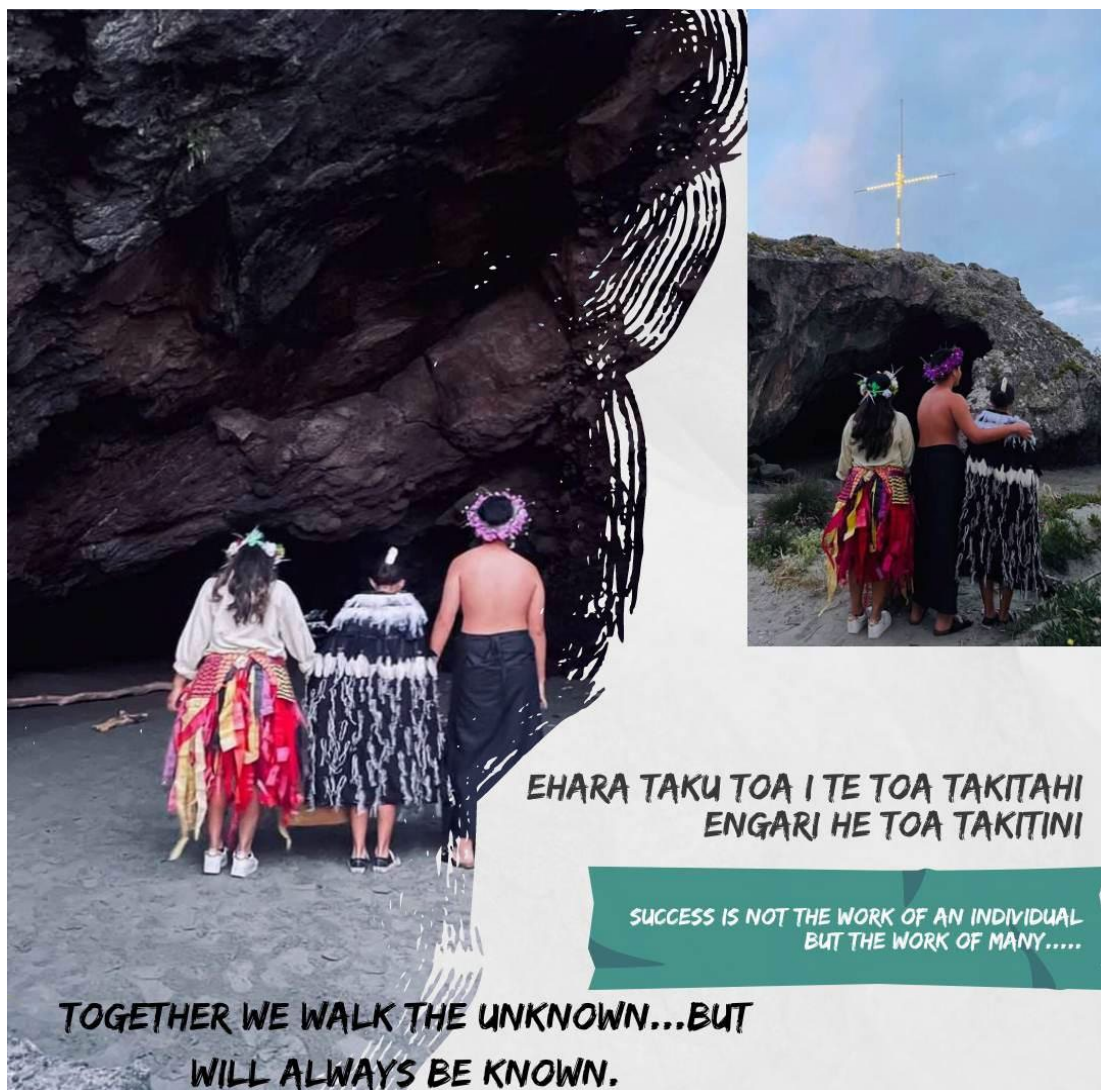


## The Equity I See Is Different For You And Me

**Matalena Tuiloma (a) and Kay-Lee Jones (b)**

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Top from left (a) Tayjuan Solofiolo Faataape- Tuiloma. From the villages Afega, Lalomauga, Vailuutai, Iva, Samoa and Niutao, Tuvalu (b & c) Cina-Rose Jones-Fiso and Wi Jones-Fiso from the village of Lotofaga, Samoa and from the iwi: Te Whānau a Kai, Te Aitanga a Māhaki and Ngāti Porou, Māori [personal photo, used with permission]

## Abstract

In our positions as Māori and Pasifika wāhine educators, Matalena Tuiloma (Samoan, Tuvaluan) and Kay-Lee Jones (Te Whānau a Kai, Te Aitanga a Māhaki, Ngāti Porou), we have a range of roles in supporting our families and communities, as well as our work within the education system. These roles can seem, at times, all consuming, yet our sense of purpose towards betterment for our peoples is at the heart of what we do. Pūrākau (storytelling) and talanoa (conversation, sharing of ideas) were the methods used to express our journeys as Māori and Pasifika wāhine navigating the Aotearoa New Zealand education system. We are mothers, teachers and past students. We advocate for equitable outcomes for our ākonga (students) and their families, which often entails being the Māori or Pasifika representative in a range of spheres. What we prioritise and deem important as Māori or Pasifika female educators is often quite different to many of our non-Māori or non-Pasifika counterparts.

