

Special Issue Editorial: The Festival of OCIES 2020

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We acknowledge the indigenous peoples and custodians of the lands on which we are each located. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

CELEBRATING AND CULTIVATING COMMUNITY AND COLLABORATION

As has been often said, 2020 was a year marked by the ‘unprecedented’ events and experiences brought about by the global Covid-19 pandemic, which continues to mark our public and private lives in various ways. While the pandemic has had a ‘global’ reach, ‘local’ experiences have been very different, perhaps no more so than in the relational space of Oceania from where we, and the authors in this Special Issue, write. For the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society (OCIES) - the official sponsor of this journal - 2020 presented new challenges to sustaining connections across our regional society, but also new opportunities. For the first time in the Society’s 37 year history, we were unable to hold our usual annual conference face to face. Instead, we held an online conference entitled the *Festival of OCIES*. As with other initiatives undertaken by OCIES during these ‘unprecedented’ times (see, for example, Sanga, Reynolds, Ormond & Southon, 2021), we sought to embrace the new opportunities offered by being unable to travel and gather together physically, while also responding to the challenges of the year with a call for celebration. Organised by a small geographically dispersed team of volunteers, the Festival was deliberately created as a space to recognise, celebrate and affirm the rich diversity of our OCIES community. We take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank Rhonda Di Biase, Maggie Flavell, and Carmel Mesiti for their time and energy in convening the conference, as well as the wider group of OCIES members who contributed their time and support in planning the event and facilitating sessions, including our New and Emerging Researcher Fono team, David Fa’avae, Sonia Fonua, Tepora Afamasaga-Wright and Ben Levy. Particular efforts were made to craft

the Festival as an inclusive and supportive online space, with participation free to all, dedicated sessions for New and Emerging Researchers, the use of Pacific indigenous collaborative discussion formats such as *talanoa* and *tok stori*, a journal workshop for reviewers, and social sessions.

This special issue of the *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives* (IEJ:CP) is an outcome of the Festival. It continues the spirit of collaboration, reciprocity, mentorship and generosity that flows through the Festival, and which underpins IEJ:CP and our OCIES community more broadly. Our editorial team involved two ‘first-timers’ to the journal editing process and emerging researchers, Rebecca and Aizuddin, assisted and mentored through the process by Alex as IEJ:CP Senior Editor and Joel as a member of the IEJ:CP Editorial Board. This collaborative mentorship arrangement reflects the active efforts of the IEJ:CP Editorial team to nurture the next generation of Comparative and International Education (CIE) scholars, as well as a commitment to building community through scholarship. As Aizuddin reflects on below, it also formed part of the Partnering Engagement Program established by IEJ:CP in 2020 in which he and Joel participated. This commitment to actively creating opportunities for emerging researchers was also enacted through the submissions and review process. Two of the six contributions were from emerging researchers and particular efforts were made to ensure the review process was constructive and affirming. Furthermore, two of the reviewers were first timers, assisted by the Special Issue editorial team and/or senior colleagues in undertaking the review process. These are times in which many of us within academia are experiencing heightened pressures to be more productive, more competitive and more ‘impactful’ in environments of less care, less community, and ultimately less meaning. We believe this makes even more important, and valued, the opportunities being created by IEJ:CP, and OCIES more broadly, to engage in collaborative processes of care, generosity and reciprocity as exemplified in the Festival and this Special Issue.

REFLECTIONS ON THE IEJ:CP PARTNERING ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM

Aizuddin Anuar

As part of the mentoring initiative for this journal, the Partnering Engagement Program, I had the opportunity to work closely with one of the Editorial Board Members, Dr. Joel Windle. As a PhD student, I was interested to gain experience co-editing a special issue in order to learn more about the nuts and bolts of this process. The opportunity to be involved in editing this issue was a great learning experience. This process began with selecting reviewers for the article that Joel and I co-edited. We had to familiarise ourselves with the substantive content of the article in order to identify potential reviewers. I learned that the “fit” of the reviewers in terms of expertise, and their willingness and capacity to engage thoroughly and thoughtfully with the author’s work is so crucial. Familiarity with the topic, a wide academic network and a certain degree of chance and goodwill is involved in this stage. When the stars align, excellent reviews are not only fruitful for the author to advance their work, but also a learning opportunity for the editor who also reads the article. Behind the scenes, I encountered an exemplary review that was remarkably thorough—reflecting deep knowledge of the topic at hand—and kindly encouraging. There was a shared commitment here to realising the potential in the article and in the author. To me, this reflected the academic ideal of collegiality and a dedication to nurturing emerging scholars.

