Pacific education: An Oceanic perspective

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Abstract: This paper applies an oceanic perspective to the process of conceptualising the education of Pasifika peoples in the context of 21st century New Zealand. Such a perspective is connected to and anchored by an authentic (in terms of the academy) network of Pacific knowledge and authority. It is able to draw on and utilise the theorising of established Pacific scholars and thinkers, as well as selected non-Pacific or Western ones. It recognises and encompasses new forms of Pacific expression and identity, which enhances authenticity and relevance. Applying an over-arching oceanic perspective in this paper will develop a historical and conceptual analysis to critique terms and constructs that have become common-sense understandings in 21st century New Zealand, such as Pacific/Pasifika, and Pacific/Pasifika education. Broader contextual issues as well as more personal ones are therefore open to scrutiny and critical reflection. This paper identifies and examines issues such as the tension between the state's priorities for the provision of education for Pacific peoples and Pacific people's motivations for pursuing and participating; the importance of critiquing beliefs and assumptions about education; the need for greater Pacific pro-activity in conceptualising their education, and determining the desired outcomes; and the isolation (intellectual and cultural) of Pacific educators located within the academy. The structure of the paper makes use of Polynesian navigation and voyaging imagery as a tool to enhance clarity, counter hegemony and support the creation of a Pacific paradigm of meaning and analysis.

Keywords: conceptual analyses; Pacific education; Pacific research in education; Pasifika

Introduction

I live in the metropolitan, Pacific rim city of Auckland; A city that is home to the largest number of Polynesians in the world. I am a migrant from Samoa; however, my children, nieces and nephews were born and raised in this country. Not surprisingly, I have a vested personal interest in the education of Pacific peoples within Aotearoa New Zealand. My commitment to education is also professional and is related to my role as a Pacific educator, academic and researcher. For the past five years I have been involved in research that has examined how Pacific peoples and Pacific education are constructed in national and institutional policy in Aotearoa New Zealand (Samu, 2007; Samu, Mara, & Siteine, 2008). This work has included conceptual analyses of the pedagogical and curriculum implications of specific national developments (Samu, 2006; 2009a).

The main purpose of this paper is to remind us that, as Pacific educators and researchers well-established in our metropolitan homes away from home, it is essential that we engage in a continuous process of self-review and critical reflection .This paper demonstrates the value of different prisms of perspective (Western theories and Pacific conceptualisations) in challenging habits of mind (particularly our own) and developing greater self-awareness in relation to economic, social and cultural flux; all in relation to the formal education our Pacific families are experiencing within a nation such as Aotearoa New Zealand.

I have organised this work into five sections. The first discusses the theoretical approach used. The second part compares and contrasts two perspectives of the inter-relationship of macro-

economy, migration and the provision of formal education. Part three discusses the use of institutional umbrella terms such as 'Pasifika', and the fourth section explores the concept of 'Pasifika education' and the role of education research. The final section examines the conceptual implications of these discussions for the present and the future. This paper uses the term Pacific people, and Pacific education until parts three and four where the case for the use of the term 'Pasifika' in the New Zealand context is explained, justified and subsequently used.

Part one: Looking for the frigate birds, looking to the stars

The theoretical approach for this paper is influenced by analytic philosophy of education (Martin, 1994; Peters, 1973; Soltis, 1968). It employs a process that Marshall (1981) described as a "clarification of concepts, theories and claims" in order to achieve "clarity and truth, as reflected in the way in which our ordinary language is meant to parallel our commonsense beliefs about the world" (p. 16). Because I am fore-grounding Pacific perspectives, 'our' refers to Pacific-specific experiences and views.

Western theoretical frameworks may be useful, enlightening, even inspiring; but these theoretical approaches and constructs should not be the only influences on the process of conceptualising Pacific experiences. Indigenous and minority scholars have engaged in what Smith (2004) described as "multiple challenges to the epistemic basis of the dominant scientific paradigm of research and these have led to the development of approaches that have offered a promise of counter-hegemonic work" (p. 5). I have looked up, out and away from the metropolitan setting in which I live, and the academy in which I work, searching for ideas and insights that I can draw on, from Pacific thinkers, scholars and academics, particularly from those who have established formidable regional and international reputations. First-generation Pacific intellectuals (in terms of the academy, and publications in English) made their mark in the 1970s and 1980s within the Pacific region with writing that Wendt (1976) described as "a revolt against the hypocritical/ exploitative aspects of our traditional/commercial and religious hierarchies, colonialism and neo-colonialism and the degrading values being imposed from outside and by some elements in our societies" (p. 59). Theorists that this present paper draws from include Albert Wendt, Epeli Hauofa and Ron Crocombe.