## Key words

Pacific, tangata whenua, Indigenous, Māori, Education

## Introduction

In our positions as Māori and Pasifika wāhine educators, we hold a range of roles. Our most important role is as mothers. Our responsibilities and service to our aiga (families), and wider communities, as well as our day-to-day work within the Aotearoa New Zealand education system can seem, at times, all consuming. Yet our sense of purpose towards our peoples' betterment remains at the heart of our intentions.

Our whakapapa (ancestral links), whānau (family) background and cultural identities provide the foundation for our personal and professional narratives. The first author, Matalena Tuiloma (Samoan, Tuvaluan), and second author, Kay-Lee Jones (Te Aitanga a Māhaki, Ngāti Porou, Te Whānau a Kai), detail experiences using pūrākau (Indigenous Māori storytelling; Lee, 2009) and talanoa (conversation, storying, sharing of ideas; Vaioleti, 2006). We were both born in the 1980s in Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand, to a backdrop of societal change and resistance against racism and other inequities.

Our aspiration is for our education system to be founded on opportunities and unlimited potential for Māori and Pasifika students in all sectors. Yet currently, Māori and Pasifika students are subject to an underperforming education system that does not fit them, nor necessarily empower cultural identity (Skerrett 2018; Tahana, 2021). We have both taught in schools in the Waitaha (Canterbury) region of Aotearoa New Zealand. The unique context of teaching in the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand

brings its own distinct nuances as discussed in these narratives. We have both heard, observed and experienced a range of inequities, many of which are sewn into the fabric of our education system and society.

Utilising pūrākau and talanoa through the use of storying and poetry, a specifically “Te Moana Nui a Kiwa” (Pacific Ocean/ Islands) tone to the writing style is employed. We seek to offer the reader a creative and personal journey. *Through our eyes*, a poem written by Matalena Tuiloma details experiences that many Pasifika parents and families endure. The main themes within this poem form the framework for Matalena’s talanoa. Kay-Lee shares her pūrākau as a historical reflection through the generations. The conclusion of Kay-Lee’s pūrākau comes in the form of a creative piece called “Society Puts us in Boxes”. The unique distinction in this article is that the two poems *are* the findings, providing thought-provoking considerations for the reader and how and why we promote equity and unlimited opportunities for ākongā Māori (Māori students) and tamaiti a’oga Samoa (Samoa students).

## Methodology

Talanoa relates to a discussion, conversation, to tell, talk, and story in Fijian, Samoan and Tongan cultures (Vaioloti, 2006). As a method of dialogue, talanoa brings people together to share ideas, views and aspirations without any predetermined agenda (Robinson & Robinson, 2005). Talanoa is an opportunity to talk through challenging and heartfelt topics (Taule’ale’ausumai, 2018). We engaged in talanoa both formally and informally with each other, as we learnt about each other’s whakapapa, family background, educational experiences, and our own children. It was an opportunity to listen and learn from each other as well as find similarities and points of difference.

Pūrākau, as stories or narratives, are a mechanism to transfer knowledge from one generation to the next; they are a sense-making tool to understand the world we live in today and that of our ancestors (Lee, 2005). Pūrākau comprise a method and kaupapa Māori methodology to share Māori narratives, “telling pūrākau is not limited to traditional stories, but includes storying in our contemporary contexts” (Lee, 2015, p. 2).

## Author 1: Matalena Tuiloma

### Through our eyes

*Through our eyes we saw pride in our parents and whānau eyes, as we crossed the stage  
under bright lights.*

*Through our eyes we chose to stay inside under watchful and at times condescending eyes,  
those doubtful we would receive the prize.*

*Through our eyes we saw our grandparents and parents' happy disguise, but behind those  
eyes were tiredness, and a people not yet familiar with banking or lending ties.*

*Therefore, their hard-earned money turned from joy into sighs.*

*Through our eyes we saw western society impacting our home lives...and we started to see  
some of our identity die.*

*Through our eyes we saw schools boast about Pasifika achievement and learning journeys.  
But the restricted and least accredited subjects' mindset from some school leaders is still  
quite concerning.*

*Through our eyes we see our children raised where identity, language and culture should be  
heard. But who in society is open to listening? To some the concept seems quite absurd.*

*Through our eyes we saw the impact of racist behaviour towards our husbands. Where is the  
accountability, progression of society or justice?*

*Through our eyes we see our lives and multiple roles and responsibilities we carry.  
Navigating all these roles makes us appear to be a charity.*

*Through our eyes we see our expectations sometimes fulfilled but fulfilment can sometimes impact us negatively. What then, is genuine support to empower us and the Pacific society?*

*Through our eyes we see the historical pain, but the fact remains the same.*

*Through our eyes our questions are pondered, but most of the time never answered or even bothered.*

*Through our eyes we see frustrations and the urgency for the next Pasifika generation not to experience the same. The question is...is society and institutions ready for a mind shift change?*

*My father*, Toa Faleniko Faataape, was born in Iva, Savaii to Matalena and Fiatele Faataape. His siblings, who live in America, Australia, Samoa, and Aotearoa New Zealand, faced inequity from an early age when they were separated to live amongst their whānau due to my grandfather passing away when my father was 8 years old. Later, my grandmother Matalena re-married to Etuale Pettybourne, and raised their children in the village of Moamoa Upolu. Here, my father was raised in the Catholic church and continued his schooling before moving to Aotearoa New Zealand.

