

## BOOK REVIEW: Pacific educators speak: Valuing our values

---

**Makiko Nishitani**

La Trobe University, Australia: [m.nishitani@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:m.nishitani@latrobe.edu.au)

**BOOK REVIEW:** Fuapepe Rimoni, Ali Glasgow, & Robin Averill. (2022). *Pacific educators speak: Valuing our values*. NZCER Press. ASIN: B0B9GPVBCD. pp. 246.

In the last decade, there has been an increased emphasis on supporting Pacific learners in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Ministry of Education published key policies and guidelines, including *The Pasifika Education Plan 2013-2017* (2013) and *Tapasā: Cultural competencies for teachers of Pacific learners* (2018). These government publications identified nine key values that must be included in learners' education environment if Pacific heritage learners are to achieve successful learning outcomes: belonging, family, love, service, spirituality, reciprocal relationships, respect and leadership. These values would make educational environments more compatible with learners' home and cultural environments. Thus, Pacific families, communities and schools can build closer relationships integral to Pacific learners' success. To support this plan and help Pacific heritage learners achieve success, *Pacific Educators Speak* was written for educators to deepen their understanding of the key Pacific cultural values. Two of the authors (Rimoni and Glasgow) have Pacific heritage, and all three teach in education at *Te Herenga Waka* Victoria University of Wellington.

The book's data are from the authors' four-year research project, which involved interviewing Pacific and non-Pacific educators across educational sectors, including early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education, in three urban centres in Aotearoa New Zealand. In addition to one-on-one interviews, the authors held *talanoa*-style discussions (culturally appropriate focus group) with some participants and observed research participants teaching in class.

Among the research findings were different ways Pacific and non-Pacific heritage educators understood and practised the nine values (Averill et al., 2020). As the authors argue, Pacific Island countries include vast geographical areas and rich linguistic and cultural diversity. Thus, each value has cultural specificity: even among the Pacific heritage people, there are differences. However, the nine values have a common interpretation among Pacific heritage educators. The authors found that non-Pacific and Pacific educators differed in their interpretations of the values.

Although New Zealand education policy identifies the Pacific values, if they are not implemented appropriately to the Pacific cultural context, the authors argue, the policy will not help Pacific learners. The authors note that for Pacific heritage learners to thrive, it is important for educators—non-Pacific and Pacific—to implement the values based on the Pacific perspectives. The authors' observations are supported by a wide range of other scholars on culturally responsive pedagogies who discuss the importance of educators

knowing and understanding their learners' and families' cultural identities (e.g., Pale 2019).

*Pacific educators speak: Valuing our values* presents the wisdom of 30 Pacific educators who shared how they understood and implemented each value and how Pacific heritage learners responded to these practices. Following Chapter 1, where the context of this book is introduced, each of Chapters 2 to 10 focuses on one of the nine values and presents various interpretations and practices by Pacific educators.

Each chapter, from Chapters 2 to 10, begins with an opening message from a Pacific heritage education leader and the authors' interpretation of the message. It then presents key themes about the focus value from the literature and participants in dot points. The rest of the chapter presents Pacific educators' responses to interview questions such as 'What does belonging mean to you?' (Chapter 2) and 'How is love present in your teaching?' (Chapter 4), followed by the research participants' responses. Although there are no clear indications, I understand that each paragraph comprises a quote from a participant. The authors say it is 'softly edited for flow' (p. 11). I think that is why they do not use quotation marks for these research participants' words. Each chapter ends with a paragraph summarising key ideas from the chapter, several discussion questions, ideas for further reading and suggested practices for readers and educators that could help demonstrate and nurture the value of their teaching. Some chapters also include a short column that presents the participants' in-class pedagogy based on the authors' observation data.

Chapter 11, 'Honouring Pacific Values: A Compass for Educators', the volume's concluding chapter, provides four additional values that emerged through their research but are not in the New Zealand educational policy: gerontology (respecting old people's roles), humility, generosity and well-being.