Although these thinkers were responding to circumstances and conditions of another time and place, their ideas can serve as conceptual tools that can lift and illuminate our thinking about ourselves and our multiple realities within the metropolitan societies that we now live within and contribute to. These particular Pacific thinkers belonged to a specific environment, that some conceptualised as 'Oceania' (Hauofa, 1993; Wendt, 1976; 1980). They were the creative and critical voice and conscience of a region of island nations, "a multiplicity of social, economic, and political systems all in different stages of decolonisation" (Wendt, 1980, p. xiii). This environment included the academe, involving research that "in its broadest sense" is an "organised scholarly activity that is deeply connected to power" (Smith, 2004, p. 5). They were in tune with these environments and were confident and unafraid of articulating their ideas and views.

As educators located in universities in Pacific rim nations, their ideas and insights not only enable us to think in alternative and uniquely "Pacific" ways, but they also lend credibility and support to our tentative (and under-exposed) efforts to create our own paradigms of meaning and analysis. In the discipline of education, there are not many Pacific lecturers and academics in Aotearoa New Zealand. Although we are experienced tertiary level educators, course developers/coordinators, and even administrators, most of us have some way to go before

achieving full-acceptance by the academy as scholars and academics. As Smith (2004) stated: "Publication is what gets academics promoted hence the expression 'publish or perish'. This is an academic game deeply embedded in academic institutions and is extremely difficult to transform." (p. 10).

Nabobo-Baba (2004) expresses similar sentiments:

> Publishing is where the ultimate power lies, for what good is research if it is not published; this is entry into academia. Entry into academia is where a lot of 'silence' takes place. Our Pacific strategies of dethroning silence must therefore include strategies to publish. (p. 19)

The challenge of strengthening our academic performance and profile, progressing within the academe is driven by the desire to contribute leadership and service in the construction of metaphoric 'vaka', or the material and intellectual vessels that can carry our peoples to better, improved ways of life in homelands such as New Zealand. However, given such aspirations, are we as in tune as we should be with certain features of our own environments?

Part two: Charting the currents

As Martin (2007) points out:

> …Our world is in flux. The electronic revolution, the emergence of a global economy, the waves of immigration, the breakdown of class and gender barriers, and the myriad liberation movements: these and more have unmoored traditional social, economic, and cultural relations. In consequence, educational metamorphoses are now daily events. (pp. 2–3)

New Zealand and other OECD nations are striving to develop formal education systems that are responsive to the changes wrought by our "increasingly diverse and interconnected world" and created by globalisation and modernisation (OECD, 2005, p. 4). The OECD has recognised that "today's societies place challenging demands on individuals, who are confronted with complexity in many parts of their lives" (OECD, 2005, p. 4). The "collective challenges" that such nations must address involve "balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability, and prosperity with social equity" (OECD, 2005, p. 4). This section aims to clarify such a powerful and dominant perspective of education provision, and contrast it with a deeply influential and arguably Pacific perspective, of education participation. Interestingly, neither perspective is spatially confined.

Globalisation and education

Globalisation is the dynamic process of increasing interactions and inter-dependencies among people and systems, particularly economic systems (Sassen, 1998). Ellwood (2001) points out that this process has been one of entanglement, that it has been in existence for centuries, and that it has rapidly accelerated over recent decades. The result is a shrinking world. The transfer of ideas, services, products, and people across international boundaries and social classes account for this shrinkage. These processes have accelerated in recent decades because of changes in information technology, the removal of protective trade barriers, changes in systems of government, and the growth in size, power and political influence of multi-national corporations (Samu, 2004).

An important set of political discourses has emerged as a consequence of globalisation, with the uncritical acceptance and use of terms such as the global economy, and the global market-place. Such terms belong to the discourse of the knowledge economy which has had a profound impact on the education system of Aotearoa New Zealand. Economic globalisation has increased the need for a developed nation such as New Zealand to become more competitive internationally. The achievement of this goal, from the government's perspective, is via what Marshall has described as a "knowledge revolution" which involves accelerating developments in information technologies and improving the role of research, science and technology in the creation of knowledge (Marshall, 2000, p. 188). Smith (2004) described this discourse as:

> …very much a privileged and privileging discourse that positions particular kinds of knowledge creation, approaches to knowledge and systems of knowing as more desirable and worthy of support because of the perceived economic benefits to be derived from such developments (p. 4).

