

## EDITORIAL:

# Tensions between policy and practice: Learning how to 'edgewalk'

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The core mission of OCIES is threefold: encourage collaboration between those concerned with comparative and international education in the Oceanic region; foster a high standard in the teaching and study of comparative and international education at all levels; facilitate the dissemination of knowledge about research and practice in comparative and international education. Our focus is to build a relational way of working to embrace our diversity, encourage equity and provide inclusive support to emerging scholars. The aim is to remain conscious of achieving our goals through authentic connection and collaboration with each other in ways that value who we are and respect our diverse range of lived experiences and world views. The process of producing this Special Issue of IEJ: CP, a collection from the Society's 2021 annual conference, embodies this way of working. As a team of six, we worked collaboratively with the contributing authors to produce a high-quality publication and ensure the process was pedagogically sound and affirming for everyone.

In 2021, as the impact of COVID continued to ensure all travel plans were tentative, especially travel that crossed international borders, we once again conducted our annual conference in a virtual space. The conference was initially planned as a collaborative event involving four universities hosting face-to-face hubs and incorporating virtually accessible sessions. These universities were the Fiji National University (FNU), the University of Melbourne, Monash University and Waikato University. Although we planned to have three hubs geographically spread across our region (Fiji, Aotearoa-New Zealand, and Australia), with continued restrictions on movement and social gatherings, only a small Melbourne hub could proceed. After a lengthy lockdown in Melbourne, we were fortunate to hold this event and interact in person again as a community. We would like to acknowledge and express our gratitude for the work of all involved in enabling the conference to go ahead despite the challenging circumstances.

The focus of the 01–03 December 2021 OCIES Conference was *Strengthening, Expanding and Reimagining Connections for and through Education*. The Fiji University also chose a sub-theme to guide their contributions, *Post-COVID-19 Educational Challenges for The Global South: Access to Quality, Safe and Equitable (Online) Learning Experiences*. The New and Emerging Researchers of OCIES (NERO) community delivered a half-day pre-conference workshop that provided opportunities to explore approaches to research design, researcher positionality and, with the journal Editor and team members, the publication process and diversity, equity and inclusion in education research.

The 2021 conference explored the role of education in re(creating) positive forms of coexistence and interconnectedness and what re(creating) of education spaces needs to occur to enable this. It provided a much-needed opportunity to explore the multi-faceted

dimensions of questions of coexistence and connectedness in education spaces and as a scholarly society. Over the two-day event, we featured three keynote speakers: Professor Carl Mika (University of Canterbury), *Being and Convergence Within Wā: Excessive and Stupendous Interconnection*; Professor Marcia McKenzie (University of Melbourne), *Global Studies and Climate Change Education Policy*; and Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba (FNU), *Clarion Call for New Values and New Order: Equitable Opportunities in Pacific Education—Lessons from Pacific Indigenous Philosophy, Ecological Justice and Relationality*. There were 30 sessions comprising 78 presentations and 172 presenters (including over 50 from FNU). It was pleasing to note the attendance of many practising teachers and beginning researchers from FNU; many also presented virtually and discussed the impact of COVID-19 on Fijian teachers and classrooms.

As a new initiative in response to our online mode for the 2021 conference, the executive committee made significant changes to the scholarship awards that OCIES typically offers for emerging scholars to attend the conference each year. Rather than provide the financial support required for travel, as has been customary, we offered a structured mentoring program to support five new and emerging researchers to turn their presentations into publishable papers. The scholarship winners worked with Miriam Ham and Martyn Reynolds as their mentors to craft and shape their work into a draft and then polished paper. The group met monthly from December to April, each time delighted at the improvements made to the ‘next draft’. Through this process, participants learned the art of writing and gained experience, giving feedback and support to each other through editing and drafting each other’s work. The collaborative, relational space we created was supportive and challenging as we grappled with the varied topics and writing styles and faced the challenge of providing constructive advice, particularly when the drafts we were looking at were in their initial stages. We are pleased to say that four of the five scholarship awardees successfully published a paper based on their presentations at the conference, three of which are included in this edition.

### **SUMMARY OF SPECIAL EDITION**

The authors in this Special Edition are primarily students who are part of the New and Emerging Researchers of the OCIES (NERO) group. We are proud that their doctoral and post-doctoral research makes up a significant proportion of the edition. We also have contributions from experienced scholars working in teams and some writing with their students. Several themes are evident in the collection of papers, but the overarching thread throughout is *the tension between policy and practice*. Differing expectations of communities, lack of shared understandings and disconnects between policy prescriptions and practice realities significantly impact how we, as educators and researchers, engage with our contexts and participants. Being mindful of these differences and the tensions they cause gives rise to the need for us as readers to listen and learn. In these moments, we need to ask questions, consider perspectives deeply, and then flexibly respond to issues as they arise to journey with the communities we engage with.

