



ULUNI VANUA

Celebratory Reflections on Pacific Education Research

Transformational leadership

Mabuhay, kia ora, and warm Pacific greetings to all! I have been very honoured to be a member of the Wellington Leadership Pacific cluster and the RPEIPP movement since 2007. Through Dr Billy Fitoo, a fellow student at the time and now Campus Director at the University of the South Pacific, Solomon Islands, I was introduced to and involved in a group of like-minded, motivated, and talented individuals who dreamt of improving the educational system and achievement of Pacific students in the Pacific and New Zealand and now are catalysts of positive change in Oceania. As a student, I was inspired by Anna Pasikale's 'Pacific Education in New Zealand', a chapter in the book 'Tree of Opportunity'. Her work influenced the focus of my research. Through mentoring as part of Leadership Pacific, I learned the value of access and support to authenticate true opportunity; that genuine appreciation brings out what is best and positive in you; and transformational leadership is about

empowerment, respect, strong and positive relationships, and interpersonal care. These learnings and encounters with generous thinkers and movers of RPEIPP have shaped and sharpened my perspective and principles about education and my teaching.



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Importance of mentoring emerging academics

The edited book, 'Re-thinking Aid Relationships in Pacific Education' (Sanga, Chu, Hall & Crowl, 2005), was a landmark for me as an academic and researcher. It was in this book that I had my first published work. As a new lecturer at the (then) School of Education of the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) in 2003, I saw a flyer for the RPEI Nadi conference on education aid. My abstract, based on a student paper I wrote while studying at the University of Southern Queensland, was accepted. The RPEI conference conveners arranged for and met my travel and accommodation in Nadi. At the time of the Solomon Islands ethnic crisis, such support to an emerging researcher was phenomenal as SICHE was in a dire financial situation. Already pleased with my presentation at the Nadi conference, I was overjoyed when my paper was published as a book chapter in

Sanga, et.al 2005. My first published work inspired me to go on to publish three more papers from my Masters research. On reflection now, I appreciate the mentoring offered to me which allowed exploration of my potential as a researcher. My first publication gave me the encouragement I needed. In moving to the University of the South Pacific, I have continued to enjoy undertaking research projects, speaking at conferences and publishing as regularly as I can. As well, I am committed to mentoring emerging academics and my thesis student because I, too, have appreciated being mentored by others.



Footprints

I see myself as more of a deckhand, or a rower, on this RPEIPP vaka; an observer mostly, a participant when required, a follower of instructions, my own experiences shaping my words today. The work that has been conducted under the RPEIPP sail signifies our people making footprints in our own sands, on our own islands, re-marking lost footprints which we were told to cover up/ sweep over quickly because they were messy and dirty, and had no place in clean classrooms. But those old footprints had taken us far before, across valleys and over mountains, right across the ocean too, and when our bare feet felt the sand, soil and leaves, when they were wading in the sea, it fed our wild imaginings and curious souls. RPEIPP has given us the opportunity to be reminded of those old tracks we used to run through as children, messy and dirty and noisy, filled with our songs and stories, but it got us places that we never imagined, and we came back sweaty and dirty, tired but

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excited for more, tomorrow. RPEIPP is also an opportunity to mark new footprints, using what we know now to make better sense of our past, our present and our future. Here's to unearthing old footprints and making new ones.

RPEI Impact: A personal and professional journey

For me RPEI was a very bold step to make a stand and say enough is enough. Enough of education systems and teaching and learning experiences which do not give Pacific people a sense of ownership, recognise our indigenous knowledge systems nor an opportunity for us to rethink and reshape our education systems to fit our local contexts, needs and aspirations. The starting point of my RPEI engagement and journey was when Dr Kabini Sanga invited me to participate in a series of Leadership development workshops for wantok students from Vanuatu and Solomon Islands studying at USP Laucala campus. Listening to Dr Kabini and observing the excitement in the room got me to engage and rethink. Since then, Dr Kabini has been my teacher and mentor and my RPEI impacted journey took off. RPEI has taught me to always appreciate and start with what you have. Dr Kabini taught us to define leadership in our own languages and from our own cultural



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perspectives. This was a new idea and approach for me. I liked it, so I absorbed, applied and used it in my work many years after. As a Solomon Islander educator and mentor, we use local and contextually developed resources by local educators and mentors. One such resource is 'Apem Moa Leadership in Solomon Islands' written by Dr Kabini Sanga and Professor Keith Walker. Amongst other valuable teachings, 'Apem Moa' focused on ethical leadership as a key component of indigenous leadership development and one that is so significant for educating a new generation of leaders in Solomon Islands and across the Pacific today. This resource placed leadership understanding in context. Like RPEI, 'Apem Moa' encouraged us to be deliberate about our commitment to influence our leaders to position themselves in their contexts and to rethink their roles in educating our children and young people whose lives must be rooted in their cultural and Lotu values for the common good. 'Apem Moa' also reshaped the thinking of many school and EA leaders during and after the GCSL programme in Solomon Islands. Congratulations and a big thank you to the founders and implementors of RPEI. Our work must continue.