Understandably, the governments of such economies have specific and focused expectations of the role of education in such developments. Samu et al. (2008) described and critiqued the national education policy framework designed to influence the education of New Zealand's Pacific multiethnic minority. They argued that:

> For Pasifika peoples, the dominant influences on education policies are the knowledge economy discourse and their own demographic and socio-economic location in New Zealand. Compared with other nations of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), New Zealand shows relative weakness, which places economic competitiveness at risk (OECD, 2005). Focused education policy on Pasifika is not surprising, given that New Zealand's economic development could be adversely affected, especially in the Auckland Region, if their education success rates are not improved. (p. 151)

Recent data shows that Pacific peoples in New Zealand make up 6.9% of the total population (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). With one of the highest natural increase rates, and a youthful population, the projected Pacific proportion of school-aged population for 2051 is one in five (Ministry of Education, 2005). Because 'two-thirds' of the Pacific population live in the Auckland region, this is "where the largest impact of this increase will be felt" in terms of impact on schooling, which, therefore, "provides a sense of urgency to ensure the educational needs of Pasifika children are met across all three sectors" (Ministry of Education, 2005, Introduction, ¶1).

World enlargement and education

Migration, or the movement of people, is one such "transfer across international boundaries", usually "driven by the desire to find a better life" (Banks etal., 2005, p. 21). Migration is seen, via the lens of globalisation, as an important process for labour distribution and the extension of consumer global market. However, Hauofa (1993) presents an alternative point of view of such processes at the macro level.

Many Pacific people map their worlds in terms of the location of their extended families. These maps frequently include New Zealand, Australia and the west coast of the United States of America, where parents, aunts and uncles, brothers, sisters and cousins reside. Modern technological advances in telecommunications and air travel have helped strengthen these familial networks. Traditional socio-cultural obligations are maintained by the flow of remittances, generally from the Pacific rim homelands of Pacific migrant communities to their Pacific country of origin, via the convenience of electronic transfers. There is also a counter-flow

of cultural wealth such as tapa (traditional cloth made from mulberry tree bark), tivaevae (traditional quilts) and ie toga (fine mats) which are an intrinsic part of life events, when family members travel to visit one another for weddings, funerals, and church openings. Hauofa (1993, p. 6) conceptualised this process as 'world enlargement'. Conceptually, the worlds of Pacific peoples are much larger than the geographic spaces and the international boundaries to which they are confined. World enlargement is, arguably, a Pacific perspective of globalisation.

Migration is an important historical and in many cases, a contemporary and on-going causal factor to the enlargement of a Pacific family's world and is usually driven by aspirations for a better life for the migrant and for those left behind. For Pacific migrants to New Zealand and other Pacific rim countries, this aspiration has included the desire for better educational opportunities for their children (Fairburn-Dunlop & Makisi, 2003). With the establishment and growth of vibrant first, second and even third generations (often referred to as 'the New Zealand-born'), cultural and social inculcation of such an aspiration continues. Success in education equates to improved qualifications, which in turn enhances employment prospects. Improvements in income result in families maintaining, even improving their contributions to their familial networks. Education is often seen by Pacific families as a means to maintain their collective status and security. I once explained that to be successful "schooling has become an important means of serving the different social units that we have certain obligations towards" (Samu, 1998, p. 244). The search by Pacific peoples for opportunities in Westernised formal education systems can be viewed as a feature of world enlargement that is driven by specific, non-Western cultural values and expectations.

Of the two perspectives, one that values an expanded view of the world, the other that gives rise to a shrinking world, the latter discourse of the knowledge economy dominates because it is the state that provides the formal education system that serves society. Pacific peoples may still espouse belief in the importance of formal education but the motivation is to benefit the collective, the extended family, or aiga, rather than the self (Samu, In Preparation). This reality of an enlarged Pacific worldview appears to be in tension with the knowledge economy discourse, and the key drivers underlying national education policy for Pacific peoples.

