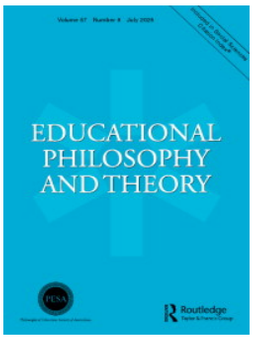

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Educational Philosophy and Theory

ISSN: 0013-1857 (Print) 1469-5812 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rept20

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To cite this article: Dion Enari, Maryanne Pale, Inez Fainga'a-Manusione, Ruth L. Faleolo, Thom G. Faleolo, Glenda Stanley, David Lakisa, Innez Haua, Jioji Ravulo, Heena Akbar, Jacoba Matapo, Radilaite Cammock & Yvonne Ualesi (2025) The experiences of Indigenous academics in the diaspora, Educational Philosophy and Theory, 57:8, 725-741, DOI: 10.1080/00131857.2025.2468424

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2025.2468424

Published online: 07 Mar 2025.

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND THEORY
2025, VOL. 57, NO. 8, 725–741
https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2025.2468424

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The experiences of Indigenous academics in the diaspora

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ABSTRACT

As Indigenous outward migration expands, some diaspora groups are larger than their population back home which is the case for many in the Pacific diaspora. Research with Indigenous peoples is largely conducted in their homelands, with minimal research on their experiences in other countries. As Pacific Indigenous academics, we employed a dimension of *talanoa* in the written form to provide insights into our academic journeys. The direction of the *talanoa* highlight how we have successfully navigated various spaces in relation to decolonising and Indigenising education, and our intentions for standing in solidarity with the native people of the countries in which we reside. This article adds voice to Indigenous communities in diaspora who have been invisible both in the motherland and new homeland. It is envisioned that this work will add to Indigenous education scholarship, and better inform academic and professional practice.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 20 January 2025
Accepted 3 February 2025

KEYWORDS
Indigenous academics; higher education; Indigenous Australia; Pacific education; Pacific Diaspora; Talanoa

Introduction

In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge the First Nations peoples of Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay respect to their Elders and traditional leaders past and present, and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We stand in solidarity with the First Nations people of Australia and acknowledge that sovereignty over these lands were never ceded. They are, and always will be Aboriginal land.

For the context of this article, it is pertinent to highlight the population of Pacific peoples in Australia including background information that support intercultural understanding (ICU). Australia's Pacific population comprises 23 Pacific ancestries which represent a diverse range of

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ethnicities and cultures from Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia (Gerace et al., 2023; Ravulo, 2015). This includes Māori peoples who are the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand. According to Gerace et al. (2023), Australia's Pacific population increased by 165,000 between 2011 and 2021. The most significant increase is observed in the Māori and Samoan populations, with a growth of over 40,000 people in each cohort. Samoan was also recorded as the second most spoken language in Logan, Ipswich and Moreton Bay (largest council in Queensland) Regional councils (Enari & Taula, 2022a). Today, the presence of Pacific peoples in Australia's mainstream society is becoming more prevalent across various sectors, such as sport, music, arts and entertainment (Enari & Taula, 2022b). Examples include the high percentage of Pacific players in the Australian rugby union and rugby league national and state teams; Heavyweight Boxing ChampionJai Opetaia; music chart toppers Stan Walker, One Four and HP Boyz; Actor Jay Lagai'aia (Enari & Taula, 2022b; Shepard & Ilalio, 2016).

Pacific education and the Australian Curriculum

A growing body of academic research has revealed that a wide range of individual and societal factors appear to have influenced and impacted the successes and/or challenges of this cohort (Pale et al., 2023). For example, some of the contributing factors that have led to educational success for this cohort included having family support (Kearney & Donaghy, 2010; Paulsen, 2018b); positive expectations (Fa'avale, 2020; Paulsen, 2016; Ravulo, 2018; Stenley & Kearney, 2017); developing positive relational connections between learners and teachers (Fa'avale et al., 2016; Ravulo, 2019; Tualaulelei & Kavanagh, 2015); and establishing effective collaborative partnerships between the education sector and Pacific communities in Australia (Cuthill & Scull, 2011). In contrast, the challenges to educational success for Pacific learners in Australia included a lack of access to permanent residency and/or Australian citizenship (Kearney & Glen, 2017; Paulsen, 2018a); other constraints on opportunities for the learner (Scull & Cuthill, 2010); and a lack of professional learning and development within schools that are related to ICU, intercultural capabilities (ICC), and intercultural education (ICE) (Kearney & Donaghy, 2010; Tualaulelei, 2021). This growing body of research with and for Pacific learners and communities in Australia supports the work towards developing and strengthening intercultural awareness and ICC across various education sectors.

