



Peer-reviewed paper

## Navigating leadership in Pasifika early childhood education: Traversing the tides of change

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The lack of leadership research in Pasifika early childhood education requires attention, as policies for improved outcomes targeting Pasifika learners remain an interest for Governing bodies. One such target includes the increased participation of Pasifika children enrolled in early childhood services (Ministry of Education, 2014). Current literature draws attention to strengthening culturally responsive practices, particularly in the critique of curriculum and pedagogy. However, the gaps in research to support sustainable leadership in our Pasifika early childhood settings continue to widen and includes a lack of research that investigates the impact of leadership upon teacher pedagogy. The need for further research within Pasifika early childhood settings is essential to understand how leadership influences and engages Pasifika children within culturally relevant pedagogy. This article will discuss the importance of cultural values, family and community contribution to sustaining a collective approach to education, which in turn resonates with Pasifika ways of knowing, Pasifika theology, ontology and epistemology. Leadership in the spirit of the collective fosters difference and offers potentialities in the learning and collective constructions of knowledge in leadership.

### ***Introduction***

The intention of this personal narrative and literature review is to critically engage with current Pasifika educational leadership research, to explore implications and possibilities for further research within this context. Literature included in this study indicate an increase in Pasifika research, including methodological, theoretical and epistemological standpoints, particularly in the reclaiming of Pacific indigenous knowledge. One such tension for Pasifika leadership is that it is not constituted only from within a humanist paradigm, rather leadership is entangled with land, waters, skies, histories, and cosmos which suggests alternative ways of being in leadership (Tamasese, 2005). The literature reviewed in this study have integrated historical perspectives of Pasifika education, with common themes in Pasifika leadership that foreground culturally relevant practice in education (Wendt-Samu, 2006; Mara, 2013). The importance of the historical context (that of colonisation within the Pacific and the migration of Pacific people to Aotearoa/New Zealand) is acknowledged within most research literature, particularly when Pasifika engagement in education is confronted and analysed. Within the literature examined there is a tension for Pasifika leadership within current education constructs and a range of paradigms are included. These are; emancipationist (Airini, 2010; Podmore, Sauvao, & Mapa 2003), positivist, interpretivist (Cooper & Hedges, 2014), post-modern, deconstructivist, postcolonial and poststructural (Devine, Teisina & Pau'uvale 2012; Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014; Matapo, 2016). Within the collective, the early childhood leader is an agent of change, navigating choices that require responsibility, ethics and care. As I enter doctoral study, the value of this research for Pasifika early childhood education communities is to heighten awareness of the complexity, multiplicity and diversity of leadership to strengthen culturally relevant practices and to navigate a future together within a Aotearoa/New Zealand and global context.



## **Entering the research context: Researcher narrative**

I start with gratitude for those who have come before me, Pacific leaders and scholars who have taken courage to bring to the attention of the world, the vā (relational space) for Pacific indigenous knowledge and its epistemological contribution to ways of knowing and becoming in education leadership and research. This study is a personal journey for me, as I engage in doctoral study and am an emerging Pasifika researcher. This article will attempt to capture the historical development of Pasifika early childhood education within Aotearoa/New Zealand and then move towards contemporary issues and Pacific ways of being with a focus on leadership within these contexts.

### **Priority learner.**

(Matapo, 2016)

*I'm a priority – that's what I'm told,*

*from the time, my mother held me in her arms, my father on his shoulders I stood, always trying to look beyond the horizon.*

*I'm a priority... learner, that's what I'm told, lowering my head, lower statistics reveal. This dichotomy is my story.*

*Priority learner to lift the outcomes of success, yet when I hear my grandfathers words I am a success in his eyes no less.*

*I am his story and he is mine, sensing more than education outcomes to define me.*

*My wairua, my mauri, my life force.*

*Why the obsession to fix me?*

*Do I need to be fixed?*

*How is education shaped by taken for granted truths?*

*Am I reduce-able to one's perception taken in brief moments of assessment?*

*When in brief moments, solidified are my fears.*

*My fears to fail, to be another statistic another rhetoric, to persuade others that I need to be fixed, I am broken.*

