



# ULUNI VANUA

## Celebratory Reflections on Pacific Education Research

My first experience of the RPEIPP was in 2017, as a fellow for the Institute of Education (IOE). Hearing stories from Dr Seu'ula about its history, the people involved, and its strategic purpose to collectivise and mobilise people in the region, genuinely warmed my heart. RPEIPP affirmed for me that, the educational solutions to the problems in the region was already with the people themselves.

This was a huge revelation because being educated in a dominant western system, we're often made to believe that our ancestral knowledges have no place in education, at least in the formal sense. RPEIPP taught me that relying on outside organisations to provide the answers was not it. The educators and researchers from each Pacific nation already had it "with-in" them.

RPEIPP provided a vessel/conduit/space for people in Oceania to mobilise and collectivise. It required leaders who had the spirit of generosity, care, respect, and love – to value their specifically similar and diverse cultures. My reflections in the 2018 paper was to highlight what I learnt whilst at IOE, a focus on strengths already "with-in" people in Oceania. Even though I'm physically located in Aotearoa New Zealand, my heart has not left the lands in Oceania. Mālō, faafetai, fakaue.



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Halo olgeta wantoks & warm Pacific greetings. Congratulations to RPEIPP on the 20th year anniversary.

I was part of the Wellington Leadership Cluster within the RPEIPP from 2008 – 2013 whilst studying at Victoria University of Wellington. The experiences of interacting with post-graduate and undergraduate Pacific students, staff, and friends of Pacific peoples including international students, Maori and pakeha New Zealanders was a transformational experience. Transformational not only for me, but also for my two children who were with me, as a single parent studying for my PhD. The groundings of the different Pacific lenses of viewing leadership for instance, through 'talanoa' and 'tok stori' gave me confidence

in local ownership for grounding research descriptions. This I apply within my own practices within the strong Melanesian patrilineal society in which I live and work at the University of Papua New Guinea. I still continue to share 'ethical leadership stories' and work with students who come from the same province as I do (East Sepik Province). The essence of it to me is my students, and the community having me a strong female mentor in principles and character. The seeds sown in the RPEIPP is growing here in my different spheres of interactions in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.



**Dr Billy Fitoo, Campus Director,  
University of the South Pacific,  
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My Name is Billy Fitoo (PhD) from the Solomon Islands. I did a Masters Degree in Education at Victoria University of Wellington (2007-09) and was supervised by Associate Professor Kabini Sanga who also instigated and led the Leadership Pacific (LP) movement. In 2007 during my first year at VUW, I was introduced to the Leadership Pacific Movement by Pacific Islands students who became my friends in my first year of study. I became part of the movement and continue to participate in organized activities. Some of the activities include one on one mentoring, seminar presentations, symposiums, conferences, workshops, research and publications and just sitting around chatting over food.

It was in those moments and space that I discovered my passion and the direction I took to become an academic. Leadership Pacific has transformed my world from a public servant to an academic. I grew to become a leader who continually aspire, support and mentor those around me. I became ethical in my daily approach to life and continue to advocate for ethical leadership in my areas of influences. The LP appreciative approach to leadership has built my confidence to deliver on leadership for university students, public servants, community leaders and mentor young leaders who wish to lead. Dr Kabini Sanga often reiterated that Good Leadership is not about how much we know but is from what we demonstrate from the heart.

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As a PI Samoan, I have found the RPEIPP platform a very significant educational forum to sustain academic writing and presentation pertaining to educational issues in the Pacific. On reflection, based on the paper that we co-published with Dr Fa'avae and Dr Rimoni from the last VPEC held at USP, Fiji, we emphasized the continuation of valuing scholarly research interests, sharing indigenous knowledge, skills and wisdom.

We again salute RPEIPP, and would like to leave you with 6 lines from the poem published in our VPEC presentation on RPEIPP in 2019, Suva Fiji.

I dream a world where Pasifika rule. No other  
Pasifika will suffer,  
Where sharing and mutual respect will bless our  
Pasifika region,  
Respect accorded to others and reciprocity  
uniting us all,  
I dream a world where all...  
Will share the knowledge, skills, resources,  
technology and opportunities  
(Fa'avae, Rimoni, & Tuia, 2019)



**Associate Professor Fuaialii  
Tagataese Tupu Tuia, Faculty of  
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**Malefoasi Ambrose, University of the South Pacific, Fiji**

The Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative (RPEI) has had influence on aspects of the education system in the Solomon Islands. Nabobo (2002) has observed that many Pacific countries are heavily depended on foreign aid for the development of their education system. The Solomon Islands is no exception. In recent years, the two major partners in Solomon Islands education are Australia and New Zealand. The common form of education aid from these donors appears as projects. Coxon and Nabobo (2000) noted the failure of sustaining the projects in the Solomon Islands, right from the planning stages. For me as a senior Solomon Islands educational official, a major mindset change that is related to the RPEI has been the scholarship on the use of tok

stori in the design and implementation of the MFAT-funded LEAP project in the Solomon Islands. Initially, the LEAP concept was “brewed” by me and shared with MFAT. My worldview of aid then was trapped by the traditional way of education aid project design and implementation. Unconsciously, I had framed myself in this position without knowing the existence of indigenous practices for working in education. Hence, when tok stori was introduced as a philosophy with potential to change the ways we understand engagement with people in their contexts, this completely changed my appreciation for project design and implementation using local expertise and knowledge. In his teaching of me and others, Kabini Sanga had introduced tok stori not only as methodology but first, as a social connector for forging effective relationships with people. The value of the research on and learning about Solomon Islands tok stori relates to its familiarity, relevance, ease of access and effective use by Solomon Islanders in educational aid projects. This scholarship points of a future where Solomon Islanders can re-configure the ways we frame education aid for ourselves.

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## ABOUT THIS SERIES

### 20th Anniversary of the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative

This newsletter celebrates the 20th Anniversary of the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative, which started in 2001 with a group of Pacific educators reflecting on the progress, development and way forward for education in the Pacific. This newsletter is a one-off series, published and disseminated online every Wednesday in the month of October 2021.

The title 'Ulu Ni Vanua' refers to a mountain, and metaphorically, to a younger person's formation, growth and maturation. Hence, a protégé ultimately develops into a ulu ni vanua.

If you would like to contribute to the next weekly issue of this newsletter, please email the editor with a 150 word reflection on how RPEIPP has been of value to you/your work over the last two decades. Reference to existing RPEIPP writings and ideas is encouraged. We welcome all contributions!

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