Part three: The contemporary voyagers

Who are Pacific peoples in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand? This part of the study provides a historical and conceptual analysis, in order to critique terms and constructs that have become common-sense understandings in 21st century New Zealand.

Historically, New Zealand grouped migrants from its neighbours from the south-west Pacific under a single name. Macpherson (1996) suggested three reasons for this practice. A Euro-centric school curriculum; New Zealand's role after World War One as a colonial administrator for Western Samoa, the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau (where often these islands were grouped together as a simple entity for administrative purposes); and what MacPherson (1996, p. 129) described as "..the high degree of residential and labour market concentration" of Pacific peoples.

The different formal names used by government organisations and society reflect the particular decade in the 20th century when the labels were in common usage. It was 'Pacific Polynesian' for the 1970s; 'Pacific Islander' in the 1980s; and 'Pacific nations peoples' towards the late 1990s (Samu, 1998, p. 177). Going into the 21st century and up to the present, the term is Pasifika. I have argued that regardless of the actual term, these are social constructs, used to group people:

> …..who seem to share some rather general, possibly even superficial similarities in the way they look and sound; where they live and work in the urban areas of Auckland and Wellington and other centres; their relative socio-economic position within this society; and the Pacific (that vast area covering one third of the earth's surface) islands from which at least half have directly originated from (Samu, 1998, pp. 177–178).

Such terms are without doubt blanket terms of convenience, developed and applied at organisational or institutional level. Debate about the use and origins of such names emerged in the mid-1990s, led by academics with credibility in researching and writing about (and for) Pacific peoples' migration, settlement and socio-economic experiences (including education), within New Zealand. Coxon, Foliaki & Mara (1994) warned terms such as Pacific Islander promote a myth of a homogenous migrant community, and their use "conceals and undermines the historical social, political and cultural uniqueness of each Pacific Islands society" (p. 181). In terms of Pacific peoples' preference, Foliaki expressed the following view: "Lumping people together is convenient for the administrator. It is not what the groups themselves desire. Different Pacific groups want to keep their own separate identities and their own languages" (Foliaki, 1994, p. 107).

Those with an interest and commitment to the socio-political location of Pacific peoples within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand continue to critique the use of blanket terms and labels. In a New Zealand Herald article published in 2007, Perrot identified a "vigorous if softly spoken debate" within Pacific communities about the use of 'pan-Pacific' terms (Samu et al., 2008, p. 146). According to Perrot, academic Dr Melani Anae considers the term 'Pasifika' as being "a new administrative stereotype" (Perrot, 2007, p. 9), whilst Dr Aukuso Mahina stated that the term was "something of a Trojan horse" because due to the demographic dominance of the Samoan community, anything labelled 'Pasifika' really means Samoan (Perrot, 2007, p. 10). With specific reference to Tongan learners, Manuatu and Kepa (2002) argued that umbrella terms such as Pasifika made specific-Pacific groups invisible and therefore putting attention to their learning needs at risk.

Not all Pacific academics and educators hold a negative perspective on the use of collectivising terms, which now include newer and intriguing 21st century iterations, such as Pasifikaans and Moana people (Airini, Anae & Mila-Schaaf, 2008, p. 47). I am of the view that

> Sometimes the main advantage of a unifying concept is the countering effect it has against oppositional forces such as neo-colonialism—or for migrant community groups such as Pasifika in New Zealand, countering oppositional forces such as assimilation and social/economic/cultural marginalisation/ (Samu, 2007, p. 145)

My stance is influenced in this instance, by Pacific historian and academic Dr Ron Crocombe. Crocombe (1970) argued that the term was first used internationally in 1970 by Sir Ratu Kamasese Mara who was the Prime Minister of Fiji at the time. Crocombe (1976) asserted that the phrase was accepted and well-used because "it satisfies both psychological and political needs, in that it helps to fulfil a growing demand for respected Pacific-wide identifying symbols and for Pacific unity" (p. 1). The phrase has never been used to imply homogeneity; rather, it has been developed and used when "the common interests of all island peoples can be served by collaboration" (Crocombe, 1976, p. 1). The term or phrase 'the Pacific Way' has been in use around the Pacific region by Pacific leaders and students of the regional University of the South Pacific for well over four decades.