*My mother*, Palele Teonea was born in Niutao, Tuvalu to Komiti and Agaifolau Vailepa Teonea. She was adopted by Komiti's brother Afoga and sister-in-law Nivaga Enosa. My mother came to Aotearoa New Zealand via the ship *Nivaga* at the age of 3 and grew up in the city of Ōtautahi. The suburbs of Bishopdale, Addington, Sydenham, and Linwood were where a majority of the first generational wave of Pacific Islanders lived. My mother grew up in Bishopdale, where my grandparents were part of the first St Paul's Trinity Pacific congregation. For our generation it is known as P.I.C., and this church still has a place in our hearts. When both grandparents decided to migrate, there was no internet, no travel agent, no cell phones or quick solutions at your fingertips. Their journey was courageous and aspirational, something our generation, myself included, could learn from.

My mother and father met in Wellington, both had previous relationships and marriages. I was the first of the two children they would share together. This new journey and stage in their life had meant their commitment was not just to their children but to each other's families and the lifestyle they would

choose to better our future. I was born in November 1983 at Burwood Hospital Ōtautahi. My mother said I was ready to come out and explore. My father would work multiple factory jobs to ensure there was food and housing for our family. Reflecting back on my childhood, state housing and poor street lighting was never an issue growing up. In the 1980s and 1990s, my street was quite well known for interracial battles and determining which race or ethnic group was superior. As a young child you are not exposed to social issues or have awareness of them. It wasn't until I became a teenager that I understood my older siblings' stories. As a toddler, I thought I lived in the best house on the block, despite the big green transformers which essentially became my 'white noise' and helped put me to sleep.

Throughout our childhood, my parents and siblings were our superheroes. Our father was always working and our mother was either working or sick a lot, so my older siblings Alfred, Niva, and Nese had to take responsibilities and be the parents for my younger sister, Coretta Dawn and me. This included school drop-off and pick-ups, attending friends' birthday parties with us, babysitting, taking us grocery shopping with them or visiting the grandparents when we could. Were they paid like other ethnic groups might expect? Simple answer, no. If you live in a Pasifika household, this is the way of life. Payment is through love, respect, and service. As an adult I now see that I was able to take on opportunities and worked in privileged positions because of my grandparents', parents', and siblings' sacrifices. Even as a family, the pattern of inequity surfaces its ugly face.

I will be forever grateful and will try my best to ensure I support their children to succeed where possible so that they have opportunities like I have had.

*Through our eyes we saw pride in our parents and whānau's eyes, as we crossed the stage  
under bright lights.*

### **Graduation and whānau**

Little did I know that during this time, our walk across the stage would impact, and continue to impact, so many lives. As stated, I saw the pride in my parents' and whānau's eyes even before the walk across the Christchurch town hall stage to receive the prize. The prize being the *golden ticket* to my parents and grandparents' generation. To them, a degree can open opportunities and provide a pathway to various avenues, and they weren't wrong. Since graduating, there have been some great opportunities and experiences. However, the pathway to success has had more challenges and issues than I could imagine. The experience of having your expertise questioned by your colleagues in your field – not everyone of Pasifika heritage is in your corner either supporting you, proving yourself in multiple roles, and the risk of cultural taxation are all well-known issues. I am lucky enough to have strong support from both my whānau and my in-laws who I cherish. A strong network of friends who have kept me

grounded and mentored me through many challenges, has allowed me to grow and develop my capability in lots of areas which I would never have imagined.

Crossing the stage is the start to many challenges ahead, it often comes with huge responsibility and expectations. Receiving the prize is positive, but as Pasifika, be prepared to understand that equity isn't a given right, because what others see as equity is different for you and me.

*Through our eyes we chose to stay inside under watchful and at times condescending eyes, those doubtful we would receive the prize.*

### **Our learning experiences towards graduation**

It was not the first time experiencing doubt from people post-graduation. Multiple scenarios throughout school, work and sports people would doubt our ability. My husband and our friends would always reflect and talk about the condescending moments throughout their time in educational institutions. My thought is because some staff knew, statistically, Pasifika were the minority and their teaching pedagogies were not relatable to Pasifika students. If educational leaders were serious about increasing Pasifika success and achievement at a tertiary level, then a few areas needed to be addressed. First, good representation throughout Senior leadership and governance (Ministry of Education, 2020a). Second, offering opportunities for Pasifika to accelerate in leadership without dealing with a condescending perspective. Third, cultural reflective analysis to determine Pasifika engagement, achievement, retention and wellbeing. Institutions can also look at how the allocation of funding, resourcing and the number of full time-equivalent (FTE) hours are being honoured and distributed to ensure Pasifika are excelling as Pasifika. Make tertiary institutions culturally attractive, engaging, and safe spaces for Pasifika students and whānau to feel like they belong – and can belong throughout the decades. Last, in order to give justice to Pasifika achievement and success, institutions need to offer staff who are not culturally responsive (or who do not have good inclusive practice) some productive cultural capability professional learning development in order to enhance student learning and engagement. Pasifika students heading into tertiary environments with staff who are not equipped in these areas, present inequitable learning environments from the start.

*Through our eyes we saw our grandparents and parents happy disguise, but behind those eyes were tiredness, and a people not yet familiar with banking or lending ties.*

*Therefore, their hard-earned money turned from joy into sighs.*



## Government processes - understanding systems

I remember watching my uncle's wedding, a beautiful one it was, but I remember feeling a bit sad after watching my grandparents and our family who went; thinking, they were in western attire, singing English hymns, and despite the Father of the service attempting to speak Samoan, his pronunciation was incorrect. The reception looked segregated, like it was out of the Black Civil Rights era, despite them being married in the late 1980s. It was a beautiful wedding, where two ethnicities came together in love, but it was clear as I watched the video how much inequity my grandparents and my mother felt to fit the western ways. Assimilation in Ōtautahi for Pasifika was very much real in our household.

