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Editorial: Pacific students and pedagogical success

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Debates about rates of achievement for Pacific students have been a feature of educational conversations in New Zealand for over three decades. We do not intend rehearsing the substance of them here, as components of them are included in the articles in this special edition. However, two aspects of this ongoing commentary continue to stand out. Points related to the educational underachievement of Pacific students are an enduring feature of these discussions. Secondly, Pacific students are seen to struggle, in particular, in Science, Technology and Maths (STEM) related areas of the New Zealand curriculum. Individual Pacific students can, and do, experience success in New Zealand educational environments including in STEM-related subjects, as Fonua in this edition points out. However, their achievements are considered examples of ‘exceptions that prove the rule’ related to the continuity of a dominant assumption of underachievement. As Chu, also in this edition remarks, “education for Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand is a contentious issue” (Chu, C. 2018, p. 5) and the articles in this edition reinforce the strength of this claim.

When we first considered the idea of a Pasifika special edition for the Waikato Journal of Education (WJE), a desire to see if it might be useful to provide a space for interested writers to consider educational issues for Pacific students “through a Pacific lens” as Reynolds (2018) puts it, motivated the genesis of this idea. What might those who have experienced success and who have become educational practitioners in their own right, have to say in relation to these debates? We knew of the work of individual Pacific academics through our own professional networks. However, these numbers were few, a telling issue in itself. This led to some concern about how many articles might be submitted. Indeed, our initial call for contributions resulted in a very small number of responses. The WJE editor-in-chief suggested that we try the ‘cold-call’ approach. This course of action included a web-based sweep of information about recent New Zealand and Pacific-based educational conferences, where Pasifika academics had presented papers. We followed up with an email to these presenters, based on information gained through conference presentations, inviting them to make a submission to this special edition. This way of approaching potential submitters proved to be far more fruitful.

During the peer-review process that followed, we found that papers submitted fell into in two distinct format categories. These included articles that followed the more traditional academic research style - including literature review, study methodology, data gathering process and analysis sections, followed by concluding remarks. Others reflected a much more in-depth, personalised and ‘real-time’



narrative approach set within ethnographic, autobiographical-inspired frameworks. As has been noted, it is far harder for academic work that does not easily conform to the more accustomed ‘reference and footnote’ taken-for-granted format to be accepted for publication (Vigo, 2017). We note the difficulties that working with indigenous methodologies can create, as indicated in the following quotation from correspondence with a prospective author:

I am not confident that if I had another attempt that I would meet the academic standard required. Even though I worked in partnership with..... to write this paper, the feedback shows we did not get to the required standard, am not sure if this process is helpful for first-time writers as I feel disappointed that the gap is so wide. Oral presentations are a lot easier. (Malita, personal communication, June 25, 2018).

We would like to acknowledge the time, effort and passion that was put into all the submissions, knowing that not all were successful.

This special edition includes three research-area perspectives - Pasifika research methodologies, research with Pasifika students and research with Pasifika teachers. In particular, we are very pleased to include articles about Pacific teacher’s pedagogical practice in STEM subjects, as well as those that reflect Pasifika students’ attitudes and beliefs about their competence related to mathematics and science learning. Four papers address this curriculum area. Dayal and Lingam’s paper explores Pasifika pre-service teachers’ knowledge about fractions. Sharma’s paper presents a language-as-resource perspective in addressing language challenges in multilingual mathematics classrooms and how to use home language and real-life contexts to maximise learning for Pasifika students in their classrooms. Kele’s paper explores Solomon Islands high school (Year 12) students’ beliefs and attitudes towards mathematics and how these ideas influence their mathematics performance, while Poraki and Edwards investigate the development of beginning science teachers’ knowledge in the Solomon Islands.

While the articles in the journal present different Pasifika-related aspects of the theory and process of educational engagement, all provide a window of opportunity through which readers can view how Pacific culture and knowledge might be better utilised to form an integral and dynamic aspect of research and classroom practice in this country. We hope that the content of all articles in this compilation provides a clear space for readers to consider what might be needed to provide for more creative opportunities for Pasifika student pedagogical engagement and success within our education system.

Reference

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