
Walking between worlds: Critical reflections on navigating and negotiating change for Pacific within secondary schools in Aotearoa

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Abstract:

Schools in Aotearoa New Zealand often find it challenging to align Pacific value systems with their own forms of leadership and culture. The education system is being asked to shift its practice when it comes to Pacific learners, families and communities, including the Pacific teaching workforce. This paper aims to offer reflections from two Pacific education leaders who have recently left their schools and are currently working in different areas of the education sector in Aotearoa New Zealand. Specifically, it seeks to outline our experiences, while offering thoughts derived from Pacific epistemologies. Challenging and disrupting the western model that is currently the foundation of how schools operate in this country is critical, particularly as we work to support Pacific teachers and students. As two Cook Islands teachers and researchers located in Waitaha, Canterbury, we have sought to live these shifts in our contexts, focusing on building teacher capacity and changing approaches within the pastoral care system.

Introduction

Within schools in Aotearoa New Zealand, Pacific students often struggle to align themselves and their educational aspirations with the system that is dominated by a predominantly non-Pacific cultural system (Chu-Fuluifaga et al., 2022; Education Review Office, 2012; Rimoni et al., 2022). Despite Aotearoa New Zealand being a country located in the Pacific region, very little in the way of Pacific language, culture and traditions are present in school systems, processes and structures. In recent decades, a strong exploration of the role of Pacific values has been made, and the integration of this

thinking has found itself prominently displayed in various educational policy documents, such as the Pasifika Education Plan 2013 – 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2013), Tapasā (Ministry of Education, 2018), and the Action Plan for Pacific Education (Ministry of Education, 2020). A deeper understanding and appreciation of the way these values might be implemented and utilised within a school context provides a hopeful path towards better outcomes for both Pacific teachers and students (Hunter, 2021; Rimoni et al., 2022).

This reflection is offered by us, as two Pacific educators, who have spent a combined 20 years of teaching in Christchurch secondary schools, as we see a need for continual reflection on the practices of our school leaders and the practices of our fellow teachers.

Locating the researchers

We are two teachers, currently not working in schools, who come from culturally hybrid backgrounds. We have diverse European ethnic roots which sit alongside our Pacific ethnic heritage. These hybrid identities which form our cultural and community worldviews have contributed strongly to the ways in which we approach our educational work and leadership, as well as the different ways we live our lives. As Fasavalu and Reynolds (2019) stated, “Relational positionality can be understood through Oceanic ideas” (p. 13) and this has certainly been the case in our work as educators. The way we have sought to relate to students, community, and our fellow teachers, has been defined by Oceanic or Pacific values, in the context of our hybrid identity. As Rocha and Webber (2017) stated:

[T]he idea of mixed racial and/or ethnic identities is no longer conceptualized as inherently problematic, yet individuals of mixed descent still seem to be set apart in both theory and practice. (p. 3)

As teachers walking between the different cultural and ethnic worlds that exist within the community, and specifically, the schools in the communities we served, we experienced this idea of being set apart, with a foot in both camps, so to speak.

Despite being brothers, and having these shared connections, we also acknowledge the ways our worldviews diverge. Like Pacific Peoples, our family culture and perspectives are heterogenous. The celebration and acknowledgement of the different cultures and traditions that shape who we are also included in our approach and influence the reflections we offer in this paper.

Pacific teachers

The first part of our reflection, primarily offered by Joseph, seeks to provide a window into experiences held by Pacific teachers, as they navigate their career pathways and as they look to lead change in schools and communities. Pacific teachers are often bastions of strength within schools, leading or supporting the cultures and identities of Pacific students and families as they negotiate the school system. They often provide support for other teachers, or even leaders within the school, who might not have the cultural confidence or competence needed to engage with Pacific learners and their families. Pacific teachers are also often in vulnerable positions, with cultural isolation and taxation being part of their reality, and leadership often thrust upon them without recognition or support. The Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020–2030 recognises the key role they play and has, as one of its objectives, to “Grow, retain and value highly competent teachers, leaders and educational professionals of diverse Pacific heritages” (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 7). This reflection will offer an insight into the experience of Pacific teachers and highlight the importance of valuing them and the gifts they bring to schools.