Childhood for me was full of creative memories which my mother invested time in, from making DIY, Hobbytex pillowcases, to painting ceramics after school, to putting them on top of our fireplace shelf. There was always something arty or fun we were doing. Little did I know, we were doing this because money was limited. Even as the second wave of our Pasifika generation came along, the inequity around understanding money was evident.

Watching movies at Hoyts Cinema, beach rides to Sumner or New Brighton was a privilege. As primary school children, we would go berry picking out at Belfast and Redwood to collect pocket money, but it helped to get the milk buttons needed for the milkman. My older brother and sisters had jobs in high school doing the milk run, to help the cost of living in our house. When they were working, we knew when they would come down our street due to the milk truck which drove just ahead of them. My little sister and I would always watch them run past our window on the footpath. I remember thinking that they were so strong. These memories highlight the importance of our aiga, their understanding and having support around financial literacy, to support better financial decisions and a way of life in the future.

*Through our eyes we saw westernised society impacting our home lives ... and there we started to see some of our identities die.*

## Identity

Pacific educator and scholar Jean Uasike Allen (2021) claims that “power relations between the centre of Western colonial knowledge and the margins of the Other are continually made and remade, not only by those at the centre but also by those on the margins” (p. ii). By sharing our experiences through purākau and talanoa, our intention is to take control of the storying of Māori and Pacific identity or identities, to centre our narratives, and challenge the voices of those who often speak for us in western society and schooling contexts.



Schools, societal impact, mispronunciation of names, colonisation, influence of westernisation, colloquial use of language, impact on household, loss of language culture and identity, sense of being too Palagi for some, and not Pacific enough to others. Fitting in with Māori and Palagi more than my own at times due to the contextual environment we lived in. Not exposed enough to our language and culture – when parents were asked, they wanted their children to fit in and not get behind in school work. I am the product of the misconception that language and cultural identity were not of high importance. Despite being raised for most of my intermediate and secondary schooling in North Canterbury, with positive experiences and life-long friendships, all the research tells us that language culture and identity gives and provides cognitive, social, emotional and developmental benefits (Duckworth et al., 2014; Ministry of Education, 2018, Ministry of Education 2020b; Te Huia, 2015).

*Through our eyes we see our children raised where identity, language and culture should be heard. But who in society is open to listening? To some the concept seems quite absurd.*

Statistics show that Māori and Pasifika peoples are still positioned well under their Pākehā (non-Māori, European) and Asian counterparts in terms of receiving tertiary qualifications (see Table 1) (Ministry of Education, 2022) and in relation to the number of teachers with Pacific ancestry throughout Aotearoa New Zealand and within Waitaha (see Table 2) (Ministry of Education, 2021).

**Table 1**

*Tertiary Qualifications by Ethnicity*

Ethnicity	Bachelor's Degree	Postgraduate qualification
Pākehā (European non-Māori)	16,920	2145
Asian	5025	985
Māori	3090	240
Pasifika	2475	140

**Table 2**

*Number of Teachers by Ethnicity*

	Number of teachers by ethnicity in New Zealand	Number of teachers by ethnicity in Waitaha (Canterbury)
Māori	8802	518
Pasifika	3005	112
Pākehā (European non-Māori)	52,690	7069

The percentage of New Zealanders of Māori ancestry sits at 17.1% (Ministry of Education, 2021). The number of teachers of Māori ethnicity working in the Canterbury region is 518 (see Table 2). Teachers of Pasifika ancestry working in the Canterbury region number 112 (Ministry of Education, 2021). The statistics make me wonder what barriers continue to hinder Māori and Pasifika students when attempting to embark on academic pathways to higher education and how we overcome them. Fijian academic Sereana Naepi (2018) argued that educational systems in Aotearoa New Zealand have a long history of undeserving Pasifika communities. Furthermore, higher education is a place where Pasifika people “experience institutional, structural and overt racism” (Naepi, 2018). Research tells us of these experiences, but I wonder, when will it change?

*Through our eyes we saw the impact of racist behaviour towards our husbands.*

*Where is the accountability, progression of society or justice?*

### **Workplace and inclusion of husbands**

Unfortunately, the stories of institutional racist behaviour are seen in multiple work spaces, people who are unconsciously racist, presenting biased behaviour when offering leadership development opportunities and roles are found in many governing organisations (Came et al., 2020). Leadership positions are often not a reflection of the national ethnic population, which could demonstrate that senior leadership are not aware of their unconscious bias. This could, in turn, deny opportunities and create self-doubt for Pasifika people. It would be beneficial for some of these people who allocate leadership

roles, to provide a process for Pasifika to have opportunities to grow within their current role and practice and not just be used as the tokenistic speaker when there is a Pasifika event, and not used in *other* professional spaces. Inequity in various forms condemns people.