Upon close examination of the Australian Curriculum, it is noted that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are embedded in the document as a cross-curriculum priority (ACARA, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d, 2024e, 2024f). However, the curriculum remains largely Eurocentric which sanitises and colonial washes Indigenous knowledge (Matapo & Enari, 2021; Smith, 2019). For example, there appears to be a lack of Indigenous-named concepts throughout all their documentation and an absence of the sacred and sophisticated nature of Indigenous knowledge (Matapo & Enari, 2021). What is also alarming and an indication of a colonial washing ploy, is the lack of acknowledgment of the historical and current effects of the colonial occupation on Indigenous education and outcomes (Langton, 1994; Nakata & Langton, 2005; Smith, 2019). Furthermore, there also appears to be an absence of references made to the Pacific region, Pacific nations and Pacific peoples in the Australian curriculum in spirt of Australia being located within the Oceania region. Moreover, there is a lack of mention of Australia's engagement with the Pacific region across social, cultural, political and economic spheres. In schools, the teaching of international languages as subjects, such as French and Spanish are prevalent (ACARA, 2024b, 2024e). Conversely, it is uncommon to find schools across Australia that teach local Aboriginal dialects, and/or Pacific languages. Furthermore, Japanese history and Italian history are taught in schools (ACARA, 2024c, 2024d); however, Pacific histories and cultures are either excluded and/or employed as a token tick box across education systems in Australia.

The formation of Indigenous and/or Pacific student dance groups for the purposes of multicultural days across Australia are rare occasions when schools allow Pacific cultures to be

present in schools (Enari, 2021). This limited avenue to practise one's culture in accordance with Australian school objectives, inadvertently reinforces and privileges Western modes of education and philosophy. These 'occasional allowances' of Indigenous and Pacific cultures reinforce the notion that Pacific ancestral knowledge systems are only welcomed during cultural performances, at the discretion of Non-Indigenous and Pacific staff and faculty. As a result, it reiterates the notion that academic student success needs to be synonymous only with Western philosophies (Enari & Matapo, 2020; Smith, 2019).

The lack of acknowledgement of the Pacific region and Australia's engagement with the Pacific in the Australian Curriculum, as well as the absence of the teaching of Pacific histories, cultures and languages across various educational sectors in Australia adds to the marginalisation and erasure of Indigenous Pacific communities, and their lived experiences as Pacific peoples in Australia. Without research outputs and curricula created and produced by Pacific peoples, for Pacific peoples, we will continue to be written out from the education systems in Australia. As a result, we will continue to have statistics about us manipulated to negatively portray us, and narratives drummed up by non-Pacific researchers to assert their dominance and presence over our genealogical knowledge and vast lived experiences. When looking at Pacific education in Australia, one must remember Australia's long-standing history of non-Pacific academics leading research and education groups that extract from Pacific people, whilst simultaneously writing over us and speaking over our experiences (Enari et al., 2024). As Pacific academics, we acknowledge this dilemma.

Talanoa in the written form

In the original conceptualisation of *talanoa* as a research methodology, Vaioleti's (2003) intention was to develop a methodology that would be better aligned to Pacific worldviews and a methodology that would enable the research to authentically experience and capture the phenomenon being researched. *Talanoa* is a term and concept that is used in the Fijian, Samoan, Tokelauan and Tongan languages and cultures, which translates to talk or discuss or converse or tell stories (Vaioleti, 2016). Furthermore, Vaioleti (2014: p. 199) described 'talanoa' as follows:

> Talanoa is a concept that covers different dimensions that can be utilized singularly or simultaneously to ensure that the significant, seemingly insignificant, most subtle and discreet elements of culture and experience that make up the totality of a phenomenon…

Over the years, Indigenous Pacific academics and researchers have contributed to the conceptualisation of *talanoa via* its use as a research methodology. Conversely, a critical analysis of *talanoa* identified that it should be regarded as a research tool or a research method rather than as a research methodology (see Tunufa'i, 2016). More recently and with the advancement of technology, *talanoa* is considered to be a '*Moana*-centred orality and cultural practice' which has evolved into e-*talanoa* where researchers and/or participants connect on an online platform to engage in *talanoa* (Faleolo, 2019; Fa'avae et al., 2022).

In this article, we have employed a dimension of *talanoa* in the written form to share our lived experiences; to help reclaim sovereignty over our Pacific stories; to decolonise Indigenous Pacific education; and to centre and privilege our Pacific knowledge systems whilst standing in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples of today. These are our stories.

Pacific academic narratives

Dr. Dion Enari
Auckland University of Technology
Pacific academics are here to stay

As a Pacific person who was raised in Australia, I know this is a new space where we can reimagine what being Samoan, Tongan, Fijian and Maori means. Together with the current Pacific academics in Australia and the future ones yet to come. We will be a force to be reckoned with together moving forward, one Pacific academic at a time. It is through reading and listening to our individual insights, that one can have a better understanding of our collective Pacific academic story in Australia.

Professor Jioji Ravulo
The University of Sydney
First Pasifika Full Professor in Australia

Reflecting now as the first Pacific full Professor in Australia I always remember and hold dearly on how it started. It was when I was working as a caseworker with young people involved in the criminal justice system. I wanted to know and learn WHY we, as Pacific communities, are over represented in such spaces. This led to undertaking my Doctorate striving to explore these social factors and variables. This laid the foundation (and my passion) to hold social systems, structures and services accountable to be better, to be responsive, and reflective of the diversity they are working to engage with. That is, if the legal system is to better serve our communities, are they understanding our social and welfare needs? Similarly, is education, health and welfare systems, structures and services responsive to our needs, and equipped to reflect our rich perspectives and practices? By doing so, we can then create legal, educational, health and welfare outputs and outcomes that are more responsive to diversity.