Pacific students

The educational experience for young Pacific learners in Aotearoa is one that could be described as *over-promised and under-delivered*. Just as life in Aotearoa was sold to Pacific migrants, like our grandmother, as the land of opportunity and success (Salesa, 2017), educational institutions can perpetuate the same ideology in claiming to have the staff, resourcing and capability to cater to the needs of Pacific learners, but simply do not. Similar to their Pacific teachers, Pacific learners in Aotearoa are often expected to educate their papa’a (‘European’ in Cook Islands Māori) peers and teachers in a culturally taxing and tokenistic way, highlighting a clear disconnect between the promised experience for a Pacific student in Aotearoa, versus the marginalised and culturally taxing reality. These frustrations for Pacific students, whether voiced or not, mirror the lived migration experience of their ancestors where, on the surface, one is made to feel valued and a sense of belonging, while being systemically ‘othered’ by the current dominant culture of Aotearoa (Dervin, 2016).

Positionality

Family introduction

Being brothers, our ancestral lines are shared and we open our positionality section by introducing our Pacific genealogical connections. We have connections to the Cook Islands and Tahiti in the Pacific, as well as England, Scotland, Ireland and Poland in Europe.

Our mother was born on the Island of Rarotonga, in the Cook Islands. Her father was from Aotearoa New Zealand, of Irish and Scottish ancestry, and her mother, born and raised in Rarotonga, is of Atiuan (an island in the Cook Islands) and Tahitian ancestry. These two met in Rarotonga when our grandfather was transferred there with the Aotearoa New Zealand Post Office, and he became fluent in Kuki Airani reo (Cook Island language). The two moved their family, including our mother, to Aotearoa New Zealand in the mid-1960s. Our parents met in the 1970s as high school students, with our father being of English and Polish ancestry. We have one parent who migrated to Aotearoa New Zealand, and one whose family had been here for several generations.

Our mother and father worked in the bank and the police, respectively, and raised their children as individuals with a culturally hybrid background. It was well known to us that we had connections to the Pacific through our mother, however, it was inevitable that we would experience some form of cultural isolation due to the distance between us and the Cook Islands, and the absence of relatives from there who were strong in the language and culture. We relied on our aunts, uncles and cousins for these family connections, forming our own village here in Christchurch, eating Cook Islands food and doing the hula when our grandmother asked us to. Because of the strong European genealogical ties, we are all fair-skinned Cook Islanders, all with different ways of engaging with our Pacific heritage.

Joseph's introduction

As a young person, I engaged with education strongly. While not necessarily winning lots of awards or coming away with leadership accolades, I have mostly positive recollections of the three primary schools and one secondary school that I attended. I remember my time in secondary school being largely monocultural, with the absence of any visible Pacific cultures or experiences. I appreciated and loved almost all of my teachers, however, cultural and ethnic diversity among them was conspicuous by its absence. I went on to the University of Canterbury and completed a Bachelor of Arts, and it was here that I really made connections to Pacific Peoples, with academic and cultural support programmes strongly in place. The Pacific Development Team at the university opened my

eyes to the ways in which Pacific leadership, underpinned by Pacific values, could enable flourishing, powerful and profound change, leading to improved outcomes for Pacific peoples.

Chris' introduction

Growing up, my Cook Island culture embodied itself almost entirely in the form of my maternal grandmother. Implicit to the dominant culture and its omnipresent stronghold within my formal education and social circles, it was hearing my grandparents converse in Rarotongan and having instilled in me the pride of where I come from that allowed my Pacific culture to survive in my identity. Through verbal reminders such as “tell people where you come from, wherever you go”, I was learning from a young age the importance of not only knowing, but living out who I am. My pale complexion has always wrestled with my sense of Pacific identity, while allowing me the privilege of being able to choose how I am perceived at face value. This, in turn, comes with an overwhelming responsibility to work for more equitable opportunities and outcomes for Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa. I recall little to no connection to my Cook Islands culture throughout any of my formal education, with identity and culture only being unpacked authentically once I began my postgraduate studies. Truly reflecting on my own bias and challenging my assumptions and privilege while training to be a teacher, teaching and leading within a culturally diverse school population, and seeing the ongoing inequities for young Pacific learners in schools is what has motivated me to contribute to change in this space.