*Through our eyes we see our lives and multiple roles and responsibilities we carry.*

*Navigating all these roles makes us appear to be a charity.*

### **Cultural taxation**

Cultural taxation for Māori and Pasifika educators and scholars is a well-known issue (Naepi, 2021). To avoid cultural taxation and burnout, I developed an idea to grow non-Pasifika cultural capability. These programmes are my attempt to shift systems of marginalisation for our people. The F.A.A.T.A.A.P.E. idea and project stands for *Fundamental Actions and Topics Aimed Around Pasifika Education*. The programme is to honour my father and his dedication to us, as well as having the courage to move here, not knowing the inequities he would face. Yet he still moved out of his comfort zone to build a better life for our family. The purpose of the F.A.A.T.A.A.P.E. programme is to identify issues and challenges, create resources to build relationships with Pasifika whānau and students to use in the classroom, utilising Pasifika events, stories, everyday life habits, generational stories, and excursions. The programme will weave Pasifika aspects into lesson plans, curriculum planning, assessment, and strategic planning. Highlighting the need for Pasifika inclusion in strategic and annual reporting at a governance level is of utmost importance. People need to be accountable as well, and this allows a professional learning programme that can be created for that.

It would not be right to only honour my maiden name and not acknowledge my married name and what my husband's family have done for me to grow my understanding around Pasifika concepts, culture, language and identity. The T.U.I.L.O.M.A. idea represents: *Teachers Understanding Inclusive Learning Opportunities Motivating Academic Awareness*. This particular programme will act as a lead-on, or separate, resource which could support teachers and educational leaders build cultural capability from a Pasifika perspective – a pathway and future aspect where aspirational academics will have skills and tools to be supported when transitioning into tertiary or vocational pathways. Both programmes are yet to be developed and researched in depth, but the concepts will link back to Pasifika and cultural frameworks in order to enable equitable and safe learning.

*Through our eyes we see our expectations sometimes fulfilled but can also have impacted negativity. What then, is genuine support to empower us and the Pacific society?*

### Support and empowerment

Despite the negative connotations that have been highlighted throughout the stories, having the ability to share authentically about challenges and barriers that paved the way for me to get to where I am is significant. It could not have been done without the support of some very influential and supportive, non-Pasifika people. From childhood friends, family friends, church whānau, various lecturers and staff at the University of Canterbury, as well as work colleagues who continue to support and empower my thinking around Pasifika equity. I was fortunate enough to be offered my first teaching position under Principal Richard Edmundson. At the school, under his leadership, they helped in the crafting of equity as a Pasifika teacher, Pasifika community member and the influence I would have would be supported. In my previous and current profession, I have not come across a principal as committed to the Pasifika community in Waitaha as he was. His influence as a leader, expert and his respect for his students, school and community should be mentioned. A principal who valued our Pasifika culture enough to come and sit in while my husband was getting his pe'a (traditional male tattoo), showed us that he is a leader willing to move outside of his comfort zone in order to understand and respect the cultural practices of his staff. Being uncomfortable to become comfortable was a concept our grandparents and parents faced often.

*Through our eyes we see the historical pain, but the fact remains the same.*

My understanding is that, when my grandparents arrived in New Zealand, there wasn't a transparent transitioning system which Pacific Island families could understand. It lacked cultural concepts and presented multiple challenges and barriers that our grandparents and parents faced (Anae, 2020). I wondered what systems did the New Zealand government, and the Samoan government have in place to have a clear understanding around equity and equality for Pacific peoples in the 1950s? Was there such a thing? If not, why not? What transitional methods of practice and support were put in place to support my parents and others like them in the 1970s and 1990s? We can look at the era and make our own justifiable comments; however, what is the excuse now? Many patterns and behaviour trends seen before are still seen in some cases for whānau today (Salesa, 2017). The lack of support and transition in the education system is still present; as a mum and aunty there are too many stories which are relatable to the previous generation before us. Again, inequity found due to lack of teacher and leader expertise in culturally responsive practice, the awareness of Pasifika expectations and livelihood impacting multigenerational households (Anae, 2020).

*Through our eyes our questions are pondered, but most of the time never answered or even bothered.*

I faced this as a mum multiple times, asking schools for accountability and why they haven't chosen to email or call through, and why the only time I hear from them is when it's over a concern or a problem. Never hearing from them when our daughter had achieved in the classroom or extracurricular events. We would find out either through our daughter, family or friends who had daughters at the same school. To these educational leaders and teachers that speak of empowerment for girls, excelling their education and building character, my question to you would be, "Why bother?" A majority of the stories heard through Pasifika parents and students, reflected concerns and issues that were similar. Some teachers and staff were not prepared for a mind shift or comfort change. Fortunately, for my daughter and family who faced this negative experience at their schools, they have strong wāhine (women) networks and advocates to empower them in their identity, in their learning and in their pathway to be the game changers needed in society to shift the institutional bias and lack of cultural competency we find amongst our schools.

*Through our eyes we see frustrations and the urgency for the next Pasifika generation not to experience the same. The question is ... is society and institutions ready for a mind shift change?*

Being a wife to a Samoan Matai (holds a chiefly title) who values, cherishes, and breathes his language, culture, and identity, it was a nice reminder of who I am and who I represent in the community. As parents, we have collectively decided to cherish and expose our daughter to both her Samoan and Tuvaluan identity that she loves and proudly represents. We have been fortunate and blessed to have supportive, inclusive and strong leaders in the family. In areas where I could not teach her such as the Samoan language and cultural formalities, her Nana Maseiga and Grandad Vaeafe Tuiloma, alongside her aunties Tafu, Miriam and Lisa, her uncles Gafa and Bander, all have nurtured her in order to allow her to succeed and feel a sense of pride and belonging. As a mother and in-law to my husband's family, this is something I will always be eternally grateful for.