One of the most rewarding parts of being a Pacific academic is being able to bring my Pacific identity, alongside its views, values, perspectives and practices to everything I do. For example, my teaching, research and writing reflect a collective, collaborative and collegial approach. In teaching, I use a 'flipped classroom' approach, where students enter a shared conversation (*talanoa*) about the topics and concepts being presented. In my research, I utilise a community-led approach that supports local voices and visibility. And in my writing, I'm keen to discuss shared responsibilities to social issues and solutions. All three areas reflect Pacific principles that we as Pacific people emanate in our desire for a collective and reciprocal approach to life. But it can be tricky!

As we work in institutions that were established by western principles, discourses and narratives, we can become overwhelmed by the individualistic approach found in academia. I strive to stay true to my Pacific values and bring these to my interactions with others. I've also learnt to see that such points of difference can be meaningfully utilised in supporting my work with others. That is, do not shy away from bringing our unique worldviews to the conversations, for others to consider, and learn from and alongside.

Overall, my philosophy in education and research is focused on creating inclusive societies—where everyone, irrespective of who they are, where they come from, what they believe and what they look like can contribute. Failure to create social structures, systems and services that are not shaped by the communities that are designed to serve does a disservice to people. By calling out oppressive social structures, systems and services that stop people from being included, we hold to account such inequalities and provide opportunities for change. This includes creating policy and research that resonates with the lived experience of people across different settings and situations. This is easily achievable when individuals see themselves as part of a collective, a community, a society that values them, as much as they value others. A reciprocal approach that once again is founded in many of our Pacific indigenous worldviews and values.

Mr. Thom G. Faleolo & Dr. Ruth L. Faleolo
La Trobe University & Deakin University
Reflections on Trans-Tasman Indigenous Educational Experiences in Aotearoa and Australia

> To those who have stood against us in fruitless attempts – like sandpaper Thank you for being useful; your roughness towards us has only helped to smooth, hone, and prepare us for the journey ahead Today we remain stronger, sharper, creative and agentic We look forward to the new learning adventures ahead For God is on our side, who can be against us?
>
> (Departing thoughts shared with A-NZ schools, December 2015)

We are writing this piece from a trans-Tasman comparative lens, as educators, researchers and as parents of Sāmoan-Tongan children. We have taught in South Auckland, raised our children in Aotearoa New Zealand's (hereafter A-NZ) educational system (preschool to high school) since the early 2000s to mid-2010s. We then moved our family to Logan, Brisbane and have been teaching, researching, and raising our children in and through the secondary and tertiary sectors of Brisbane's regional and Australia's hybrid educational system since 2016 (Faleolo, 2023; Faleolo et al., 2024). Our Pasifika minds, having experienced first-hand the deficit theorising and socioeconomic discrimination of A-NZ schools and universities during the 1970–1990s (Anae, 2010; Anae et al., 2002), are constantly scrutinising the way that Indigenous, including Māori, Pasifika and Aboriginal peoples in Australia, are being treated by these educational systems we teach within (Stanley, 2020; Stanley & Kearney, 2017; Vass, 2012). We question what systemic agendas are driving the educational experiences of our own children and how we can best navigate the potholes of the A-NZ and Australian educational machines—often engineered and created for non-Indigenous success yet marketed as a sociocultural all-encompassing experience with tokenistic images of Indigenous, just to tick that 'institutional' box of inclusivity.

What is the reality? While the broad-brush stroke documentation in A-NZ Ministry of Education (MOE) promoted success for all and 'raising the standard' of Māori and Pasifika education (MOE, 2001, 2011a, 2011b), what was occurring at the forefront of education, on the ground, in boardrooms and in classrooms, countered this effort. As heads of learning and pastoral care leaders during our time teaching in A-NZ, we were often challenged by faculty members about how and why we were raising expectations and increasing the achievement of Māori and Pasifika learners in our departments. There was a time shortly before Ruth resigned from our beloved collegiate in Ōtara, that she had grown frustrated listening to a group of teachers constantly questioning the viability of the *high achieving Pasifika students gaining 'Excellence'* in their externally assessed and moderated assessments through the NCEA system—Ruth could no longer contain her anger and began questioning them aloud in the staffroom space—'why is it so difficult for you to believe that *our Pasifika students can achieve* with Excellence? Is it because you expect very little from them?' and 'if you don't believe in our Pasifika students, why do you choose to teach here? I believe you're in the wrong suburb and possibly the wrong profession!'

As parents we found that the success of our own Sāmoan-Tongan children in school was a cause for contempt from our own teaching colleagues (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous); this experience opened our eyes to the systemic bias against the achievement of Pasifika in A-NZ. Although there were *plenty of Pasifika success stories* to evidence that we are part of a long history of Oceanian agentic and capable peoples in the diaspora (Enari & Fa'aea, 2020; Fa'avae et al., 2022; Faleolo, 2012; Hau'ofa, 1993, 1994), we were bombarded then and still today with the challenges and complexities of systemic racialised labels 'poorer communities', 'disadvantaged learners' and children of 'high crime areas.' We believe that things will improve in A-NZ as *our people are resilient and will overcome* whatever challenges get thrown at them (Enari & Matapo, 2020; Fa'aea & Fonua, 2022; Stewart et al., 2024).