Tivaevae as method: reflective image of teacher student relationships

In using Pacific research methods and models, we often turn to imagery or practice embedded in Pacific cultures and ways of being in order to help us grapple with, or give life to, our thinking (Naepi, 2016; Sanga & Reynolds, 2017; Tualaulelei & McFall-McCaffery, 2019). For Cook Islands people, the tivaevae is one such image that we turn to in order to reflect. The tivaevae theoretical framework is an approach based on the artistic quilting process in the Cook Islands and has been slowly emerging over the last two decades as a valued Pacific research model (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019; Powell, 2013; Te Ava & Page, 2018). Based primarily on the work of Teremoana Maua-Hodges and further developed by several Cook Islands academics, including Te Ava (2011; Te Ava & Page, 2018) and Hunter (2022), the tivaevae model can serve to centre Cook Islands and Pacific ways of reflecting. The reflection that follows seeks to capture something of tivaevae thinking and is personal to the authors of

this article. It has been useful to us as we reflect critically on our practice and should not be seen as an established way of thinking in Cook Islands culture. Having a deep understanding of what it means to be tagata o le moana, a person of the Pacific, means connecting with the rich diversity of knowledge that exists within the Pacific. Much like a tivaevae, tapa (barkcloth) or tatau (tattooing) does not consist of a single shape, symbol or colour, there is difference and similarity throughout the coming generations of Pasifika communities who live in Aotearoa New Zealand (Airini et al., 2010). For this reflection, the tivaevae offers a visual representation of the interconnectedness, layering and beauty of the relationship between Pacific teachers and students in our schools.

The tivaevae is a quilting tradition, prominent in Cook Islands culture both in the Cook Islands and in the diaspora (Rongokea, 2001). The production of a colourful quilt with natural patterns reflective of the natural world, primarily flora and moana imagery, is a method with which to convey legacy. Traditionally, tivaevae are crafted by mamas, or elderly women and matriarchs, their skilful hands giving visual and tangible effect to place, occasion, memory, and ceremony. One has only to visit communal locations where these mamas frequently gather together, such as the Punanga Nui Market in the Cook Islands or Cook Islands community centres in Aotearoa New Zealand, to see the ongoing creation of tivaevae. Tivaevae are often talked about as a legacy – left behind for next generations, typically by these Cook Island matriarchs (Tagata Pasifika, 2019).

The tivaevae consists of a background layer of fabric, with patterned layers imposed on top, stitched in a variety of ways. This process of multiple layers in a tivaevae can be understood as a metaphor for the relationships between teachers and students. The teacher is the background layer, providing support, and guidance, while the student is in the top patterned layer finding their way and being allowed to shine. The elaborate and colorful patterns are centred and, like our students, they are pushed to the front for all to see. While this dynamic exists, the relationship between the background and the pattern is one of codependency. The tivaevae cannot exist without both, the background and pattern, playing their part. This can be likened to the codependency between Pacific teachers and Pacific students. In our experience, the relationship between the two is vital, and the presence of the Pacific teacher can serve to elevate the experience of the Pacific student.