I have argued that a similar need exists for Pacific peoples located in the metropolitan centres of Pacific rim nations such as New Zealand (Samu, 2007). I am not alone in such a viewpoint. Whether the term or phrase is Pacific Islanders, Pacific peoples, or Pasifika, the usage of such terms, at best, 'encapsulates both unity and diversity' (Airini et al., 2008, p. 47).

Part four: Preparing for the journey

In the rest of this work, I will refer to Pacific peoples in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, as Pasifika. In the preceding sections, I have provided clarification to my understanding and use of this term. I have identified and critiqued two significant influences on education. which appear to be in tension. I have also presented an argument for an analytical approach that utilises the theorising of established Pacific scholars and thinkers, as well as non-Pacific ones. A metaphoric vaka (boat) is now in place to embark on an exploration of the features of an ideal, contextualised, and therefore relevant 21st century model of education for Pasifika.

Re-thinking Pacific, Pasifika education

A regional colloquium on education in the Pacific region, took place in 2001 under the auspices of the Institute of Education (IOE), University of the South Pacific. The purpose of this gathering was to 're-think' or reconceptualise Pacific education for the 21st century (Institute of Education, 2001). Samu et al. (2008) drew on the outcomes of this colloquium because they considered the definitions of Pacific education by the Ministry of Education, and other New Zealand based academics to be "limited and limiting in their vision for Pacific peoples"' (p. 147). The main outcome of this colloquium was what these authors described as " a rich and robust conceptualisation" (p. 147) of Pacific education called "The Tree of Opportunity" (Institute of Education, 2002, p. 3).

"The Tree of Opportunity" is both a goal and a process. Its purpose is to assist in "the survival, transformation and sustainability of Pacific peoples and societies" and its primary goal is to "ensure all Pacific students are successful and they all become fully participating members of their groups, societies and the global community" (p. 3). This concept recognises that Pacific education is a process "firmly rooted in the cultures of Pacific societies", because this will "permit the incorporation of foreign elements" in ways that will maintain Pacific learners' identities (p. 4). The process also involves critique of the underlying values and assumptions of the formal education systems and development programmes that respectively deliver and shape Pacific peoples learning experiences (Institute of Education, 2002).

Samu et al. (2008) argue that a conceptualisation of Pacific education such as the 'Tree of Opportunity' is essential for informing education policy and practice for Pacific peoples in New Zealand, because "it is informed by Pacific aspirations and perspectives" (p.147). They have taken this conceptual model and modified it slightly for the New Zealand context.

According to Samu, Mara and Siteine (2008), the purpose of pursuing formal education, for Pasifika, is "our survival and sustainability as Pacific peoples" and the enhancement of "our transformative capability"' (p. 147). Educating Pasifika young people in New Zealand should not require them to assimilate, or submit to any form of cultural identity allocation. Siteine (2009) has begun researching ways that well-intentioned teachers allocate identity types to those Pasifika learners that appear not to have a strong identity, in an effort to help such students to be "positive in their own identity" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 8). Samu et al. (2008) recognise that Pasifika identities can be very fluid, given the demographic profile of Pasifika in New Zealand.

A second feature of this model is the main goal of education for Pasifika. It is ”the success of our learners within this education system—learners equipped to serve their families and contribute to New Zealand society” (Samu et al., 2008, p. 147). This recognises the high aspirations and expectations that many Pasifika families have of the formal education system. Achieving learning outcomes that lead to formal qualifications are important, because of the potential economic benefits to the collective.

Education should be a process that is grounded in diverse Pasifika cultures. Curriculum and pedagogy needs to be culturally informed and culturally responsive. Samu (2006) illuminates this particular feature of the conceptual model with my argument that in order to be responsive to Pasifika learners, teachers need to develop “a deep contexualised understanding of Pasifika identities” (p. 39). I state that “amongst Pasifika learners are unique, contextualised Pasifika ways of knowing and relating to the world. What is needed is tailor-made, contextualised teaching” (p. 46). This conceptualisation of Pasifika education ensures that Pasifika cultural identities and values are not compromised, or smothered by other influences.

Since 2001, the Institute of Education at the University of the South Pacific has continued to oversee a systematic programme of professional development, research and education work, informed by this conceptualisation of Pacific education. There has been a series of collaborative projects dedicated to the common interests of all island peoples. The programme of shared theorising and informed practice represents a sustained, workable framework, providing evidence yet again of the viability of ‘the Pacific Way’ in the Pacific region. When modified to align more smoothly to the New Zealand context, this conceptual framework for Pacific education, which is both robust and tested, has much to offer.