Having taught across regional Queensland and urban state secondary schools in Brisbane since 2016, we can see that the freedom of our Pasifika learners in these educational contexts is due to a distinct absence of socioeconomic labelling that exists in A-NZ yet is somewhat dulled in Australia. This is largely because economically our Pasifika families are doing well in Australia, with access to levels of income and job opportunities that are more

plentiful than that available to our families in A-NZ. Although we do see that this is also a big factor at play when Australia-based Pasifika learners are not as eager to pursue higher education at the end of their formal secondary education (Faleolo, 2020; Stanley, 2020). Whereas in A-NZ, higher education is a pursuit that is considered the 'norm' in most Pasifika families—a way out of 'the factory floor'. Another fallacy that is confronted by our Australia-based Pasifika students, especially our young men, is that they are only valued in school as sports team members—'to run fast with the ball and score'—often seen as 'not university material' and 'a great contribution to the labour market.' As Pasifika educators working and living in Australia, we now join our fellow Pasifika educators and researchers across the many states of this nation, to re-write our educational narratives and to promote the many pathways of success through higher education (Pale et al., 2024; Uasike Allen et al. 2023) and onwards.

Dr. Innez Haua
Macquarie University
The Mudmir Table

Just inside the entry into the Centre of Critical Indigenous Studies (which is the only Indigenous Studies Department in all the continent of Australia) of a big city university is a conference table named the Mudmir Table. Just like the Torres Strait Island of Mer, named by a Meriam person, in the Meriam Mir language of its peoples, the Mudmir Table is our place in the sun.

The Mudmir Table is our island in the ivory tower.

It is where we: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Pacific and Indigenous scholars from around the globe gossip our resilience and brilliance. Where we gather in safety and nurse each other's wounds. Where we laugh, eat and nourish our bellies, our intellects, our spirits, our hearts. It is where we plot and scheme against the hate and ignorance. Our food and tea-filled belly laughs and profanities float out of the centre confines and into the corridors of the Arts building. I watch how this affects others. Some of these others flinch. Some spy at us with glints of fear in their eyes or slivers of condescension in their plastic teeth. Most, though, reveal envy. It is evident in their gratuitous hand gestures when they are invited to sit.

In the Centre of Critical Indigenous Studies of this big city university there are posters everywhere. Splashes of big, bold colour, on every spare bit of wall. Words and images of defiance and affirmations explicitly expressed. They declare Blak Indigenous Queer Love, Big Blakness, Blak and Indigenous Beauty and Indigenous Resistance. Indigenous Everything. They disrupt the modern architecture and they make-messy the precise lines and minimal, neutral colour schemes and the wall and door placements that were designed to prosper ivoryness.

And the mortar between these posters, are photos of us. Us who reside in this department and us who sit at the Mudmir Table. Us graduating, us slaying dragons, us achieving, us in battle and joyous us. They solidify it all and declare that we are here, whilst making here, as (un)comfortable as possible.

The Mudmir Table inside the Centre of Critical Indigenous Studies is inside a structure of glass, steel and concrete where the structure produces glass, steel and concrete knowledges. The structure/tower is in an institution named for a mass-murderer. On Dharug Ngurra. Country where it is impossible to count the generations of Wallumattagal knowledges that have always been here. And always will be. Dharug realms, Dharug being, and knowing knowledges spanning time immemorial and futures immeasurable. All this nurtures the Mudmir Table, and the peoples who sit there.

I sit there too.
At the Mudmir Table, next to them.
A settler.
Wahine Māori—protected, nourished, nurtured and grateful.

Dr. Maryanne Pale
Victoria University (Melbourne)
Heeding the call

> …I consider how diffractive practice produces new possibilities through embracing multiplicity, difference, and divergence (Hill, 2017). In this light, difference is seen as affirmative, as a tool of creativity rather than as separation and lack (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017) … My intercultural experiences and understandings offer a positive difference to the field of academia… (Wilson et al., 2021, p. 256).

As I reflect on my experiences as a Tongan/Pacific academic based in Australia, I remember and reconnect with my excerpt above with an appreciation for how my intercultural experiences and understandings have supported the work that had ensued. Since then, I am grateful for the opportunities that have enabled me to contribute positive insights within the field of academia (e.g. Pale et al., 2023, 2024). In 2022, I was awarded with a Swinburne University of Technology Dean's Emerging Researcher Award for initiating, co-leading and contributing to educational research with and for Pacific learners in Victoria, Australia. 2023 welcomed the arrival of my second child; however, six months later my family and I farewelled my Father in Aotearoa New Zealand. This juxtaposition saw my return to work with a renewed sense of determination and purpose, which led me to a new appointment as a Senior Lecturer, Education at Victoria University (Melbourne) by the end of 2024.