Reflection One: Joseph's reflections - Pacific teachers' realities

The cultural practice of tivaevae relies on stories and personal reflexivities (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019; Powell 2013; Te Ava & Page, 2018). My reflections of Pacific teachers' realities act as the background layer and are accounts of support and guidance. In 2010, I applied for a job at Shirley Boys' High School. During the interview, it was explained to me that the teacher who ran the small Pasifika cultural group had resigned, and I was asked whether I would be willing to take on this role

should I be offered the job. For me, it seemed like a fulfillment of a promise I made in my first year of university – to use my education to support Pacific students – so I accepted the position and the Pasifika coordinator role. On my first day, I was told by one of the senior teachers at the school, who had formerly led the group, that due to my being associated with the Pasifika students, I would have “instant mana”. I remember being led into the room that they used to practise, being introduced to them, and feeling slightly intimidated when I realised I was only a few years older than some of them. However, the teacher was right. Within hours, I was being greeted by them as I passed them in the corridors and in the quad. This continued 14 years later, but now I see them outside of school, living lives as adults. Due to this relationship, a strong sense of belonging was forged. I belonged to them, and they belonged to me.

Pacific teachers as agents of hope

Teaching is a profession that offers hope to others. In doing what we do as Pacific teachers, we seek to help our students and their families to look to a better future through the medium of education from school. As a young person, searching for a way to contribute to a better world, I saw teaching as a way to do this. Freire (2005), in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, discusses the concept of “humanization” as being the vocation of humanity. Humanisation entails the realisation of the right to become “more fully human” and “restorers of humanity” (Freire, 2005, p. 44). One might consider how these concepts might apply in an Aotearoa New Zealand schooling context, particularly as we reflect on the realities of Pacific communities and the role and experience of Pacific teachers. Freire’s notion of humanisation seems an apt way to view the vocation of teaching.

A core part of a revolutionary approach to education is the establishing and strengthening of dialogue. Freire calls dialogue an “existential necessity” and states that it is an “encounter among women and men” and “an act of creation”, and that it must exist in the context of “a profound love for the world and for people” (2005, p. 89). This view of dialogue being a transformative and humanising force is essential if we are to look for ways to support Pacific teachers as agents of hope. Giving prominence to their voices and experiences does not just concern an attempt to fight for dominance, but rather, creates opportunities for a profound dialogue to occur within our school communities.

In my journey as a Pacific teacher of Pacific students, I often found myself in a position to offer hope. This was sometimes done in the classroom, but was more often done in the spaces that were woven throughout the student and their family’s experience with school. Alongside the academic, these spaces included the social, cultural, and spiritual paths that they walked. A critical action undertaken by leaders in a school is to recruit Pacific teachers and support them to be agents of hope. In my

experience, while they are not a homogenous group, they can offer unique and culturally grounded ways to meet the needs of Pacific students. As Thaman (2001) stated:

The contrast between the culture of modern schooling and most Oceanic cultures as these are lived today and its implications for formal education cannot be over-emphasised. It is, however, not an unbridgeable gap. The main bridge, in the view of many Pacific Island educators, must be the teacher. (p. 7)

Pacific values and pathways within education

For many Pacific teachers, the expectation exists for them, both internally and externally, that their career is underpinned by the values that permeate various Pacific communities in Aotearoa New Zealand (Rimoni et al., 2022). Activating Pacific teachers in our schools requires leaders within schools and mentors of these teachers to have an understanding of Pacific values, even if they differ in their expression from their own lived experience. If those who hold these key positions in schools are able to know and understand these values, then they will be able to strengthen their own leadership and create a culture of care for Pacific teachers.

Foremost among these values is a sense of service, which encourages going beyond their specific role or job description. This value of service, a value that can be seen in a pan-Pacific way, however, is particularly exemplified in the Samoan value of *tautua* (Fa'aea & Enari, 2021). Service, or *tautua*, can manifest in various forms and be accompanied by different perspectives, depending on the context and the cultural background of the teacher. As such, teaching offers an opportunity to champion the value of service and provides a pathway where Pacific people can give themselves to their community. This is true of other sectors, such as health, community work and also the wider umbrella of education outside of the teaching profession. An example in my own experience is of a young Samoan teacher who was a former student of mine. Throughout his time at university, while training to become a teacher, he returned to the school every year and trained the polyfest group – offering countless hours, free of charge, in order to strengthen the cultural identities of the students at his own school. Over the last eight years, his expression of *tautua* has been woven into the very fabric of the school. He is now a staff member who aims to live this value as a teacher, in the classroom and in the staffroom. His approach connects deeply with Pacific students and families, as well as non-Pacific students, staff and families.