*The pieces of me, become pieces of you – fragments in politics, policies of change and priority education plans.*

*What motivates you to help me to achieve higher degree?*

*Responsive to policies, a responsive tap to funding...and in changing my perceptions of wisdom, what it is to know, and who's knowledge matters most.*

*And still, with fire in my eyes, and warmth in my soul, the horizon I seek beyond one's control.*

*Responsive, inclusive, equality, terms coined in essentialising difference...of culture, of colour, of ability...my hopes, for education is that our eyes may meet in search of the horizon and for that moment, knowing the potential in me, is knowing the potential in you.*

*How can we navigate potentiality, to bring forth new subjectivities, what it means to lead and to know, to traverse tides of change in a globalised space, spaces together, yet spaces apart, spaces of difference and an openness to the unknown.*

*These are our indigenous histories, that bring us together, the vā of our ancestors, within me, within you, and the hope for wisdom for a people yet to come.*



## ***Why Pasifika?***

The term Pasifika is a collective reference to Pacific Island peoples who have made New Zealand their home and is also inclusive of New Zealand-born Pasifika people. Pasifika ethnic groupings relate to Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Cook Islands, Niue and Tuvalu (Leauepe & Sauni, 2014). Pasifika was coined in the early nineties as a bureaucratic term in creating efficiency in grouping Pacific populations together (as a collective group) in national policy documents. Due to its contentious history, Pacific scholars have researched and recognised this term Pasifika is not always well received amongst Pacific peoples living in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Finau, 2014). As Finau (2014) explained, many Pacific peoples living in Aotearoa/New Zealand identify more with ethnic-specific cultural concepts. In contrast, the term Pasifika locates a geographical standpoint and connects Pacific peoples home in Aotearoa/New Zealand as well as linking to Pacific Island homelands. Pasifika researchers have embodied this term to bring forth a positive light in claiming Aotearoa/New Zealand as well as Pacific Island nations as whenua, or homeland (Wendt-Samu, 2006). The significant ties to the land, extends beyond one current location, it is situated genealogically, spiritually and is open to relations of change. These stories and indigenous knowledge are woven into the fibres of our oratory traditions and brings together Māori (as tuakana) and Pacific peoples as ocean navigators in connection to the wider cosmos. Furthermore, the significance of Pacific indigenous knowledge generates alternative ways of being and knowing, which challenge dualisms of Cartesian constructs of knowledge, which continues to permeate education discourses (Matapo, 2016).

## ***The social and political landscape of Pasifika early childhood education***

Pasifika early childhood education services established in Aotearoa/New Zealand from 1972 onwards were initiated as community-based projects by Pacific migrant women. The initial response by Pasifika communities was to maintain Pacific language and culture for their children as new migrants to Aotearoa/New Zealand (Mara, 2013). This collective effort to initiate Pasifika early childhood education for Pasifika families demonstrated leadership that was socially constructed and considerate of Pacific cultural perspectives, theology and Pacific indigenous knowledge.

The overarching purpose and rationale for Pasifika early childhood education essentially differ from predominant approaches that are evident now in mainstream early childhood education (Mara, 2005). The history of early childhood services in Aotearoa/New Zealand is interwoven with political and global events and changes in the discourse around child development, feminist theory, and decolonising of education for Māori (May, 1997). In a similar vein to that of Kohunga Reo, Pacific language based early childhood services shared a similar vision; maintaining language and culture in education through the provision of a cultural based pedagogy.