I remain steadfast in knowing that my academic and research work are underpinned by Tongan cultural values: 1) *faka'apa'apa* (respect); 2) *loto to¯* (humility); 3) *tauhi vā* (nurturing relationships); and 4) *mamahi'i me'a* (loyalty/passion). These values have often carried me through the most challenging of times over the past decade in Australia; particularly when I have served as the only Tongan/Pacific academic in various spaces. There is strength in knowing who you are and where you come from. There is also an unwavering resilience in knowing that in my Tongan/Pacific ways of being, knowing, doing and belonging, I am often reminded that this journey is not mine alone.

My family and community continue to reinforce the notions of cultural duty and inherent responsibilities. These notions are heightened by the call to initiate, to lead and to produce academic and research outputs by drawing on Tongan/Pacific epistemologies, traditional knowledge and cultural practices. The call lends itself to also having the courage and the foresight to disrupt the status quo and to facilitate critical discourse within academia and across educational contexts to (re)introduce Tongan/Pacific ways of being, knowing, doing and belonging. Therefore, I look forward to the new opportunities, collaborations and experiences as I continue to navigate towards heeding the call.

Dr/Pastor Inez Fainga'a-Manu Sione
Village Connect, Pathways in Place (Paul Ramsay Foundation) & Griffith University (Community Research Fellow)

Mastering the art of navigating a multicultural, multi-generational and multi-sectoral space both online and face to face, best answers the question of what it is like as an Indigenous academic in our new homelands (Fainga'a-Manu Sione et al., 2023; Faleolo, 2023; Durham et al., 2023). As an Associate Pastor, and a Pacific researcher working from within my community, these spaces have added layers to the strengths and deep insight into the Pasifika Indigenous ways of learning, knowing and being within the diaspora (Fainga'a-Manu Sione, et al., 2023). Paul from the bible best said it in his statement 'Even though I am free of the demands and expectations of everyone, I have voluntarily become a servant to all, in order to reach a wide range of people… I didn't take on their way of life. I kept my bearing in Christ-but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view' (1 Corinthians 9:19–20, Message translation). It is the journey of 'entering into their world to experience things from

their point of view' that has been the most insightful learning process in this act of service through research (Fainga'a-Manu Sione, 2022).

It has required what the First Nations people call Daddirri, meaning deep listening (Ungunmerr-Baumann, 2002). Furthermore, to then translate such knowledge and wisdom into research, using Indigenous methodologies to teach and educate a dominantly mainstream western, system, has been an important work of voice and visibility for multicultural, migrant peoples. There has been one key Indigenous learning that every educator, irrespective of culture, can use to build bridges across generations, cultures, hierarchies and communities. This is through the importance of connection before content.

The Pasifika ways of knowing, being, and doing are centred upon the capacity to *teu le vā* (Anae, 2010), meaning to nurture social and sacred relationships. Put simply, nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care, or until they feel like they belong and can connect in a conducive, culturally safe environment. For Pasifika peoples, to express such care, connection takes precedence which is conducted through what Vaioleti (2014) calls *talanoa* (unconcealed storytelling), as it allows people to share their personalised stories, whether it be of their families, cultural heritage or areas of interest. This Pasifika way of working is also familiar to First Nations peoples of Australia through yarning (Bessarab et al, 2010), which is a process of 'making meaning, communicating and passing on history and knowledge'. It is this priority of 'making meaning' that first starts with giving visibility and voice to the individual learners within the classroom and the richness of what they bring into the learning space.

Often the teaching and learning process is one dimensional with the teacher or lecturer being the knowledge holder and spending the entire time talking at students (Ravulo et al., 2020). Such practices fail to engage people from multicultural backgrounds as it ignores the process of *talanoa* and yarning between learners (Ravulo et al., 2020). Privileging Pasifika methodologies has been key to attaining equity, diversity and inclusion within our education systems to authentically ensure all learners can thrive and that their holistic selves can be given voice and visibility in the classrooms (Fainga'a-Manu Sione, 2022). As a Pasifika Indigenous researcher this has been my contribution to the diaspora. To give voice through research and advocacy to the holistic, intergenerational ways of working that centres our Pasifika ways of being, knowing and doing.

Dr. Heena Akbar
The University of Queensland

Passing the baton

Standing before a lecture theatre filled with 480 medical students enrolled in the University of Queensland's Doctor of Medicine program, I reflect on my journey with a sense of disbelief. Growing up in multicultural Fiji, where my father worked in the sugar mills and my family traversed 15 schools due to his postings, my parents instilled in me a strong appreciation for education. Despite the nomadic nature of our existence, they consistently emphasised the importance of striving to do our best.

Arriving in Brisbane at 18 on an AusAID scholarship to pursue Bachelor of Applied Science in Molecular Biology and Biochemistry, I was confronted with many challenges. Navigating an unfamiliar education system, adapting to new surroundings and missing close family support tested my resolve as I adjusted to the new environment. My Pasifika upbringing, values and faith, allowed me to persevere with determination so that I could adapt to the Australian university system.

Today, as a Senior Lecturer armed with a PhD in Public Health and happily settled with my own family, I find fulfilment in realising the aspirations I cherished during my early years in Fiji. My teaching and research revolve around the serious issue of Diabetes which plagues all of our communities in the Pacific and our Māori and Pasifika peoples living in Australia.