Another important value for Pacific communities and people is the value of leadership. School communities and school leaders often look desperately to Pacific teachers to help in critical areas such as Pacific student achievement, pastoral care, and family engagement, and as such, leadership is sometimes thrust upon them. This may take the form of a principal asking the teacher to assist in

strategic planning, a colleague asking for advice on how to work with a student or members of the community – turning to them in challenging situations. In my professional experience and in my work with Pacific colleagues, this has been the case and our Pacific teachers have risen to the occasion in spectacular ways. An example of a Pacific teacher demonstrating leadership and being supported to do so is a Samoan teacher who was identified early by the principal of our school as being a leader in the Canterbury Pacific community. He understood her leadership skills to be values-based and stemming from her Pacific identity and culture. Crucially, he also appreciated that these leadership skills were transferable and appointed her to key leadership positions, not solely Pacific focused. His leadership as a principal, making strategic decisions that celebrated and recognised Pacific value-based leadership, ensured that Pacific staff and students in the school were better supported by having someone they connected with in leadership.

Addressing cultural isolation and taxation

Currently, there is a dearth of research looking at the experience of Pacific teachers in the Canterbury region. In 2022, Pacific students accounted for 4.77% of the overall total number of students in Aotearoa New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2022a). While this represents an increase of 12.7% over the last four years, it indicates a low Pacific student and family population within Canterbury schools. This means that, if you are a Pacific teacher in the Canterbury region, your school's Pacific roll will likely be between 1% and 10%. The likelihood of there being other Pacific teachers on staff is also very low. In 2021, the number of Pacific secondary school teachers in the Canterbury region was 112 (Ministry of Education, 2022b), which means that there is a high likelihood that Pacific teachers will be alone, or in low numbers, in their school, and particularly in their department or team. For many Pacific teachers in this situation, the school looks to them to provide a function that they are not necessarily equipped for, or supported to do; however, they are given the role by default due to their cultural and ethnic background.

The situation of cultural taxation is similarly felt in higher educational institutions where extra cultural activities often become the responsibility of Pacific peoples in a voluntary capacity (Naepi, 2021). However, at times the leadership of the school is able to provide working conditions (pay and release time) in order to facilitate a specific role, and at times they are not, and the teacher is encouraged to perform these duties in an almost volunteer capacity.

It was my experience, arriving at a school as a lone Pacific teacher and being culturally and socially isolated in this regard. Taking on the responsibility for the Pasifika performance group allowed me to support students in their education. But there was no mention of remuneration, rather, this aspect

of my job would be considered as my extra-curricular obligations. The naivety of the leadership of many schools is that the job of supporting a specific cultural and ethnic section of the community can be sectioned off and achieved as part of an extra-curricular aspect. The expectation is often that the teacher will be able to also connect with the students pastorally and support their academic aspirations, alongside the role of helping with the cultural performance group that might have been the original intention. Teachers in these situations often become the default *dean* or *go-to person* for other teachers on staff, who might be struggling to engage with Pacific students or their families. This can compound issues around cultural isolation, as the Pacific teacher then becomes the holder of knowledge for all things Pacific and is asked to do more and more, when all they agreed to was to support the Pasifika culture group.

Effective solutions for the issues that Pacific teachers face involve structured and intentional and strategic support for Pacific teachers, investment in the development of Pacific teachers and intentional recruitment processes so that other Pacific teachers or teachers with the necessary skills are able to join the team.

Reflection Two: Christopher's reflections - Pacific student realities

My reflections of Pacific students' realities act as the top-patterned layer, finding their way and being allowed to shine. Having worked as a dean and Pacific coordinator within schools in Aotearoa has meant engaging with Pacific students in their day-to-day schooling life and within their respective communities. Unfortunately, the reality for many Pacific learners is that they face racial biases and discrimination daily, whether it's being reprimanded for speaking in their mother tongue, being the subject of cultural taxation or having their cultural customs disrespected.