This conceptualisation of Pasifika education can be developed even further. In addition to critiquing the values and assumptions underlying education policies and initiatives that impact on Pasifika learners and communities, we must also consistently critique and review our own motivations and expectations of formal education, particularly in terms of the transformative effect of education (Samu, 2009b). If education results in ongoing culture crossings (Martin, 2007) then we need to examine the personal, lived experience of education for the Pasifika second and third generations in New Zealand. And be open to learning some possible truths about ourselves as their elders and self-appointed navigators.

The role of Pacific research in education

> Those who have the funds own the research, determine the focus and directions of the research and the results (Baba, 2004, p. 98)

Research (particularly state-funded research and development) has played a significant role in building the knowledge base from on-going, targeted developments to strengthen and support the education of Pasifika peoples in New Zealand. This has several inherent challenges.

Pasifika education, as constructed by the Ministry of Education (MOE), is arguably a government strategy to reconcile the growing impact of Pacific demographics within New Zealand’s economic development. Research and evaluation contracts are the main mechanism by which the Ministry obtains quality information it requires for the various initiatives that it funds in order to address its strategic objectives. It can be expected that in such a policy environment, the Ministry of Education will continue to be a major source of funding for research and development that is explicitly about improving Pasifika learner outcomes.

The increased research activity that focuses on Pacific peoples as a multi-ethnic group within New Zealand started in the mid-1990s in the education sector. Much of this has been funded and driven by the MOE. Examples of projects 'won' by university-based research teams include: in 1996, the evaluation of the Strengthening Education in Mangere and Otara (SEMO) project; in 2001, the Pasifika research guidelines and Pacific literature review; and more recently, in 2007, the Quality teaching research and development (QTRD) initiatives (a teacher inquiry initiative examining effective pedagogies for Māori and Pasifika learners across curriculum areas).

Given that much of this research is contracted out, there emerged the recognition for the need to ensure that a consistent set of ethical principles were followed for educational research that involved Pacific participants. As a consequence of internal discussion and debate (driven by the Ministry's own internal Pacific advisory structures) the Ministry of Education's research division contracted a team of Pasifika academic researchers to develop a set of ethical principles and guidelines. *The Pacific Research Guidelines* produced by Anae, Coxon, Mara, Samu and Finau (2002) for the Ministry of Education was never intended to be definitive. Since its release, other sectors that require research informed policies and programmes for Pacific peoples have developed principles and guidelines for research. For example, the Health Research Council (2004) and the Tertiary Education Commission (in 2003, for the review of Performance-based Research portfolios). Because the pool of Pacific researchers in New Zealand is limited, many of the same individuals were consulted in the development of research guidelines and protocols for other sectors engaged in research that 'involves specific [Pacific] ethnic groups…as well as research that spans Pacific communities' (TEC, 2003, p. 1).

Each of these guidelines for research involving Pacific participants defines Pacific research, and states the overall purpose of research. These provide interesting and useful insights into the nature of such ethnic-focused activities. For example, according to the Ministry of Education guidelines, Pacific research involves Pacific participants. Its role is: "to identify and promote a Pacific world view….[and] interrogate the assumptions that underpin Western structures and institutions" (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Samu & Finau, 2002, p. 7). This point recognises the existence of underlying power relations.

Pacific research must be explicit as a 'counter-hegemonic' tool and actively engage in what Smith (2004) calls "the decolonisation project in research" (p. 5). I consider this literature base to be a crucial source of navigational tools for knowledge generation and dissemination. However, an important question to pose at this point is, to what extent do researchers draw on and use the same sources of information to inform and evaluate, their knowledge and understanding of Pasifika peoples and their education, in this country?

Setting Our Own Course

Who is at the helm? Who sets the course? Who reads the sky and searches the horizons for signs? Is it us? Or is it someone else? Who are we? Are we satisfied, even conscious of the way we are going? (Waddell, 1993, p. xv).

These questions were asked as a part of a collective response by Pacific academics to Epeli Hauofa's essay Our Sea of Islands (1993). I consider them to be powerfully relevant questions for Pacific peoples in Pacific rim locations such as Aotearoa New Zealand to ask in terms of our aspirations and our expectations of formal education, and the global forces that shape the provision of that education by the knowledge economy-driven, Western democratic states that we call home.