Factors of identity have been implicit in the rationale behind the development of the Pacific early childhood movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand. One narrative captured, is that of Teupoko Morgan where she explains her journey of education in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Rarotonga (Morgan, 1993). Teupoko Morgan communicates her early years learning experiences in Rarotonga, where she explains the context of learning was not separate from family and village life. Her childhood experiences demonstrated her position as a social actor; participating in decision making and contributing to daily family and village tasks. Teupoko Morgan goes on to explain how fundamental her early childhood years in Rarotonga were in inspiring her to qualify as a teacher and continue a long serving commitment to teaching both in Aotearoa/New Zealand and in Rarotonga. In her work with children and Pacific families, she encouraged teachers and parents to tell stories, to tell the stories of Samoa, to tell the stories of Rarotonga (Morgan, 1993). Like Teupoko Morgan, legacies of other Pacific Pioneers such as Ferani Ete, Jan Taouma, Feaua'i Burgess, Materena George, Tapaeru Tereora, Rangi Viliko (and others) have shaped our histories in Pasifika early childhood education (ECE) and continue to influence Pacific cultural connections for children and families within the New Zealand Pasifika ECE context.



The publishing of such historical narratives is significant in reminding the younger or more recent advocates and participants in the sector that there is a very exciting history that still needs to be researched and documented. Such origins constitute the professional and cultural heritage of Pacific ECE and are a source of mana and vision, and would go a long way to ensuring Pasifika ECE retains its holistic, collective focus. As a researcher, I question how these historical narratives may generate further dialogue and critique around leadership in our current Pasifika early childhood contexts, particularly in understanding the commitment and adeptness of our past Pacific leaders to bring about change.

Shifting now towards the current context, Pasifika early childhood centres are a minority within the wider Aotearoa/New Zealand early childhood sector with only 96 licensed early childhood centres operating in 2014, making up 2.2% of the total number of licensed early childhood services (Ministry of Education, 2014). As a minority, Pasifika early childhood services are in a position where organisational sustainability requires careful consideration and leadership. The marketisation of early childhood education exacerbates competition amongst ECE services, which has caused further implications for the viability of Pasifika ECE services having to compete with other local ECE services (Gould & Matapo, 2016). Further tensions between leadership concerning the current Pasifika success strategy is that there remains no mention of Pasifika perspectives of 'quality' early childhood education. The dominant view of 'quality' education foregrounds the aims of Pasifika success to engage Pasifika learners in areas of the curriculum, fostering later economic productivity. In addition, Pasifika student success strategies lack consideration for leadership practice, particularly the implementation of this strategy for Pasifika leaders and teachers within Pasifika early childhood settings (Chu, Glasgow, Rimoni, Hodis, & Meyer 2013).

As a result of government policy targeting Pasifika early childhood participation to 98%, there is an increasing number of Pasifika children enrolling in early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2014). Cooper and Hedges (2014) argue that the focus of Pasifika student success needs to go beyond increasing participation in early childhood education, as their study revealed the significance of children and families own cultural funds of knowledge as essential in meaningful engagement in early childhood education. In more recent years there have been various research interests in Pacific pedagogies in early childhood education, particularly how dominant discourses in education favour hegemonic perspectives of quality and the implications this may cause for Pasifika teachers and families (Devine, Teisina & Pau'uvala 2012; Mara, 2013).

### ***Early childhood curriculum Te Whāriki: Past and present***

Pacific early childhood pioneers were involved in policy development and were an integral part of the Before Five policies in the 1980s. Many of these Pacific pioneers were involved in the certificate and diploma training of Pasifika early childhood teachers, including the development of our nations' first early childhood curriculum. Changes in the discourse around the professionalisation of the early childhood sector impacted further policy development; the creation of mandates and compliances for all licensed ECE services. These mandates would directly affect funding for each licensed early childhood service.

The draft curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1993) contained a specific reference to tangata Pasifika which was intended to help teachers to interpret *Te Whāriki* and respond to particular priorities and interests within Pasifika early childhood services and communities. Components of tangata Pasifika within the draft were later excluded in the final version, hindering possibilities for planning, assessment and appropriate professional practices among all teachers working with Pasifika children and their families. Mara (2013) identifies that without the presence of tangata Pasifika in the final version of *Te Whāriki*, the articulation of valid Pasifika pedagogical links to *Te Whāriki* were also held back. A report presented by the advisory group on early learning in June of 2015 affirms that the exclusion of Pasifika content from the final version of *Te Whāriki* in 1996 was a serious mistake (Ministry of Education, 2015). "Without specific mention of Pasifika perspectives and direct links to the key competencies, the language and culture of Pasifika children and families disappear from view" (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 17). This situation continues, despite the Ministry of Education's



goal that the proportion of Pasifika children starting school has increased from 86.2% to 98% in 2016 (Ministry of Education, 2015).