I incorporate Pasifika principles into my pedagogy and research, prioritising respect and community-building that instils cultural reverence when interacting with my students, researchers and academics. I have had the opportunity to mentor and encourage Māori and Pasifika students and early career health professionals to take up further studies and work together on projects aimed at improving the health of families. I continue to guide and empower Māori and Pasifika individuals embarking on their educational journeys, fostering a collective commitment to enhancing the well-being of our communities.

Central to my academic journey has been the privilege of working with community elders and leaders to co-create initiatives tailored to address the pressing needs identified by our communities. These collaborative endeavours underscore the significance of grassroots involvement and culturally sensitive and responsive approaches in effecting meaningful change.

As I look to the future, together with this cohort of aspiring future leaders representing diverse backgrounds and with a shared passion for medicine, I am reminded of the transformative power of education and the imperative of collective action in confronting health disparities. My journey, shaped by determination, cultural pride and a commitment to service is a testament to the boundless potential residing within each individual to effect positive change within their communities and beyond.

Dr. Glenda Stanley
Griffith University, Centre for Systems Innovation
Dropout to Doctorate

As a once-high school dropout, pursuing higher education was far removed from my psyche or career aspiration. I did not thrive nor conform in the school setting. I struggled to see how the application of learnings from within the classroom translated to the realities of everyday life—it was often disjointed, disconnected and far removed—a challenge many of my students throughout South East Queensland from similar demographics and postcodes have shared over the years.

It was when I attempted to join the Australian Defence Force in my early 20's (without success) that I realised the reality of having no qualifications. That 'computer says NO' moment fuelled my inner rebel (aka stubbornness, drive and resilience) to commence and commit to getting an education, and the journey of lifelong learning which has led me to the spaces I now occupy. Not just for myself and my Samatau family, but also the many Pacific students in my city of Logan who have shared similar stories and experiences—yet often with more hope, holding greater aspirations for themselves and their families—far greater than I had dared to hold for myself as a teen.

This reflection piece is a (re)claiming of space, knowledge and purpose. It is illuminating the need for us collectively to deeply understand and purposefully navigate the systems and ecosystems in which we live, move and breathe to better influence and shape our present and future. For it is from this wider bird's eye view, that we can see the greater system/s, enabling us to understand *where* and *how* to create long-term sustainable systems change for the betterment of our children, families and wider communities. And it is in these spaces that we can collectively grow and thrive.

Dr. David Lakisa
Talanoa Consultancy
Navigating Fa'asamoa and 'Fa'a-Australian'

My PhD research was born from personal migration and vocational experiences as a New Zealand-born, Australian-raised Samoan. My reflections as a PhD holder, former high school teacher, academic and business consultant in Australia, embodies a distinctive intersection of cultural identity, scholarly pursuit and professional practice that is both enriching and

challenging. Migrating to Australia in the late 1980s positioned me to navigate and negotiate a multifaceted approach to academic and professional opportunities.

First, navigating and blending 'two worlds', between '*fa'asamoa*' and Australian societal values was and is an enriching experience. On one hand, the emphasis is on family, respect, identity and social responsibility while on the other, sits the values of mateship, freedom, fairness and opportunity. This duality offers a unique lens and opportunity to bridge and integrate the Samoan and Australian culture (Lakisa, 2020).

In the realm of academia, being one of the few Pacific Islander faces teaching at an Australian university, allowed for the sharing and exploration of Pacific Island perspectives into the scholarly discourse, often underrepresented in mainstream research. I felt honoured and 'blessed' to contribute to the academic landscape with Pacific knowledge systems, research, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks, particularly in the field of education, health, sport, cultural studies, business and diversity management. I especially look fondly on my time as a former secondary school teacher in Australia. I delighted in raising the profile and capability of 'generation next' and enjoyed the collegiate camaraderie with fellow educators. Secondary or tertiary education teaching and learning provided me with an important layer of practical experience and understanding of the educational system's challenges and opportunities for fostering cultural sensitivity and diversity among young people in Australia.

Moving forward

As we reflect on our context as Indigenous Pacific peoples in Australia who stand in solidarity with our Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island, we recognise the commonalities throughout our *talanoa* (Enari & Haua, 2021; Haua & Enari, 2023). Our experiences within the Western education system continuously remind us of the importance of our Indigenous Pacific cultural identities and heritage, whilst acknowledging the Indigenous peoples of Australia. It is a complex journey, as we constantly battle trying to implement our ancestral ways of being, knowing and doing in spaces which continue to silence our Indigenous Pacific worldviews (Enari & Matapo, 2020). We navigate these spaces in search of better opportunities and pathways for our Pacific peoples and the generations to come. We advocate for an education system that is for us and by us. For if Western education systems are not reflective of Indigenous realities, we will constantly be marginalised.