The question that is central for me is whether society is ready for a mind shift, a change? Today, there is a shift in education, a positive shift that organisations and institutions are willing to improve their understanding of Pasifika success. This shift has been driven by educators working in classrooms, as well as by government initiatives, policy, and action plans such as the 2020-2030 Action Plan for Pacific Education (Ministry of Education, 2020a) and Tapasā (Ministry of Education, 2018). This work combined with continued development and implementation of Te Tiriti O Waitangi is part of the foundation for growing cultural capability.

The Ministry of Education (2018) identified Pacific learners as a priority, many schools are using cultural frameworks and resources such as the Pacific action plan, Tapasā, Fonofale framework and the Kakala framework to build knowledge and improve pedagogical practice. Schools allocating resources

appropriately to develop teacher capacity and capability, could support Pasifika. However, inequities within our systems are still present; there needs to be a mind shift change to inform teacher practice, retain Pasifika learners, empower Pasifika leaders and create better pathways for informed career choices and opportunities to better our people (Ministry of Education, 2020a).

## Author 2: Kay-Lee Jones

My father has whakapapa links to Ngāti Porou, Te Aitanga a Māhaki and Te Whānau a Kai. He was a whāngai (nurtured by another family) child, raised by his biological aunty. My father was born in 1949, the parents that raised him had beautiful te reo Māori fluency, yet they made a conscious choice to raise him in the English language. Their aspiration for my father was to survive and thrive in an increasingly Pākehā world. My father moved to the South Island when he was 16 years old, leaving his East Coast roots. He went from Gisborne, where Māori were the dominant population, eating Māori kai and ‘being Māori’ was the norm, to a Pākehā dominated city, ingrained with Pākehā ways of being and doing. My father joined the New Zealand Fire Service at 19 years old. He was the first Māori firefighter in Christchurch. He recalls an officer calling him “Darkie”. Joining the Fire Brigade at that time was a significant feat, racism was rife and Māori were the underclass in many facets of society. Taonui (2019) reflects upon racism in Christchurch stating, “from the late 1960s onwards, more street level white racist groups emerged in Christchurch than elsewhere in Aotearoa New Zealand” (para. 22).

My mother grew up in Te Tihi o Maru, Aotearoa New Zealand. Her father was a businessman. Her mother was from a small town called Riverton. My mother recalls her first cousin having noticeably darker skin than hers. She also recalls her aunty and others feasting on the delicacy tītī, mutton birds. Tītī can only be sourced from near Stewart Island by families with ancestral links to the land. My mother remembers covert discussions in her youth about my maternal grandmother having Māori ancestry. Any knowledge of whakapapa Māori was not talked about. As my mother and siblings grew older, they and the wider family began to acknowledge my grandmother’s (their) Māori ancestry. It changed from *undercover* to something to be proud of.

My parents met in Ōtautahi; they built a strong foundation for us. We ate Māori kai and knew who we were as Māori – proud of our identity – yet we did not have a strong grasp of our whakapapa or te reo Māori (Māori language). My brother and I attended English-medium schooling. My mum took me along to a Kōhanga reo (Māori immersion early learning nest), but her experience was not one where she felt embraced. Although my mother has Māori ancestry, without competency in te reo Māori or a strong familiarity of cultural customs, she was uncomfortable within te ao Māori (the Māori world). Over the

years, this has increased, Te Huia (2015) affirms that Māori identities can evolve and change due to the environment one is in.

My mother and father were hard workers, around the home and in paid work. Mum and Dad have a whānau-first attitude, education was important, and a strong work ethic was/is also valued. Dad worked as a firefighter for more than forty years and Mum worked in a range of jobs, the longest being for the Canterbury District Health Board. They both had a strong service orientation, both in work and in everyday life, to help others. We grew up in a working-class area, we were not well off. Growing up in Christchurch in Aotearoa New Zealand through the 1990s, for my friends and I who were mostly brown, we knew about skin-heads<sup>1</sup> and were afraid of them, racism was in our faces even as adolescents. My own schooling experience, and that of my brother were local, and in general, positive. I recall feeling most comfortable in settings and experiences that were specifically Māori in nature. These included Māori language classes, kapa haka, and spending time in our school wharehau (meeting house).

The closest high school to us encompassed a mixture of lower-socioeconomic families and affluent families. It was a melting pot of cultures and backgrounds, yet the minority groups were Māori and Pasifika. Fortunately, many of the friends I attended kindergarten and school with are my friends to this day. Some of these close friendships were with Samoan, Fijian-Indian, Niuean, and Māori – we were united in the fact that although our ancestry differed, our experiences in school and society were similar. In many ways, we bonded through inequity, challenges and successes.

In my first year of high school, we were put into form classes made up of students with collective talents or interests. There were a lot of Pākehā (non-Māori, of European descent) students in that class, many very academically capable. By my second year, I was streamed into a class with many other brown faces: Māori, Tongan, Samoan, Niuean and others. As a class, we attended maths and science together; it didn't take long to realise we were streamed into the lower-ability classes. The practice of streaming places tamariki and/or rangatahi in a group or class according to ability, the perceived ability is a teacher's judgement, often the result of one test or exam (Connolly et al., 2019; Pomeroy et al., 2022). No one ever talked to us about why we were put into a lower-ability class or talked to our whānau about *the decision that was made for us, and to us*. In my primary schooling and intermediate years, I believed I was a smart kid and was very motivated. Yet this experience in secondary school, where I was put into cabbage maths and science classes, my motivation for school, and confidence in my abilities decreased. I started to care less about school. In the classes where the teachers took time to get to know

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<sup>1</sup> Skin-heads – a term used to describe a subculture of white people who shave their heads and generally follow racist neo-Nazi beliefs about non-white people being inferior.



me, including my ancestral language, culture and identity, I did well. But, for other classes including maths, I remember feeling unknown, unseen, and unmotivated.

