowing, of dance, of movement, of
embodied being, our ways of succeeding.

Pacific, Indigenous lens, engaging, effective,

Journeying together, in relationships

The human essence of us

Va

Tauhi vā

As a collective

To centre our voices

Shift, break, disrupt, destroy the systems

for your futures and all our futures.

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