An emancipatory paradigm

In early 2018, I stepped into the FNU Lautoka campus with a pounding chest and hopeful eyes. It was my first day at work as a young iTaukei woman academic. I attended my first Vaka Pasifiki that year. It was at the conference that I was introduced to 'The Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative for Pacific Peoples by Pacific Peoples'. As an indigenous academic, I had set my mind very early on to do all I possibly can to help improve formal education for my people; the initiative's stance on the need to ensure indigenous and Pacific peoples increased ownership of the processes of education and curriculum improvement/development was one I can only applaud, encourage and work towards. It was also at the Vaka Pasifiki that I bought the "Tree of Opportunity " and was introduced to 'Cultural democracy' by Prof. Konai Helu Thaman - a woman of the Pacific who unapologetically writes and speaks about

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education in PICs. I was intrigued and it has fueled my curiosity since. Like those that continue to write for a liberatory form of education in the Pacific, I will also work in my current role, to encourage an emancipatory paradigm on which to build culturally relevant content and pedagogies. Student empowerment in conducive environments is key to 21st century learning. Whether it be teaching or research, I hope to always be grounded in the core values of RPEIPP. Vinaka Vakalevu.

Guests in the relational space

Anae's (2019) article "Pacific Research Methodologies and Relational Ethics" evaluates contemporary forms of Pacific Research Methods from the past two decades, reflecting on their development and importance. This article, and others on Pacific research methodologies, have influenced us greatly as teachers and non-Pacific researchers engaged in research involving Pacific communities. As non-Pacific researchers we are guests in this space; Pacific research principles provide us with a framework we can follow which guides our thinking and challenges our Western perspectives. They remind us that research "with Pacific peoples and communities is [to be] ethical and methodologically sound with transformational outputs"(p.1). Throughout, the article advocates the criticality of relationships in research involving Pacific people. Airini et al.(2010) indicate that most Pacific research methodologies underline the vital importance for the value of relationships, and refer to the va. Anae et al (2001) described the va as "being a relational space, in which Pacific values of love, service, spirituality, respect, reciprocity are felt and enacted", those values are what we have learned are at the heart of Pacific research. Western research approaches often draw importance on the outcome, and what can be gathered and reported. In contrast, Pacific research methodologies prioritise the building of relationships. The Pacific research principles have

taught us that our role as researcher is one where relationality is key, with the understanding that the building of relationships is reciprocal throughout the research process and beyond.



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RPEIPP Mafana

Mālō e lelei and warm greetings from Tonga. It is a blessing for me to reflect on two giants of education in Tonga – Professor Konai H Thaman and Professor ‘Ana M Taufe’ulungaki. These two giants greatly impacted education and their role as mothers of education in Tonga, with the innovative ideas they initiated as the way forward for education. Their ideas greatly challenged and motivated emerging Tongan educators. Their ideas of embedding traditional educational knowledge while wholeheartedly striving to decolonise western educational knowledge influenced my thinking. I first heard of PREIPP in 2017 from my Masters supervisor, Dr. Seu’ula. I dug deeper in the series and my heart melted as I felt the mafana from these Oceanians including my heroes Konai and ‘Ana towards education in the Oceania. Their works really inspired me as a teacher educator to nurture, shape and equip teachers of

Tonga with the attributes of the Faiako ma’a Tonga. Happy 20th anniversary PREIPP and a huge congratulation and thank you to Professor Konai H Thaman and Professor ‘Ana M Taufe’ulungaki for all your passion and love for Tonga – God and Tonga are my inheritance. ‘Ofa lahi atu.

Celebratory reflections on Pacific education research

As a young Pacific Island research scholar, I’ve learnt and come to understand that it is important to acknowledge and embrace our indigenous knowledge, values and ideals into the western formal education system. The Pacific Islands’ education system has been long dominated by foreign ideologies and theories introduced by our colonizers, at the expense of our ways of understanding and valuing ideas based on our indigenous culture and beliefs. Rethinking our education frame and research activities on reclaiming and including our ways of doing and knowing on our indigenous system is vital for inclusivity and a more transformative and meaningful learning. The ever-changing world has brought about many changes in the Pacific Education system and has dictated our ways of teaching and learning.



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As a Pacific Islander, I believe now is the time to work together and pave the way in ensuring that our indigenous knowledge, culture and beliefs are valued and recognized in the formal education system.



