NZARE Symposium to AERA 2015

Advancing Justice in Education for Pacific/Pasifka Peoples through Discourses of Success and Responsiveness

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Abstract

This symposium promotes recent research responses that utilised new theoretical and methodological approaches and directions in the interests of educational justice for Pasifika communities (i.e. Pacific Islanders) within New Zealand, Pacific communities in island nations of the Pacific, and transnational Pacific communities in the Pacific Rim nations.

Objectives of the session

The main objective of this symposium is to demonstrate the innovative ways indigenous epistemologies, socio-cultural frameworks and multiple methodological perspectives have been used by Pasifika researchers to focus on (as well as draw on) culture, language and heritage, in order to contribute to educational change. An additional objective is the building of collective scholarship and community for Pasifika women scholars located within a faculty of education, in a New Zealand university.

Overview of the presentation

This symposium is made up of emerging scholars (yet experienced educators) in Pasifika/Pacific education from the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Their research demonstrates how the integration of education research and disciplinary inquiry is harnessed to “examine the meaning of culture, language and heritage in education research and praxis with the aim of advancing justice” for Pasifika communities in New Zealand, and within the Pacific region. In their presentations, they will discuss the theories, methodologies and philosophies that underpin national policy; effective teaching and learning practices for Pasifika learners (in schools); aid-funded curriculum development; and evolving cultural conceptions essential for success. This discussion will be followed by a plenary within which common themes and findings will be summarised and implications for education of transnational Pacific communities in Pacific Rim nations such as the USA, will be reflected upon. Collectively, their papers demonstrate new optimism, innovation in thinking and scholarship and, at the same time, quiet confidence in Pacific peoples’ ability to draw on their own cultural resources in determining strategies for moving towards solutions to ‘old’ problems.
The Presentations

1) Va’a Tele: Pasifika learners riding the success wave on linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogies

Rae Siilata, The University of Auckland, New Zealand

For Pasifika learners being schooled in English-medium classrooms, success is premised on the belief that language and literacy development are central to their achievement at school. Schools, however, are not culturally neutral domains, and certain forms of knowledge are valued over others in English medium schooling. Pasifika families want their children to be successful at school. Notions of what constitutes genuine success for minority learners within majority culture schooling indicate that Pasifika learners should be able to succeed as Pasifika people, rather than fulfilling expectations that require them to become members of the ‘majority’ culture in order to achieve lifelong academic, or professional goals. If Pasifika learners’ languages, cultures and identities are represented in the ‘valued knowledge of school’, and utilized as a normal part of language and literacy learning in their classrooms, then their perceptions of success will include, rather than exclude, their linguistic and cultural identities.

This research explored the notion of success for Pasifika learners in English-medium classrooms and the central roles that teachers and leaders played in enabling these learners to connect the worldviews, languages, literacy practices and experiences of their homes with the valued knowledge and literacy practices of school, so that ultimately Pasifika learners experienced success in all the worlds they walked in. The research was set within a New Zealand national literacy professional development project which schools joined voluntarily with the goal of raising student achievement in literacy. The study used a mixed methods case study approach in which the practices of five ‘effective’ teachers of Pasifika learners were explored in order to devise, with support from the research literature, dimensions of effective literacy practice specific to Pasifika learners. This presentation explains the Va’a Tele Framework (the ocean-voyaging canoe of Pasifika peoples) as a metaphor for Pasifika learner success, supported by stories from the effective teachers and their Pasifika learners. Analysis of findings suggests that teachers can teach Pasifika learners effectively and in particular ways that connect with and build on their specific languages, cultures, and identities to become literate at school. This presentation will describe and discuss the enactment of these linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogies.

2: Levers and Pivots: A Critique of New Zealand’s ‘Success’-focused Pasifika Education Policy Framework

Tanya Wendt Samu, The University of Auckland

This paper presents an analysis of what the author identifies as the Pasifika national education policy framework. The aim of such an analysis is two-fold: (i) to develop insight into how and why the New Zealand Ministry of Education (MOE) constructs Pasifika learners as a priority group; and draw on this to inform a (ii) critique of the Ministry’s comprehensive and strategic response to the education and development of Pasifika peoples in New Zealand. Critiquing policies requires an appreciation of the wider social, historical, economic and political context in which they are produced. Policies are conceived, in this study, as discourses because they reflect some of the key features of a more post-structuralist conception of discourse – for example, the acquisition of authority for the topic, a sense of embodying the ‘truth’ about it and constituting the ‘truth of the matter’ at a historical point in time (or historical moment). Foucault’s ideas about the historical analysis of ideas were instrumental in the development of deeper knowledge and understanding of policy (surface layer) and to the identification and analysis of other layers of significance – metaphorically, in the stratigraphic sequence below or out of sight (and consciousness) of policy, policy makers and those researchers and educators who focus on generalised patterns of groups. His concept of discontinuity as both process and product was used to inform the conceptual analysis of the MOE’s key policy drivers for each education sector and the MOE’s over-arching Pasifika Education Plan (PEP). The insights that emerged have shaped the key argument of the study: that the development and refinement of a national policy framework targeting Pasifika learners...
is driven by a neo-liberal perspective of the effect of current Pasifika demographic trends and comparatively lower education success rates on the nation’s efforts to build a knowledge economy.