The most recent draft of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2016) attempts to engage with Pasifika theories, listing values that underpin various Pasifika models and frameworks. The four general points explained under heading 'Pasifika theories' (p 14) identify relationships across time and space, ability to navigate between Pasifika and non-Pasifika world views, the use of metaphoric language and respect and reciprocity. Although Pasifika early childhood education locates as a critical practice involving a decolonising of ECE discourse, the 2016 draft has no specific mention of Pacific/Pasifika philosophy, theories or frameworks. The 2016 draft offers very little insight to the complexity of Pasifika knowledge systems (ways of knowing and being) although extensive contributions have been made in Pasifika research over the last twenty years (Matapo, 2016).

### ***Researcher considerations***

I often wonder how these tensions between 'professional' and cultural constructions of leadership interplay, intersect and juxtapose as a multiplicity of leadership praxis within the Pasifika early childhood context. I question how hegemonic leadership discourse must be critiqued regarding how leadership in Pasifika early childhood settings navigates cultural and professional commitments. Furthermore, is it enough to develop key indicators for effective leadership and is having one cultural model for leadership conducive for the cross-cultural spaces that many Pasifika early childhood settings operate?

### ***Pasifika leadership in education, challenging dominant leadership discourse***

Literature that examines the current situation for Pasifika early childhood education draw connections across education contexts, these include Pasifika student success strategies (Chu, 2009); specialised Pasifika teacher training programs (Matapo & Leaupepe, 2016) transition to school, and research innovations within Pasifika early childhood centres (Cooper & Hedges, 2014; Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014; Mara, 2013). Much of the literature advocates for an emancipation for Pasifika ways of knowing within postcolonial and postmodern paradigms, with a critical focus concerned in social justice. What is presented, are the repeated tensions between practice, policy and governance. Ang (2010) argues that such tensions are evident in the way policies and practices recommended by governing bodies respond to issues of inclusion, under-achievement, and diversity. The policies are fundamentally based upon the belief that inequalities must be attended to. However, these policies and application thereof are rarely supported with useful guidance for leaders and teachers (Chu et al., 2013) and offer little consideration of Pacific/Pasifika cultural ways of being and knowing.

Tagoilelangi-Leota (2010) identifies challenges in the application of policies are not new to Pasifika ECE and have been of concern since the initial development of Pasifika early childhood education services in the 1980s. In addition, Leaupepe and Sauni (2014) and Mara (2013) have identified key issues that impact the current and future directions of Pasifika early childhood education. These are; the need for comprehensive overview of the direction of Pasifika early childhood education in terms of societal and community outcomes, perception of Pasifika culture and languages including the multiplicities of Pasifika identity, the need for an increase in the number of qualified Pasifika early childhood teachers, culturally inclusive review of quality indicators and dimensions, and finally quality teaching and learning in conjunction with organisational sustainability. From the recommendations given by a range of literature included in this review, there is little mention of the importance of culturally inclusive leadership or connections made to leadership in promoting culturally inclusive pedagogy which is fundamental to the purpose of Pasifika education.

Research in early childhood educational leadership continues to focus attention on the relationships of the individual leader within their particular organisation, rather than the contextual characteristics of communities and societies in which early childhood services are located (Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow, 2007;



Waniganayake, 2011). This suggests that the leader within the early childhood organisation, may operate in disconnect to wider political, cultural and societal influences that are impacting upon the lives of children, families, teachers and community. Numerous researchers both international and national, have investigated how hegemonic views of leadership are problematic for early childhood education, particularly in the marginalisation of indigenous perspectives of leadership which may provide alternative and significant change within early childhood communities in the provision of culturally inclusive practice (Fasoli, et al., 2007; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015; Waniganayake, 2011).