We begin this journey through tensions with the reflective work of Kabini Sanga, Johansson-Fua, Martyn Reynolds, David Fa’avae, Richard Robyns, Grace Rohana, Graham Hiele, Danny Jim, Loretta Case and Demtria Malachi. Their article was conceptualised and drawn from a *tok stori* at last year’s (2021) conference. The team of experienced researchers and leaders consider what leadership looks like in the day-to-day life of Pacific Island contexts. The article outlines the tensions leaders face in walking

between the various culturally inscribed positions they inhabit across different spheres of community life.

The second article, contributed by Melissa Chin, Victoria Beckworth, Ben Levy, Swati Gulati, Alea Macam, Tanya Saxena and Dwi Purwestri Sri Suwarningsih, uses vignettes of their personal experiences as doctoral students to critically reflect on the challenges and opportunities arising from their positioning as researchers within their doctoral research projects. Their reflections reveal the differing aspects of positioning and point to a firm conclusion of the importance of a researcher's explicit and critical examination of the dynamics of positioning in research. The term 'edgewalk' that is part of the title for this editorial is a reference to this article.

The third article follows a similar vein, also considering notions of positioning and relationships of power, but in the context of communities of practice in schools. The authors Lindsay Fish, Maggie Flavell and Emma Cunningham expose the embedded practice of silencing that can occur due to unexamined systems and assumptions of communication between schools and families despite 'best intentions' to be inclusive. Their article takes an innovative approach, presenting fictionalised vignettes that draw us into commonly experienced 'goings-on' in school systems. They demonstrate how schools and educators can learn from Indigenous knowledges and relational practices when engaging with families and the community. By engaging in these approaches, the authors suggest schools can foster greater equity and communality between teachers and families for the benefit of students.

The next two articles in this Special Issue discuss the impact of government lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on university students' learning. Jeremy Dorovolomo, Siuta La'laupea'alu, Loriza Rafiq, Patricia Rodie and Billy Fito'o utilised Pacific Indigenous methodologies of *tok stori* and *talanoa* to learn from students in Fiji and Aotearoa-New Zealand about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The article highlights tensions experienced between the needs of university students during pandemic-induced 'lockdowns' and the practices of university staff and communities during the 'lockdowns'. The article identifies the value of social capital for mitigating the potential negative impact on students' well-being and valued strategies for strengthening students' social capital. Focusing more on the opportunities and challenges of transitioning to online learning, Fereal Ibrahim, Sangeeta Nath, Sofia Ali and Naqsheema Ali's article reports on research into the experiences of in-service teachers undertaking tertiary study at the FNU during pandemic lockdowns in Fiji. Ibrahim and colleagues' research highlights the diversity of student experience and associated preferences for online learning modalities. The articles from Ibrahim and colleagues, and Dorovolomo and colleagues demonstrate the value of rapid, practice-focused research undertaken by teacher educators, where findings can directly inform practice and university policy. Both articles conclude with recommendations for how universities can plan for and respond to mitigate the adverse impacts of rapid change. Their findings are useful suggestions for practice for university systems and educators.

The final three articles, drawn from the 2021 conference, deal directly with tensions between education policy and the practice of teachers and educators working in schools. Victoria Beckwith examines how unclear definitions of concepts, such as global citizenship, impact how such concepts are communicated in policy, with ramifications for curriculum and pedagogy. After discussing the historical and theoretical debates about the definition of global citizenship, Beckwith narrows the focus to the New Zealand

context to examine the ramifications on practice. Alea Macam similarly interrogates the ideologies underlying the introduction of professional teacher standards in the education system of the Philippines. Macam's analysis of two key policy frameworks demonstrates the importance of unpacking the values and assumptions carried within policy reforms and considering how these may (and do) shape teacher subjectivities and practices within local contexts.

The final paper in this Special Issue takes us to Bhutan, where Jobden Tobden and Miriam Ham share Tobden's research, undertaken with policymakers, which reveals how delays in educational policy reform have had a significant negative impact on the potential for education to contribute to the nation's Gross National Happiness agenda.

In this issue, we also have a Community Voices piece that, although not presented at the 2021 conference, fits with the thread of tensions between policy and practice experienced by educators across the globe. The piece by Robert Mizzi outlines recommendations for creating inclusive workplaces for LGBTQ international educators. The paper is based on the voices of teachers who have experience working in international contexts that do not value diverse identities. Their recommendations are practical and responsive to the tensions experienced by the educators, the schools and their leadership, and the institutions' cultures.

This issue also features three Book Reviews, by Niranjana Casinader, Marie Quinn, Preedha R. Govindasamy and Philip Wing Keung Chan, on recently published texts in CIE.

While diverse in topic, overall, the collection of articles for this Special Issue offers a rich representation of the 2021 conference theme and the diversity of OCIES and Comparative and International Education as a discipline. The Special Issue demonstrates how CIE research enables, and indeed requires, continual investment in relational connections and engagement across countries among emerging researchers through Indigenous dialogic methodologies and with teachers, students, policymakers, researchers, authors and editors.



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