The study then asks: is there another way of looking at these all-important demographic trends, patterns and their socio-economic implications? One which disrupts and shifts thinking and in turn create new discontinuities in knowledge?

3 Outsiders, Insiders and Decisions about Knowledge: Responsive curriculum development, implementation and change in a Pacific nation – The Example of Nauru

Alexis Siteine & Tanya Wendi Samu, University of Auckland

Curriculum development, implementation, and change are both complex and demanding in the best of circumstances. Curriculum developers must balance international imperatives, national interests, and the professional needs of teachers, as well ensuring that the content of the curriculum serves the best interests of learners. Educators who are experienced and knowledgeable and who teach in well-resourced schools with well-established education systems can find such change challenging— but what of teachers within the context and setting of a small island state in the Pacific, such as the Republic of Nauru?

For many Pacific nations located inside the Pacific Circle, the very nature of innovative approaches must be responsive to contexts wherein education is a basic need in itself, enabling people to enhance their abilities to participate within the political, cultural and social spheres of their societies. It is also an activity that sustains and accelerates overall national development, as in the preparation of a skilled workforce for the economy. School curriculum is a major high-stakes tool for this temporal-spatial process.

In this presentation, we consider the range of challenges faced by educators in Nauru from our perspective as the international education advisors, situated as ‘outsiders’ rather than insiders from New Zealand; who are of Pacific (Samoan) heritage, and have provided curriculum and teacher development since 2011. The key question this study addresses is: What kinds of knowledge should be included in a responsive, 21st century social science curriculum for the teachers and children of Nauru? Should it be from the perspective of small island developing states? Tourist perspective? Or from an Oceanic perspective?

This presentation will describe and discuss the highly contextualised, uniquely Nauruan features of this collaborative curriculum project. It employs a critical, reflective approach to the examination of our efforts to meet the project’s terms of reference to build teacher capacity and strengthen teacher knowledge in four key areas: content knowledge; teaching and learning; curriculum development; and the nature of social science subjects such as social studies.

The major challenges for curriculum development and implementation are unique, contextualised and quite different from those of the education systems of Pacific Circle nations such as Australia, Taiwan and New Zealand (which are important bilateral aid partners with Nauru). The issues for a new social sciences curriculum are more fundamental—such as basic resources, teacher education—and yet, aspirational—such as cultural revival.


‘Alaimaluloa Toetu’u-Tamihere, The University of Auckland

This presentation will examine my research methodology called Talanoa mei he Kaliloa or simply Kaliloa as a Pacific research methodological framework. I used and developed this methodology out in the field as part of my doctoral research. I argue that the Kaliloa methodology elicits honest, truthful, insightful methods of collecting data which not only respects participants and place of kaliloa but connects the research and the participant(s) in a dialogical and meaningful way.

In part one of my presentation I will lay out the various definitions and uses of the Kali including the Kaliloa which will in turn demonstrate why Kaliloa is a useful, insightful and relevant method of
collecting data. In part two of my presentation I will extend further definitions of Kaliloa and explain how these make Kaliloa a meaningful and connecting data collecting practice.

In part three of the presentation I will cover some of the changes to this ancient traditional practice and ways Kaliloa can adapt to current times and changes. Kaliloa has evolved due to significant changes in Tongan culture, family dynamics, migration and technology. In view of these changes, I posit that Kaliloa should ideally remain a daily practice within Tongan homes, in order for us to retain our culture, language and a pathway to continue to empower our young people in different fields. In particular, in the field of education it is necessary for success. Kaliloa may be an effective way for Tongans in Tonga and in diaspora, to succeed in all fields of endeavours and simultaneously maintain Tongan ways.

In summation I will then explain why Kaliloa as an indigenous Tongan practice can be a model for Pacific Research across disciplines.

Summary of Abstract and papers prepared by the presenters, and shortened for this version. Feb 2015