As Pacific researchers in Australia, we acknowledge that our presence in these spaces is a form of service to our people (Enari & Fa'aea, 2020; Fa'aea & Enari, 2020). There are inherent expectations and responsibilities that we aim to uphold through our leadership, research and teaching, as well as through acts of service to our Pacific communities and the Indigenous communities upon whose lands we occupy. Indigenous Pacific epistemologies, values and ways of knowing and doing are important in our work and in the fostering of relationships within academic institutions, the education sectors and society at large. *Talanoa* (Vaioleti, 2014), *teu le va* (Anae, 2010) and *tauhi vā* (Pale, 2019) are a few of the examples of Pacific epistemologies and methodologies that are presented in this article that will resonate with Indigenous Pacific students, families and communities. If more schools, academic institutions, government agencies and not for profit organisations explore and adopt such Pacific ways of knowing and doing; then it would help to establish and/or strengthen Pacific student, family and community engagement and participation across different sectors. In addition, privileging Pacific epistemologies and methodologies can help to bolster cultural safety within schools, academic institutions and society. As such, systems can develop and/or enhance pedagogical approaches and professional practices that are indeed equitable, diverse and inclusive.

Make no mistake, we do not occupy these spaces as a hobby, or for individual progression. Instead, we hold these spaces for our people to ensure programs and education is not imposed

on us and for us. We will continue to use our own unique Indigenous Pacific cultures to add to the discourse and fabric of education in Australia. Like the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, our knowledge systems and wisdom predate the formation of the Australian nation state and country. May our knowledge be privileged not only for our own people, but for mainstream Australia, to better understand and appreciate us. Ia manuia.

Open reviews

The experiences of indigenous academics in the diaspora

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The article focuses on the contributions of Pacific academics in higher education, particularly within the Australian context, where Pacific diaspora communities have grown considerably. The most recent Australian census data reports 337,000 people of Pacific heritage in 2021, which has doubled since 2006 and represents 1.3% of the total Australian population (Howes & Liu, 2022). The authors, who are Pacific academics, share their experiences through Talanoa to highlight their challenges and successes in navigating transformative practices within Australian academic institutions. Their insights speak to their resilience, commitment to decolonising and Indigenising education, and efforts to centre Pacific worldviews within academia.

Pacific diaspora academics are pivotal in challenging and transforming Australian educational institutions. Their dual responsibility entails contributing to the intellectual and professional landscapes of higher education while honouring and integrating Pacific cultural knowledge, identities, and practices. By incorporating Talanoa (an Indigenous Pacific methodology), these academics seek to decolonise educational spaces, standing in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This approach challenges Eurocentric curricula, advocates for culturally relevant pedagogy, and promotes inclusivity and equity throughout educational systems.

By confronting systemic marginalisation, Pacific academics expose and address the Eurocentric bias that often results in the omission and underrepresentation of Pacific histories, cultures, and languages. Their efforts go beyond conventional teaching roles to foster intercultural awareness, develop community-led research initiatives, and mentor Indigenous students. Grounded in values of respect, humility and relationality, they offer a holistic approach that bridges cultural knowledge with academic practice.

Individual narratives highlight the unique and collective contributions of these academics. Dr. Dion Enari emphasises the collective impact of Pacific academics in shaping academia for future generations. Professor Jioji Ravulo, Australia's first Pacific full professor, is committed to community-led research tackling social and systemic inequalities. Thom Faleolo and Dr Ruth Faleolo provide a trans-Tasman perspective, reflecting on their experiences of discrimination within educational institutions. Dr Innez Haua reflects on the indigenisation of her Department of Critical Indigenous Studies and the resistance to pushing against the modern architecture of the institution, the material resistance spoken through posters on the wall, and images of defiance and affirmation. She exclaims 'we are here, whilst making here, as (un)comfortable as possible'.

Dr Maryanne Pale centres her Tongan values, which inform her service and resilience. Dr and Pastor Inez Fainga-Manu Sione navigates multi-generational and multicultural diaspora contexts in her research. At the same time, Dr Heena Akbar draws upon Pasifika principles in her lecturing role within the Queensland Doctor of Medicine program. Dr Glenda Stanley's journey of reclaiming educational spaces and Dr David Lakisa's navigation of fa'asamoa and Australian

societal values further reflect the complex dualities faced by Pacific academics. Collectively, their efforts illustrate the transformative impact of Indigenous methodologies and cultural values within academia.

Ultimately, their work represents a form of resistance and advocacy for Pacific peoples in the Australian diaspora, challenging the imposition of Western educational frameworks and promoting systems that reflect and respect Indigenous realities. By centring Indigenous voices and perspectives, these academics aim to create inclusive and equitable educational spaces that celebrate Pacific knowledge and cultures, benefiting Pacific communities and broader societal appreciation and understanding.

The experiences of indigenous academics in the diaspora

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Higher education and tertiary study have been highlighted as a key aspiration for many Pacific people. The authors of this article discuss previous experiences of moving from small Pacific islands to neighbouring developed countries like Australia and New Zealand for better economic and educational opportunities and experiences. For Pacific people in the diaspora who represent a growing minority, cultural identity plays a significant role in grounding and validating aspirations and contributions. As has been written about extensively, universities remain a Western, Eurocentric space for knowledge enquiry and research (Enari et al. 2024). The experiences of the authors in this article are evidence that more needs to happen to shift the needle within universities to learning environments that are decolonised and conducive to indigenous Pacific knowledge and belief systems. The authors of the article highlight avenues in which tertiary institutions could provide these shifts. They discuss the need for institutions to be able to engage and promote pathways of success for Pacific students. This requires specific identification of Pacific needs and tailoring support pathways to address student needs (Cammock et al., 2022).