An extensive literature review conducted by Chu, et al (2013), draws attention to the gaps in Pasifika education research. The urgent call for further research in Pasifika leadership was illustrated, including the importance of fostering culturally appropriate ways to involve Pasifika family and communities in the leadership and governance of Pasifika early childhood education. Similarly, Airini (2010) reported that there was no literature available on the implementation of Pasifika leadership within the Pasifika education strategy. Both sources specifically report that further attention in research is needed to sustain the education strategy within Aotearoa/New Zealand. Further political tensions permeate ECE, as operation of services compete in a free market neoliberal system (Gould & Matapo, 2016), which is another strain Pasifika early childhood leaders must navigate.

### ***Navigating a future for leadership in Pasifika early childhood education***

In an attempt to interrogate dominant leadership discourse, Davis, Krieg and Smith (2014) draw upon the work of Foucault and Derrida to challenge notions of leadership in the context of early childhood education and care. What is acknowledged in this study is the hegemonic masculine knowledge of leadership that tend to dominate educational leadership discourse and the implications for such knowledge when considering care in education. Perspectives of indigenous leadership as researched by Santamaria and Santamaria (2015) identifies notions of care as integral to leadership practice; care for the community, care for family and care for children. Care and social justice is argued in this study as an interwoven practice that seeks to understand and engages beyond a superficial level with diversified learners, staff and community (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015). Therefore, navigating future directions for Pasifika leadership must be considerate of the relational and collective entanglements of Pasifika learners, where Pasifika leaders may think differently about leadership subjectivity.

In summary, the review of literature has revealed tensions for Pasifika leadership in ECE and sought to identify future aspirations for Pasifika leadership in education, comprising cultural knowledge and values for leadership practice, with the intention that leadership must continue to serve the betterment of Pasifika children, families and communities (Airini, 2010; Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014; Wendt-Samu, 2010). In more recent years there has been an increasing interest in Pasifika early childhood education, particularly in a critique of curriculum and pedagogical practices. Nonetheless, there is a lack of research that investigates how leadership subjectivity within a Pasifika context is sensed and traversed, professionally and culturally embodied.

### ***Conclusion***

In the histories of the Pacific, Pacific people have traversed the Pacific Ocean by way of voyaging and navigation; whereby the ocean itself is home for Pacific people, extending beyond boundaries inhibited only by land. It is through specific cultural knowledge of the cosmos that the virtuosity of navigation and voyaging that enabled the discovery of new horizons with the promise of new lands. So, skilled were the Pacific navigators (as explained by Crosby, 1986) that the Pacific people found every inhabitable island in the Pacific, which spans at least a quarter of the globe. In the ontology of Pacific navigation, intensities of the inter-relational space between man, ocean, and cosmos provided new movement and pathways in each voyage passage. Although the many Pacific Islands had been visited and revisited the passaged journey was never



identical; however, the cultural knowledge praxis of navigation was consistent in locating each Island. Pacific Ocean navigators used the earth, wind, fluctuations, rhythm, tides, sun, moon, stars, clouds, birds to locate and situate paths into the known and unknown (Evans & Salesa, 2014). The Pacific body of knowledge of navigation is not one alone in isolation, rather a multiplicity of entwined knowledge(s). The accomplishment of navigating with such complexity and skill continues to inspire scholars today. The way in which knowledge is socially constructed in the creation of Pacific indigenous knowledge is at the very core of Pacific ontology and epistemology.

Like navigation, leadership in the context of Pasifika early childhood education, today requires attention to the inter-relational space, acquired skills and specialised cultural knowledge. I have observed and experienced challenges that Pasifika leaders face in day to day practice in attempts to navigate political, social, and cultural milieus in which they and their early childhood centres operate. The shoals of Aotearoa/New Zealand in contrast to Pacific reefs and tides of the Pacific Ocean may bring other encounters that require emerging, shifting and more fluid leadership praxis that challenge both hegemonic and fixed cultural constructions of leadership within the early childhood education environment. For the Pasifika leader, multiple complexities must be traversed; in a re-imagining of praxis that is personal, cultural and professional.



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