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Reflecting, Re-learning and Re-Engaging

As a young academic, my first ever Conference was the Vaka Pasifiki Education Conference in Tonga in 2014. This was my initiation into the field of academia. This Conference was a feast of ideas on how we can weave theory into practice, with a focus on Teacher Education. It was in this platform that I became aware of the immense work put into the birthing of the RPEIPP. It gave me an opportunity to confidently reflect, relearn and re-engage in my own space of learning. The courage of our Pacific Educators to steer our Education Va into challenging waters was not only a sign of bravery but also that of 'Yalomatua'. It has given me the opportunity to begin my own journey as a PhD scholar, to explore the knowledge and learning space of my people. A journey that is driven by the Fijian Vanua Research Framework (Nabobo-Baba, 2008) and the Iluvatu Framework (Naisilisili, 2012).

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!

RPEIPP 20th Anniversary Events website: <https://www.usp.ac.fj/institute-of-education/rpeipp-20th-anniversary/>

RPEIPP BOOKS

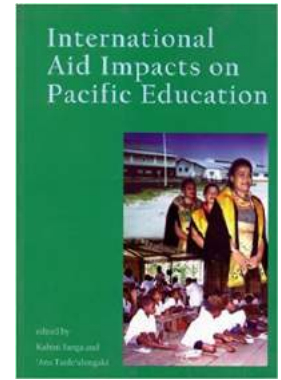
Some of the books produced as part of RPEIPP over the past two decades



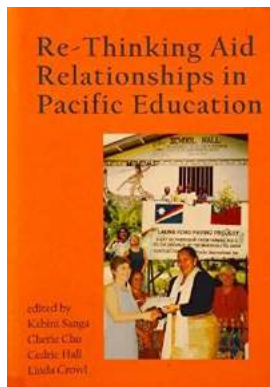
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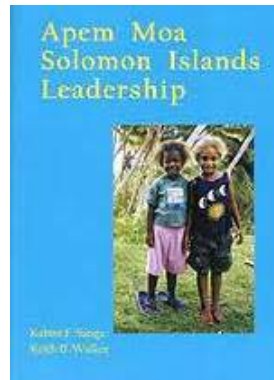
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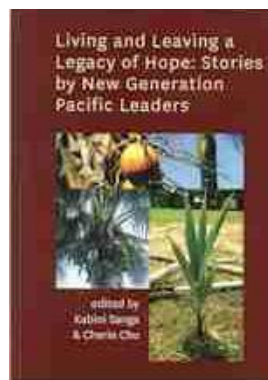
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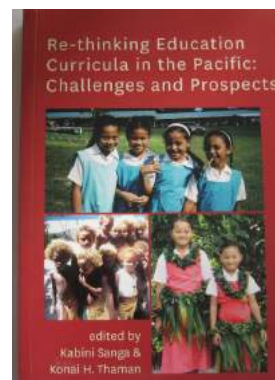
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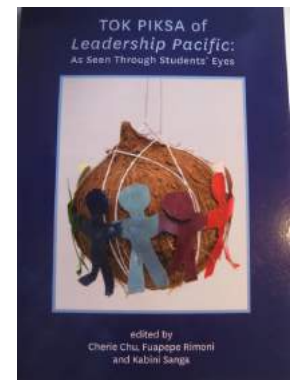
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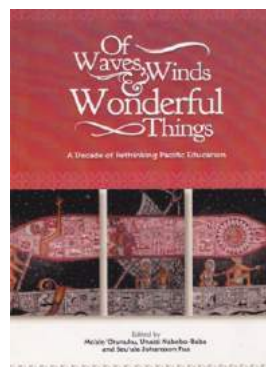
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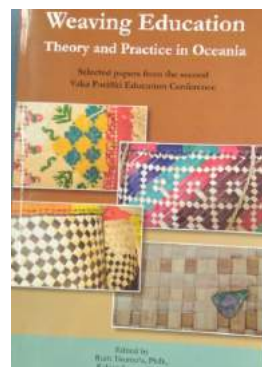
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For information on procuring these books, please contact Pine at pine.southon@vuw.ac.nz

SPECIAL ISSUE SPOTLIGHT

Waikato Journal of Education Vol 26 (2021)

Special Issue: Talanoa Va: Honouring Pacific Research & Online Engagement

With foreword by Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba

[Click here](#) to browse the special issue and read the writings of many of our Pacific researchers

RPEIPP THROUGH THE YEARS



Rethinking Pacific Education Colloquium, April 25 -27, 2001. Institute of Education, University of the South Pacific



Leadership Symposium, 23-25 January 2006.
University of the South Pacific



Vaka Pasifiki Education Conference, 5-6 July, 2018, University of the South Pacific

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