

EDITORIAL: Revisioning education in Oceania: Walking backward into the future, together

Adreanne Ormond & Kabini Sanga

It is our joy to gift to you, readers, the IEJ: CP Special Issue 2023, a compilation of accepted papers from the OCIES 50th Anniversary Conferences (Virtual and Face-to-Face [F2F]) convened by Victoria University of Wellington (Virtual, 10-11 November 2022) and jointly with Fiji National University (F2F, 21-23 November 2022 in Lautoka, Fiji).

Besides being the 50th anniversary year, 2022 saw OCIES return to its annual conference in F2F mode following the global border lockdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we re-gathered at the Fiji National University campus in Lautoka, Fiji, OCIES conference leaders were mindful of the global crisis and its effects on Oceania's capacities for thought leadership, education thinking and sense-making. We knew we had to counter the negative effects of the pandemic crisis on teachers, students, learning and leadership. Even during the pandemic, OCIES leaders sought to sustain the community by organising virtual conferences, convening regular virtual meetings and initiating the Wellington Southerlies online seminar in collaboration with Victoria University of Wellington. Throughout the COVID pandemic, concerns about the future—of Oceania peoples and education—were always at the fore of OCIES leadership thinking.

As Oceania thought leaders, conference conveners saw OCIES as a relational community—a family. Hence, in preparing for the 2022 F2F annual conference, we were cognizant of the valuable ontological, epistemological, axiological and pedagogical linkages—the commons—between the past, the present and the future. Moreover, we were mindful of the relational and cooperative nature (particularly of our Indigenous worldviews and communities) and our shared futures. Our chosen conference theme, 'Revisioning education in Oceania: Walking backward into the future, together,' reflected these foundational understandings. We crafted a conference theme premised on a shared ontology, an integrated mindset and a collaborative perspective of our world, ourselves and of time. With this theme, we encouraged OCIES members and conference participants to be wise in their reflections about the past and courageous in their future aspirations.

For this Special Issue, we called for proposals based on the conference thematic categories, as follows:

1. The Past—Present issues, tensions and or lessons. We sought proposals to reflect on the Oceanic educational past and explore the tensions between the past and the present. Whatever the schooling/institutional level of research interest, disciplinary foci, research subject matter or educational ideals, this theme provided opportunities for submissions about past issues, experiences, performance, and insights, together with new insights and experiences of the present.

2. The Present—Future issues, tensions and or potentials. We called for proposals to include anticipations of Oceania's educational futures based on reflections on the past and people's intense connections with the present. We encouraged authors to explore the tensions between the present and our expectations about the not-yet-here. Whatever the schooling/institutional level of interest, disciplinary foci, research subject matter or educational ideals, this theme provided opportunities for papers about past-present issues, experiences, performance and insights, together with authors' anticipated and expected futures.

We accepted 12 proposals, representing a mix of empirical and theoretical papers. By the time authors submitted their full papers and blind reviews were undertaken, we were left with seven papers. All accepted papers met all required criteria.

Like other recent IEJ: CP Special Issues, the 2023 Issue is marked by the following key features and commitments. First, most authors are new and emerging researchers, some of whom are first-time authors. By intentionally supporting New Generation OCIES members to publish, this affirms through enactment the OCIES commitment to the intentional socialisation of OCIES members and by contributing intellectually to this education community. Second, mentoring was central in our editorial minds and a consistent commitment in all aspects of the production of this Issue. Throughout the entire process of publication, experienced joint authors, the Special Issue administrator, IEJ: CP technical staff, manuscript reviewers and the Special Issue co-editors have played their roles as mentors to the authors and affirmation of their work. Third, a team of OCIES experts have offered service competently and generously towards the publication of this Special Issue, thereby demonstrating the OCIES members' commitment to agency, stewardship of gifts and generosity of hearts. Hence, to the following colleagues, we offer our acknowledgement and appreciation for their valuable contributions: Laura van Peer, Special Issue administrator; Martyn Reynolds, Rebecca Spratt, Tepora Wright, and Adreanne Ormond, Manuscript reviewers; Philip Wing Keung Chan and Hongzhi Zhang, IEJ: CP Senior Editors; and Miriam Verbeek, Copy Editor.

SUMMARY OF PAPERS

In the language of the Community Voice article (Sanga, Reynolds & Ormond in this Issue) about conference as feasting, we offer the following summary outline of the articles in this Special Issue. We thank the authors for gifting their works to us. In turn, and in the spirit of 'conference as feasting', we pass on these gifts to you for connection, as exchange, for sharing and for your further distribution.

The first three articles tackle the theme of the Past—Present. First, Tim Baice of Auckland University argues that while conventional equity policies in higher education are focused on dismantling barriers and redressing inequalities that restrict the participation and success of students from historically excluded groups, such equity policies often contribute to the problems they seek to address. In a case study of his own university, the University of Auckland, Baice uses a Sāmoan *Manogi* (fragrance) framework to critique equity policies and discourses, offers deep insights into policy impacts on diverse students and proposes ways of re-framing considerations for collective rethinking and revisioning of equity in Oceania.