Even though I did not feel known in my maths classes I, along with other 'brown faces' found a safe space at school. It was a space where I felt I could be myself; where I was understood and where I could excel. This was in *the whare*. We would take our te reo Māori classes there, practise kapa haka, talk to our whaea and matua (te reo Māori teachers) as well as hang out at morning tea and lunch times. It was our whakaruruhau (safe place/protection), under the support, guidance and manaakitanga (kindness and generosity) of our te reo Māori teachers. There was a microwave for heating up our noodles, and for keeping warm during winter lunch hours. To us, this was *our place*. We could see our pepeha (genealogical and geographical links) displayed, we felt secure in our identity, and we could be our true selves. Many of our Pasifika aiga used to also call the whare their home at school; it was the Māori teachers, and their aroha ki te tangata, ahakoa ko wai, ahakoa nō hea (*love and respect for people, regardless of who they were and where they were from*) that ensured all felt welcome and were included.

I enrolled in teacher education in the early 2000s. My parents had no formal qualifications, and I wasn't surrounded by friends gaining tertiary qualifications. My initial interview at the college didn't go well. To enter pre-service teaching, you have a meeting with teacher education lecturers about your strengths and relatable experiences. For a young and quite timid wahine Māori, this was an awkward experience. For many people, particularly Indigenous women, to highlight their many talents and skills is a hard task. Kāore te kumara e kōrero ana mo tōna ake reka, *the kumara does not speak of its own sweetness*. This Māori proverb speaks of the humbleness and humility which is valued in the Māori world. Needless to say, I did not get into Teachers' College in my first interview. I was asked to attend a second interview. At the second opportunity, my whānau were also invited to come along, they spoke on my behalf about my talents and dispositions. My families' tautoko (support) was the reason I got into college and am a teacher today. Without them I wouldn't be where I am. If the whakataukī above and Māori worldview had been considered at my first interview, I may not have needed a second.

As an undergrad, I visited a lot of schools on practicum to gain teaching experience. It was my second-year teaching placement in a bilingual Māori-immersion school that confirmed my desire to work in kaupapa Māori education. Another teaching practice I remember clearly was in an English-medium, high-decile classroom, in an affluent area – I felt very much on-the-outer. There were no Māori students in the class, no Māori staff, not one Māori face, I felt very isolated. I remember one of the students mentioning my clothes in a derogatory manner, she was only young, yet her tone, and the fact I knew I dressed professionally and appropriately made me feel disheartened. Her comment shouldn't have bothered me, yet it did make me feel lesser. I remember pondering the possible stereotypes and

perceptions that may have been held in the hearts and minds of her parents and others connected to that school.

It was during these undergraduate teaching experiences that I remember thinking, when I had my own tamariki, I wanted them in kaupapa Māori education. I did not want my future tamariki to be at risk of feeling ‘othered’ or worse ‘lesser’ because of who they are and where they come from.

I have gone on from Teachers College to teach in a range of schools, mostly within Māori-medium education. I now teach in initial teacher education. Today, as a Māori academic, cultural obligations and workload do not look the same as for our non-Māori counterparts. Māori and Pasifika often have a sense of service to our people, that goes well beyond our teaching commitments or research outputs (McAllister et al., 2019). Torepe (2011) interviewed Māori teachers; she identified the most frequent “cause of burn-out was the participants’ desire to maintain their own high professional standards, whilst trying to meet the demands of their non-Māori colleagues” (p. 49). We work hard because we have a responsibility to our whānau, hapū, iwi and ancestors. We also have an integral responsibility to our tamariki and mokopuna to provide learning experiences where they are seen, that are relatable, and where their life experiences are validated and celebrated from a cultural standpoint. Our current workload model does not factor in ‘he kanohi kitea’, being a seen face in the Māori community. Being active in the community; attending, working, supporting and advocating for kaupapa Māori initiatives and events is normal for Māori academics and Māori teachers. It is fundamental to who we are and what we love. Through being involved in events such as kapa haka competitions, Manu Kōrero (Māori speech competitions), Kura Reo (Māori language immersion wānanga), and other kaupapa to celebrate te ao Māori, we become known, accepted and often respected faces. The interactions and the relationships we create and sustain through being involved in these kaupapa ensure we are connected with local hapū, iwi, mana whenua and wider Māori communities. We are entrenched in these communities, and the mahi we do often goes unseen by our non-Māori colleagues. These are authentic and real relationships, with no self-promotion, or institutional advancement agenda. These hononga (connections) are real, whānau-based and founded on aroha ki te tangata. Often when we talk about the importance of relationships with our non-Māori colleagues, they understand the importance, but they do not necessarily do the work.

Throughout education we hear the negative statistics and, although some educators use these to try and inspire us, they are still reiterated far too frequently. We know them and the more these narratives are pushed in our faces, the more likely we are to live up to them. Durie (2006) affirmed that the ‘underachieving Māori student’ rhetoric becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Māori are constantly fighting stereotypes, whilst justifying our position, having to overcome biases and giving rationale as to why Māori, Pasifika and other Indigenous knowledge systems are of equal or greater value than

western knowledge/s. This is all whilst supporting non-Māori and non-Pasifika colleagues to become more culturally responsive practitioners. We work hard.