For many Pacific families, education is highly valued as an opportunity for success in life (Salesa, 2017). Often migrant Pacific learners are navigating this experience alone, isolated and without the usual community and family support they may have left on their home island. Further, the responsibilities and roles within the family unit are often vastly different to their papa'a (European) peers, which can cause misunderstanding when assumptions are made around such issues as lateness, missed deadlines or attendance. It is important for teachers to understand the difference between a migrant Pacific learner and a Pacific learner that may not have grown up in or known their ancestral homeland. This gives rise to the need for meaningful learning relationships to avoid homogenising Pacific learners and making assumptions about them at face value (Rimoni et al., 2022). The overall student experience of a Pacific learner compared to that of their papa'a peers is different, yet the current system maintains its tailored service to the dominant papa'a culture.

Navigating new shores and belonging

One of the major symptoms that I have seen contributing to inequitable outcomes for Pacific learners is the homogenising of Pacific Peoples. In my experiences, when a Pacific learner enters a school in Aotearoa, their status is made known to staff primarily as a *Pacific Island student* or a *priority learner*. At face value, this would seem inclusive, yet this impression of this status for the Pacific learner comes from a deficit positioning (Matapo & Baice, 2020). What is not often considered is where in the Pacific the learner actually comes from, when they arrived in Aotearoa, if they are Aotearoa born, their mother tongue and dialect, their values and beliefs, or how they choose to identify. This highlights the importance of *cultural locatedness* as described in the Tapasā document published by the Ministry of Education (2018). Each one of these intrinsic and identity-based attributes is central to many Pacific peoples' sense of self and identity, especially when navigating a new and unfamiliar environment. Similar to the way in which Māori might identify with their iwi (tribe), awa (river), and maunga (mountain) before they do the collective status of Māori, Pacific peoples have a village, mountain, river, and life force that has allowed us to thrive for hundreds of years, knowing who we are and the significance of our ancestors who have laid the foundations for us today.

This homogenised lens can lead to our learners feeling shame or guilt about who they are, invisible, inferior or sadly feeling no choice but to conform entirely to a more western worldview to be considered successful. It is a key responsibility for all teachers in Aotearoa to know, firstly, their own privilege and bias, then their learners, individually. This will allow space for each learner's identity to be seen, understood, celebrated and nurtured (Ministry of Education, 2018). An example may look like stitching identity-based exploration into unit plans, having learners practise speaking their pēpeha often, getting students to teach the class about a unique skill or technique used by their ancestors. Barriers to pedagogical decisions like this can manifest in complaints such as “what about the Pākehā learners”, or “if the Pacific learners get special recognition, can we have fish and chip Friday for their Pākehā peers?” At face value this may seem like an inclusive idea; however, the omnipresent and generational socialisation of what is primarily British culture in this country is the default, and therefore a clear example of the dominant culture not allowing for a truly equitable and inclusive learning environment for all.

Navigating learning and deficit theory

During my time as a Pacific coordinator in schools I heard such remarks as “those Pasifika boys!”, “they are speaking about me in their language” and “why do Pacific learners get special

treatment?” Comments like these, especially when they come from teachers themselves, not only feed into dangerous stereotypes but put up barriers to learning through deficit theorising. These perceived deficits are often suggested as being responsible for the gap in academic achievement between Pacific learners and their peers (Mara, 2014).

As teachers we consistently hear from Pacific learners that they “don’t like that teacher”. For the protection of ourselves and each other, remarks like these are often quickly dismissed. But what happens when one hears this every day, from the same students about the same teacher(s)? Of course, claims like these require investigation and a search to understand where all parties fit into such a complaint. However, I quickly came to understand the importance of listening to the collective voice of students and the reasons as to why they simply do not like some of their teachers. Teachers must be actively aware of their unconscious bias and ability to let this influence the way they engage with different learners (Blank, et al., 2016). A teacher’s job is not measured on how well they are liked, yet as teachers we often hold the keys to the future success of our learners. Therefore, if we as teachers are holding deficit ideas about our Pacific learners, whether conscious or unconscious, we risk developing within our learners a belief that they do not belong and cannot succeed within this system (Bishop & Berryman, 2006).