Second, Grace Rohoana of the Solomon Islands National University observes that Solomon Islands Education has shifted from its policy on basic education that promotes equitable access to quality basic education to one that prioritises high student enrolments to generate revenue. Offering a detailed analysis of this policy shift, its implications on quality education and financial viability, and the challenges posed by policy shift tensions, this study sought a balanced perspective from which policymakers, school leaders and education stakeholders might re-frame their policy responses.

Third, Meleana Koloto, an independent researcher, uses her Victoria University of Wellington PhD research to explore how Tongan families support and care for their members with *siva-tu'amelie* (special needs) education. Using a multi-layered approach to ensure safe spaces for participants, the study obtained rich, high-quality family stories. It generated strength-based perspectives on a subject often associated with negative connotations. Contrary to common notions of Tongan families viewing their members with *siva-tu'amelie* through a medical or religious lens, this study offers new framings on how Tongan society, educators and the education system might perceive individuals with *siva-tu'amelie*.

The next two articles explore the theme of the Present–Future. First, Elizabeth Moore of Victoria University of Wellington delves into the innovative use of *pā'ina* (Hawaiian for the potluck) as a metaphor to reimagine a research approach that fosters collective understanding between non-Indigenous knowledge seekers and Indigenous knowledge guardians in Indigenous knowledge contexts. Exploratory and courageous, this paper is assertive in its pursuit to offer ways of undertaking respectful and honouring research relationships and encounters. The study argues for embracing the broader research context, promoting reciprocal and respectful relationships, assuming complexities and drawing from Oceanic principles such as *vā/va/wā* in negotiating research spaces in ways that support harmony and balance within relationships. The study offers the *pā'ina* metaphor as a potentially transformative approach for respectful and inclusive research with Indigenous communities.

The second article in this thematic category is by a team of authors: Dominique Mahuri (University of the South Pacific), Vilive Cagivinaka (Fiji National University), Sereima Baleisomi (Fiji National University), Onelau Faamoemoe Soti (National University of Samoa), and their mentor Martyn Reynolds (Te Herenga Waka | Victoria University of Wellington). Based on a *tok stori* (Melanesian oral form) session by the authors on ‘quality education’ at the OCIES 2022 F2F Conference at the Fiji National University, this article highlights the perspectives on the dynamics of quality education as seen from frontline educators from diverse Pacific settings. The woven discussion includes explorations of tensions between colonial pasts and the present and points to hopeful expectations about the not-yet-here. The resultant mat balances prevalent notions of quality that flow from distant places into Pacific settings with locally derived positional understandings and, in so doing, offers contextual flesh and currency to some of the key concepts valued by regional initiatives.

In the final category, two articles have overlapping contents in the theme of the Present–Future and that of the Present–Past. The first is by Dominique Mahuri (University of the South Pacific and Principal, Santos East School, Vanuatu), Jeremy Dorovolomo (University of the South Pacific, Fiji) and Amton Mwarakurmes (University of the South Pacific, Vanuatu). In this study, Mahuri and his mentors Dorovolomo and Mwarakurmes investigate the common and relevant Issue of the relationship between student academic

(school) achievement and sociocultural factors. Based on their research of Pentecost Island teachers in Vanuatu, the study uses Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning to explore their study questions. The study noted the complexities of contexts, with their intertwining systems of collective behaviours and simultaneous interactions within environments. The study showed that in this Vanuatu example, sociocultural factors affecting academic achievement included kava as a sociocultural keystone, religious responsibilities of community members, domestic commitments towards families and wider communities and traditional formalities such as *bolololi* (Traditional pig-killing ceremony), *mateana* (funerary ceremonies) and *lagiana* (marriage). The study concludes that local communities influence the relationships between teaching, learning and student success. This paper offers ways of making teaching culturally inclusive, assisting students to acquire important communal values, maintain their spiritual and cultural duties and living sustainably with their environments while adhering to the virtues of national citizenship and governance. The second of this category is by Afrada Shah of the Fiji National University. In this Fiji case study, Shah explores the lived experiences of Fiji students during the COVID-19 global pandemic using an online reflective assessment. Covering issues of online study, student reflections and pandemic-related experiences, this study offers insights for Oceania educators as we gaze into our educational futures. This study supports Sustainable Development Goal 4, confirming that students experienced challenges that were financial, learning-related, lifestyle-oriented and related to mental health. The study also offers nuanced Fiji student experiences, reflecting the local sociocultural context. For future thinking, this study offers ideas related to reviving traditional systems (*veisa*, Fijian barter system), strengthening social connections using technology and ways of applying values, such as resilience and genuine care in times of pandemic crises.

Finally, in this Special Issue, in the Community Voice section, Sanga, Reynolds and Ormond offer readers a gift, stirring our reimaginings of our conferences, gatherings and OCIES community.

It is with much delight that we now recommend these articles as gifts to you for your intellectual feasting.



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