As a non-Pacific anthropologist working with Pacific heritage high school students and their Anglo-Australian teachers in rural Australia (e.g., Nishitani & Lee, 2022), I read this book with excitement to see how beneficial it might be to learn how Pacific educators embed cultural values in Pacific learners' educational environments. I also felt it would be challenging for Pacific and non-Pacific educators to implement the Pacific perspective when working with students from other diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Ideally, each educator—irrespective of their cultural background—should be familiar with students' cultural identities and embed their values in teaching. However, in reality, in this increasingly mobile, multicultural world, I assume teachers in New Zealand also work with students from diverse cultures, including and beyond Pacific heritage learners. To respond to this issue, it would have been helpful if the book expanded the section on 'Education Policy' (pp. 6–8) and provided more information about the national context and the extent to which the New Zealand government prioritises Pacific heritage learners in education over other migrants with different cultural backgrounds.

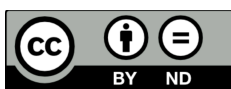
While the book offers rich stories of the Pacific educators, more information about each participant would help the reader understand their thoughts and experiences. As it stands, each paragraph of participants' words is listed without supplemental information about the participant. For example, under the heading 'In terms of teaching and the learning environment, how does demonstrating and nurturing spirituality play out?' (p. 83), there are six paragraphs, which I assume are quotes from six participants. Some say they implement Christianity and prayer in class, and others say they are in a secular school. It

would have been more readable if pseudonyms and brief profiles of each participant, including what they teach, were available for readers to provide some contexts of the research participants' teaching practices.

Although this book has the potential to be an invaluable resource for non-Pacific educators, it may not be accessible to those who have limited knowledge of Pacific languages and cultures. The research participants' narratives are peppered with various words from the Pacific languages without English translation. I have a limited knowledge of Tongan, which helped me understand Pacific educators' words, but there are some that I could not understand. While part of the issue could be addressed by simply adding a translation, for example, '*mokopuna* (grandchildren)', some important cultural concepts, such as *vā* (space, relationships), need an extensive explanation for non-Pacific educators to fully understand their research participants' words (e.g., Ka'ili 2017). Implementing Pacific cultural values in the wider education structure would become possible when both non-Pacific and Pacific educators work together. I agree with the authors that the cultural values identified in New Zealand's education policy require educators to understand Pacific cultural perspectives. However, to achieve this goal, additional scaffolding, such as a glossary explaining cultural concepts, would have made this book more accessible to a broader readership.

## REFERENCES

- Averill, R., Glasgow, A., & Romini, F. (2020). Exploring understandings of Pacific values in New Zealand educational contexts: Similarities and differences among perceptions. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 2, 20–35.
- Ka'ili, T. (2005). *Marking indigeneity: The Tongan art of sociospatial relations*. University of Arizona Press.
- New Zealand Ministry of Education. (2013). *Pasifika education plan 2013-2017*. <https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/Strategies-and-policies/PasifikaEdPlan2013To2017V2.pdf>
- New Zealand Ministry of Education (2018). *Tapasā: Cultural competencies for teachers of Pacific learners*. <https://teachingcouncil.nz/assets/Files/Tapasā/Tapasā-Cultural-Competencies-Framework-for-Teachers-of-Pacific-Learners-2019.pdf>
- Nishitani, M., & Lee, H. (2022). Fruit picking and farmwork as racialised stigma: The children of Pacific migrant workers in rural Australia. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 44(4): 488–504. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2023.2136631>
- Pale, M. (2019). The Ako conceptual framework: Toward a culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 47(6), 539–553. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2019.1575945>



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license,

visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA

Authors and readers are free to copy, display and distribute this article with no changes, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and the International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives (IEJ: CP), and the same license applies. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>. The IEJ: CP is published by the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society (formerly ANZCIES) and Sydney Open Access Journals at the University of Sydney. Articles are indexed in ERIC, Scimago Journal (SJR)Ranking / SCOPUS. The IEJ:CP is a member of the Free Journal Network: <https://freejournals.org/>

Join the IEJ: CP and OCIES Facebook community at Oceania Comparative and International Education Society, and Twitter: @OceaniaCIES