Who are we? Are we satisfied, even conscious of the way we are going?

Do we know who we are, not just in terms of all-too familiar social indices and demographic statistics? Are there other ways of knowing ourselves and enhancing our self-awareness as Pacific peoples who have become an integral part of nations and societies far away from our ancestral homelands? Our economic and social realities are very different to that of our kith and kin in the Pacific nations we also call home. Do we know where we are going as members, nationals, citizens of powerful, ever-changing societies we have migrated and settled into? In addition to knowing where we are going as members of Pacific families and clans that have existed for aeons, and have a settlement scope that supersedes political borders and boundaries?

Who is at the helm? Who sets the course?

When it comes to our education in New Zealand, who sets the plan, the agenda? In terms of education policy who sets the course, and in terms of grass-roots level decision-making, is the national course in alignment with the course that we are trying to set for our own children and families? Again, are we mindful of the implications across our familial networks, the ones which we can map across the Pacific, within this nation, and others including the heritage homelands in the Pacific?

Who reads the sky and searches the horizons for signs?

Do we have the knowledge and skills to monitor and analyse the social and economic contexts that shape and influence national policy? Are we skilled with the approaches that the states' experts use, as well as developing our own, in order to be able to discern, perceive and 'read' the context in ways that are meaningful and relevant to us? Do we have the capacity to engage in meaningful ways? Do we have the required qualifications and expertise to be positioned where the power is, where the decision-making takes place?

Anchoring in the 21st century

> Pride, self-respect, self-reliance will help us cope so much more creatively with what is passing or to come…must try and assume control of our destinies, both in utterance and in fact (Wendt, 1976, p. 51).

In this paper, I have drawn on Pacific conceptualisations from the past in order to provide an arguably deepened perspective of different several fundamental features of discourses surrounding the education of Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand. Specifically, I have drawn on the ideas of Albert Wendt, and his essay Towards a new Oceania (1976); Epeli Hauofa and his essay 'Our sea of islands' and Ron Crocombe's 'The Pacific way: An emerging identity'. And I have used selected ideas from these seminal works to reflect on collectivising terms and labels for Pacific peoples; the education of Pacific peoples; and the profound influence of the wider social and economic context on education in Aotearoa New Zealand, not least the education of those within its borders who identify with one or more Pacific heritages.

I am one of a number of educators working towards acceptance and recognition within the academy, but given the intellectual activism and legacy of the afore-mentioned Pacific scholars, I have no doubts that my research and writing about education of and for Pasifika in New Zealand must endeavour to be informed by what my colleague and I have referred to as 'an Oceanic perspective' (Samu & Siteine, 2006; Siteine & Samu, 2008). We attribute this perspective to Hauofa (1993) who conceptualised the Pacific as "a sea of islands" rather than "islands in a far

sea". This is "a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships" (Hauofa, 1993, p. 7). An Oceanic perspective draws attention to ancient Pacific peoples ways of seeing their world. As Hauofa declared:

> If we look at the myths, legends and oral traditions, and the cosmologies of the peoples of Oceania, it will become evident that they did not conceive of their world in such microscopic proportions…their world was anything but tiny. (p. 7)

An Oceanic perspective of education can be developed even further. Wendt's conceptualisation of a 'New Oceania' included counter-hegemonic features such as the importance of individual dissent. He warned that "without it our cultures would drown in self-love" (Wendt, 1976, p. 52). He advocated, not for the revival of past cultures but "for the creation of new cultures which are free of that taint of colonialism and based firmly on our own pasts" (p. 53). An Oceanic perspective therefore encompasses new forms of expression, identity, and can absorb creative 21st century approaches to resolving issues and concerns of Pasifika peoples and Pasifika education in the 21st century Aotearoa New Zealand.

I can also apply an oceanic perspective to the process I am currently engaged with as an emerging scholar. Nabobo-Baba's (2004) description of "… the usual feelings of isolation and the helplessness that comes from being minorities in academia" (p. 19) and of the intellectual and spiritual aspects of that isolation, resonate strongly with me. In seeking for and applying the ideas of established Pacific scholars, I feel both connected and anchored by the authentic network of Pacific knowledge and authority. Applying their theories and concepts helps to reduce the feelings of isolation in my own scholarly journey.

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