The university is often seen by Pacific people as a space where students have to learn, study and approach learning in the 'palagi' way. These realities leave all the responsibility of learning on Pacific people, who already have to adjust culturally to new environments within the diaspora. The arrival of Pacific people at university is often accompanied by a period of transition where one realises their options and where they see themselves. Tertiary institutions need to be flexible and open to providing Pacific-centric spaces where Pacific youth can grow, develop, fail and pick themselves up and succeed. Unfortunately, as the authors point out in this article, this is not the reality for Pacific students and staff.

The authors also remind us of the importance of finding connection within academia and being in the practice of sharing and framing positionality within academic spaces. They posit that positionality is about knowing who Pacific people are and where they come from. In so doing, Pacific people build confidence to disrupt, decolonise and re-indigenise Western tertiary institutions. These have the potential to filter into academic processes that will serve our indigenous populations better. These changes lead to more flexible learning and teaching environments where the delivery of education is framed with multidimensional lenses.

The authors raise validated Pacific methods of enquiry like Talanoa, which provides a tool for engaging with colleagues and students in a way that recognises positionality and cultural identity within learning spaces. Talanoa also requires reciprocal learning and understanding, removing an often one-sided, power imbalance that Eurocentric institutions place on indigenous students, researchers and academics when they enter university. These practices, along with

many others (teu le va or nurturing of relationships) lead to more connection and alignment of Pacific value systems within tertiary institutions.

The experiences of indigenous academics in the diaspora

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Long before we were Pacific and Indigenous academics in the diaspora, we were products of the migrant dream. Wide-eyed and full of high expectations of the educational opportunities our parents had envisioned and left their ancestral lands for—we, too are always on the move. We are as Salesa (2017) stated, 'like islands and archipelagos. and like their islands, they are in motion, growing and moving on the crest of powerful forces, some dramatic like tectonic or volcanic energy …' (p. 223).

The authors remind us that Pacific and Indigenous in the academy are powerful forces moving with dramatic energy that seized those opportunities with the Pacific cultural intelligence of our ancestors. The authors display their inter-generational navigational skills in motion to traverse the sometimes choppy Trans-Tasman conditions in the academy. Collectively, the authors speak back with volcanic energy to Eurocentric systems and structures in higher education and universities that continue to underserve Pacific peoples.

There has been much work in Aotearoa NZ by researchers in decolonising methodologies and indigenising curriculum. However, the authors signal the urgent work required for an increasingly diverse Pacific population, particularly in Australia. The authors requisite a considered Pacific and indigenous approach acknowledging First Nations, including all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia, that unifies their stand in sovereignty over lands as never ceded. This early signal of commitment and reciprocity as allies to self-determination for indigenous peoples aligns well with their employment of talanoa. Individually and collaboratively, they voice concerns of a Eurocentric modus operandi where Pacific epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies are often relegated to the margins.

In true tusitala (storytelling) style, the authors call for a reimagining of the landscape (Enari et al., 2024) through indigenisation of schooling and education curricula discourse. Their unique vantage point provides the reader with rich lived experiences teaching, researching and serving students in higher education and universities with Pacific and Indigenous-specific ways of knowing and being. The authors illustrate ways to tautua (serve) the very communities we hail from by invoking us to resist the absence of our histories, languages and culture in the Australian curriculum. Professor Ravulo, the first Pacific Professor of Australia, appropriately stirs us to call out oppressive structures, systems, and services and engage in reciprocal approaches that are underpinned by our Pacific values and worldviews. Mr Thom & Dr R. Faleolo reflect on their trans-tasman indigenous educational experiences in Aotearoa and Australia, highlighting the agentic work needed to counter narrate the deficit labels of poor communities, disadvantaged learners and high crime areas and to advocate for promoting more pathways to success. Dr Haua motions us to be 'indigenous everything' and 'make-messy' disrupting modern architecture with splashes of big bold colour with words of defiance and affirmations explicitly expressed! Our Pacific values of Faka'apa'apa, loto tō, tauhi vā, courage and foresight to disrupt the status quo are key to Dr Pale's heed to the call, which aligns with Dr/Pastor Fainga'a-Manu Sione's reminder of Paul the apostle and servanthood. She calls for Daddirii, or deep listening and yarning, as holistic intergenerational ways of being. Similarly, Dr Akbar calls for incorporating Pasifika principles into pedagogy and research, prioritising respect and community building. Dr Stanley prefaces her experience as a school dropout and

the importance of (re)claiming space, knowledge and purpose. Finally, Dr Lakisa moves our attention to Indigenous Pacific cultural identities and heritage, simultaneously acknowledging the Indigenous peoples of Australia. Importantly, he calls for programs and education to not be imposed on us but for us. Collectively, the authors remind us to keep the 'motion' as Pacific and Indigenous academics. (WC 597)

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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