For Pacific learners to have more equitable outcomes, it is imperative for all teachers in Aotearoa to be checking their bias, assessing why they believe what they believe, and championing all of their learners through knowing who they are, where they come from and what they value. Then ensuring, particularly if a teacher is of the dominant culture, that they do not silence the cultural lens and world view of their learners with their own.

Navigating the measure of success

When it comes to the measure of success in education, Gert Biesta (2014) asked whether we are measuring what is valued, or measuring what is easily measured and thus end up valuing what (can) be measured? This begs the question as to how individual schools in Aotearoa measure success and where our Pacific learners belong in this measure. In my experience as a teacher, I believe that success is still primarily associated with academic success: high grades, meeting deadlines and academic accolades to name some measures of success in schools. However, among the many measures of success within individual nations, villages and families throughout the Pacific, academia is not necessarily a definitive measure in this sense. I know from my own Cook Island culture, specifically within Rarotonga, Aitu, and Tahiti, learnings such as knowing how to speak publicly with confidence, respecting and acknowledging elders and the young (vulnerable members of the community), mastering certain traditional customs and art forms and maintaining our native language are just a few examples

of what might be considered success. Pacific learner success looks different to how their papa'a peers may perceive this concept. The *Pasifika Success Compass* identifies this, valuing a more holistic approach in celebrating culture, language, family, community, and love among many other intrinsic elements of life (Ministry of Education, 2018).

In an environment where the prevalence of a mono-focused measure of success (academia) dominates, a learner from a Pacific nation with a differing measure of success will find this challenging and, in some cases, require them to unlearn or even hide their deeply embedded values from their upbringing. The consequence of this for our Pacific learners often forces them to navigate two opposing environments: school and home. Teachers must actively embody culturally responsive practices to avoid deficit theorising and therefore limiting opportunities for learner success (Bishop & Berryman, 2010). I have seen improvements in this space from when I went to school to now, however schools can be caught out if they try to implement a more culturally responsive environment by having Pacific learners lead these changes. This, in turn, gives rise to the risk of cultural taxation (Padila, 1994), where there is an expectation on a Pacific learner to address matters of inequity or inequality in a school environment. I have witnessed Pacific learners from all high-school year levels address staff during professional development, where they are seeking to educate teachers about their world view, home life and realities of their educational experience in Aotearoa. In the same sessions I have witnessed these same learners being publicly challenged and debated with by their papa'a teachers. Not only is there a power imbalance in this space of vulnerability, but a lack of safety for our learners who often have to justify and explain their identity and whole self to a critical and often unconsciously biased audience. Of course, this is not all teachers, as I speak generally from my own experience.

Conclusion

The education system in Aotearoa New Zealand acknowledges Pacific learners as priority learners, seeking to address the disparity in academic achievement in comparison to their papa'a peers. However, when considering this disparity through a holistic lens, academic achievement is but one area in which success can be attained. Understanding belonging, community, care, family, story, food, language, and name are just a few areas in which many Pacific Peoples would identify success, highlighting the mono-focused (and often exclusive) measure of academic achievement. Of course, academic achievement is important for our learners to progress in navigating our ever-changing world, but it is not the only measure. Aotearoa New Zealand is, and has always been, a Pacific Island. Our learners today are faced with the seemingly impossible task of growing up in one world (i.e., a cultural world at home) and being educated in another (i.e., formal schooling). The tivaevae framework has

acted as an effective reflection tool, enabling myself, as the back layer of the tivaevae, to only exist and tell a story when the success of our learners and all that they are becomes stitched together as one. Teachers, especially those who identify with the dominant culture, must actively engage with their Pacific communities and listen. Listen to who we say we are, not who we are told we are. Knowledge and custom have been retained and passed down for generations by our ancestors, not to be stifled and challenged yet again in an unfamiliar and often damaging learning environment.

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