My husband is Samoan. He proudly wears a pe'a that he was given in his late teens. He is fluent in his native tongue, Gagana Sāmoa, and immersed in his culture. We have three Samoan, Māori children that attend a Māori-medium, pā wānanga (learning village). Deciding which school to enrol your tamariki in is a hard task for any parent, and particularly so for dual/multi-heritage children. You want everything for your tamariki; high quality teaching, unlimited opportunities and for many Māori and Pasifika parents, we want their ancestral language/s, culture/s and identity to be empowered through education. We made a choice for our tamariki to be taught in a kaupapa Māori setting, as we could not guarantee their cultural identities would be empowered in the English medium. The enduring gaps for Māori in an underperforming (mainstream) education system are remnants of colonisation, and highlight the disparities embedded in society (Walker, 2016). Through their Māori immersion schooling, te reo Māori me ōna tikanga is normalised daily; however, our children's Samoan whakapapa is not celebrated or acknowledged in the same way.

There are many cultural synergies in terms of values, life experiences and language cognates between my Māori culture and my husband's Samoan culture. Although there are also distinct nuances and beliefs that are very different. Over time, and having children of dual/multi-heritages, we have learned to interweave these unique distinctions, similar to a whāriki (woven mat) in which some aspects of our traditions and ways of being are merged and some are further apart. Our wants for our tamariki are the same. We want them to thrive as confident and competent citizens, strong in their cultural capability – and to be their true and holistic selves.

Society does not always build up our beautiful brown (or lighter-skinned) babies in the way we'd like it to. A recent experience that disappointed, but didn't surprise me, was when I took a group of rangatahi out for lunch. I was working with the students on a research project, we'd just finished our celebratory lunch at the mall and we were going to head back to school and the rangatahi wanted to buy a drink with the spare money they had left over. We all went into the supermarket, I was lagging a little behind as they went off ahead to each choose their drink. They arrived at the self-checkout, I was a little behind them. As I arrived and could fully see what was happening, I realised that each of their bags were being searched by the security. I quickly went to see what was going on and to advocate for these kids who had done nothing wrong. The security replied that it was store policy to check bags. I looked around and did not see one other bag check being checked, just our kids, our brown kids. The rangatahi had just finished some amazing research work at school and were taken out of school to have lunch to celebrate their accomplishment. And the reception they got was ... "you can't be trusted, you must've done something wrong". I play the situation over in my head and it angers me. My disappointment in the way the supermarket staff acted towards our rangatahi appals me, but does not shock me. One of

the rangatahi was my own boy, another was a Manu Kōrero champion, another is a standout kaihaka (kapa haka performer), all very talented youth. That day, society shone a dark light on their achievements. Unfortunately, the culturally safe bubble my boy and the rangatahi were in, in their kaupapa Māori educational environment didn't and couldn't protect them from the racial stereotypes and acts of racism in society.

### Cultural synergies

There are synergies between our narratives. The stories of our parents' generation both include migration, cultural connection and disconnection, as well as identity development. Mchitarjan and Reizenzein (2014) asserted that immigrant parents face a range of pressures and challenges in attempting to hold on to their cultural identity and raise their children in a context that is foreign to their own. Other similarities are present through values encompassing: a strong work ethic, courage and resilience, a deep family commitment and loyalty. Although our ancestral, family backgrounds and wider pūrākau are different, the determination for our grandparents and parents to forge a successful path for their uri (descendants) is consistent and ongoing. There is a strength, and sense of resolute perseverance that remains despite a variety of challenges and inequities. Our aspiration is for our education system to be founded on opportunities and unlimited potential for Māori and Pasifika students in all sectors.

### Society puts us in boxes

By Kay-Lee Jones

Society puts us in boxes

Boxes that tell us who we are, what we can and should be

Boxes that tell us we are not enough

You're not Māori enough

*Eyes glance towards a kaumatua, as he 'should' be able to lead the whaikōrero at his age, yet his language was beaten out of his people.*

You're not Samoan enough

*She sits there quietly, unable to speak her mother tongue. Her parents came to this land for greater opportunities; cultural disconnection, language loss.*

You're not Pākehā enough

*Stared at by the shop owner as he browses the shelves. Hoody up, wallet in his pocket. Suspicion, security moves in. Too brown to have money. He exits embarrassed, head down.*

You're not palagi enough

*Judgement, low expectations. The teacher places her in the bottom streamed maths class. One test, sat alone, without her aiga. She's in the 'cabbage maths' class with all her mates. Silence, shame.*

Society puts us in solitary boxes

Boxes that we don't fit, that confine us

Boxes designed to silence us

They shame us and make us feel small

STOP, boxes are made of cardboard, and are easily broken

Free from the box, we stand

Together, united, aiga, whānau

Collective strength, collective voice

Standing tall in our mana

In the light of our tūpuna

Ready to fulfil aspirations

And shatter stereotypes

Our voices will not be silenced. We will sing. We will speak. We will dance

We will not wear the shame you place on us

WAIT...Is it *only* society placing us in the box?

Or is it also our own perceptions?

There is no box

I am enough

I know my mana and that of my ancestors

Society puts us in boxes

We will not box ourselves

We will break societies preconceptions and misconceptions

We will not take these on as our truth

We, us, aiga, whānau

We are enough

We are our ancestors' mokopuna

Their blood runs through us

We are our whakapapa

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