As an emerging scholar submitting articles to academic journals, the experience of co-editing an article in this issue—of being on the other side—opens my eyes to the meticulous, painstaking tasks that are required in the production process. Being involved as editors and reviewers takes a significant amount of (free) time in midst of other pressing (and paid) responsibilities. Quite plainly: it takes a lot of time; it takes a lot of hands; it takes a lot of patience. I am grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with Joel, Dr. Alexandra McCormick and Rebecca Spratt, the reviewers and also the article author, Dr. Bonita Marie Cabiles. I have learned tremendously from our encounters. Having gone through this experience, I am certainly better able to appreciate that a lot of work (behind the scenes) happens in moments that an author may perceive as frustrating lulls and delays in the academic publishing process. Such work is undertaken carefully and rigorously. At times it may be thankless work amidst the increasingly frenetic pace of academia. But the end product, such as this Special Issue, is a *special* celebration for all involved when it is finally out in the world.

SUMMARY OF SPECIAL ISSUE CONTRIBUTIONS

The five articles and the creative content piece in this Special Issue draw on presentations given during the 2020 Festival of OCIES online conference. In our first article in this Special Issue, Fikuree, Shiyama, Muna, Naseer and Mohamed focus on a small island developing state (SIDS) context in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on their field research carried out with school principals, teachers, students, and parents in the Maldives, they engage with the challenges to providing education in this Indian Ocean nation, and the disproportionately negative consequences of lockdowns for students' learning. The authors consider how learners and schools coped with rapid changes to online schooling, underscoring achievements, but also how the pandemic has contributed to widening disparities between schools in urban and rural contexts. Fikuree and colleagues call for SIDS governments to prepare contingency plans for emergencies, whereby education can be managed in socially just and equitable ways.

In the second article, Cabiles expands the possibilities of pedagogy of discomfort by considering how teachers' moment-to-moment classroom encounters with students in a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) setting may shed light on the affective dimensions of their habitus. Utilising three episodes of teachers' discomfort in a superdiverse primary school, she demonstrates how such discomforts diminish the embrace of CALD encounters as moments for learning. Thus by encouraging the productive use of discomfort as a pedagogical resource both in the classroom and in teacher education, Cabiles gestures to the possibility of one's habitus being transformed through the confrontation—and embrace—of such affect.

Koloto's contribution critiques the often superficial and problematic ways in which Western inclusive education policy frameworks have been exported. She offers a useful way out of this dilemma in the context of Tonga by identifying local cultural values that could be used to reframe and give greater meaning through forms of inclusive education that are based on existing notions of solidarity, respect and dignity. The work of resignifying inclusive special education is an important move that Koloto shows can make policies more culturally appropriate and engage communities for whom current approaches have limited purchase.

Continuing a concern for problematising the ubiquity of Western concepts, Sanga, Johansson-Fua, Reynolds, Fa'avae, Robyns and Jim's contribution offers a re-storying of the academic practice of literature review. Drawing on their vibrant *tok stori* session on leadership held during the Festival, the authors demonstrate the value of considering "oral literature" alongside written forms within a review process. Weaving together written and oral literature, the authors accomplish an insightful analysis of both the process of literature review and understandings of education leadership across the Pacific region.

Remaining in the Pacific, Dorovolomo and Rafiq share insights from their qualitative comparison of two collaborative programs – 'Read like a Demon' and 'Read like a Champion' - that engaged sports role models in the promotion of literacy in Melbourne, Australia and Suva, Fiji. In the outcomes of their study, they identify four key areas relating to literacy development among school children in the programs studied: creativity and innovation; contextualised, situated practice; society-based partnerships; and the involvement of role models.

Our Creative Arts contribution to this issue is a film from Hawai'i entitled [He Wa'a He Moku He Moku He Wa'a](#). Co-produced in partnership with the Polynesian Voyaging Society, The Nature Conservancy and Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and World Heritage Site, the film provides an engaging exploration of traditional wa'a (canoe) values and how these can be applied to our contemporary lives. In his commentary, Co-Producer Limitaco, discusses the pedagogical power of the film and shares examples of its use within school and University level activities.

Together the contributions to this Special Issue are indicative of the diversity of scholarship of the OCIES community. They also share a concern for the role of education in fostering caring, inclusive, collaborative, and sustainable worlds. We hope you enjoy reading this Special Issue as much as we enjoyed, and learnt from, the collaborative process of bringing it together.

REFERENCES

Sanga, K., Reynolds, M., Ormond, A., & Southon, P. (2021). Pacific relationalities in a critical digital space: The Wellington Southerlies as a leadership experience. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 26, 63-77



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