

## Introduction

Dr Seu'ula Johansson-Fua, *Director, Institute of Education, The University of the South Pacific*

---

The title of this book, 'It takes an Island and an Ocean' is taken from the theme of the Vaka Pasifiki Education Conference of 2018 *It takes an island and an ocean: Rethinking Pacific Education for resilient, healthy communities*. The Vaka Pasifiki Education Conference of 2018 was held at The University of the South Pacific's Laucala Campus in Suva, Fiji from the 5th to the 6th of July, and formed part of the 50th Anniversary of the University that year.

The conference in 2018 marked the fourth education conference since the Rethinking Pacific Education for Pacific People by Pacific People (RPEIPP) activities were completed. The first was in 2011 and the movement then continued to evolve, eventually officially taking on the name Vaka Pasifiki Education Conference in 2014, making this the third conference of that name.

### What is Vaka Pasifiki?

Vaka Pasifiki has both literal and richly metaphorical meanings. In a number of Pacific languages vaka or waka is literally understood as a means of sea transport, and most commonly refers to ocean-going sail boats and canoes. Pasifiki is a transliteration of the English word Pacific in a distinctly Pacific form, and refers collectively to the island dwelling Oceanic peoples.

Metaphorically, Vaka Pasifiki captures the essence of a vessel for, and of, our Pacific people. Vaka Pasifiki is inclusive of the many and diverse cultures of those who carry an educational vision forward; the means by which they carry it and are carried by it; and the reason it is done.

The destination of Vaka Pasifiki is, as yet, uncharted. It is dependent on the clarity of the collective visioning of Pasifiki people, who alone can forge new Oceanic paradigms, define and navigate to a destination which is sustainable and in which Pasifiki flourishing is assured. Vaka Pasifiki must be open and able to see and utilise the navigational wisdoms of its people. It must "ride low, close to Oceania: so that we feel the currents", and strive to be ever responsive to the hopes and aspirations of Pacific peoples, serving them with humility, respect and courage.

Vaka Pasifiki, therefore, is an educational movement, supported by “ordinary people with extra-ordinary dreams!” It is the initial name for the emerging Indigenous Pacific Research School of Thought. We invite you to journey with us.

### What is the Vaka Pasifiki Education Conference?

Vaka Pasifiki Education Conference provides an opportunity for the sharing of ideas, presentation of research and best practice, and discussion of issues relevant to teacher education, educational policy and practice, and teaching and learning in Oceania.

The Vaka Pasifiki Education Conference is hosted by the Institute of Education as part of its role as secretariat to the Pacific Education Research Foundation (PERF) that founded the Rethinking Pacific Education initiative that is the RPEIPP. The Vaka Pasifiki conference is hosted in collaboration with national ministries of education and national universities/ teacher education institutions of hosting country. In the past, this has included Tonga Ministry of Education and the Tonga Institute of Education (Vaka 2014), the Solomon Islands Ministry of Education, Human Resources and Development and the Solomon Islands National University (Vaka 2016) and the Fiji National University (Vaka 2018). Through generous donations, conference fees and corporate sponsorships from various businesses around the Pacific we have managed to fund the Vaka Pasifiki.

Since the first conference in 2011 in Laucala, Suva Fiji, we have hosted the Vaka in Tonga, in Solomon Islands and in 2018 returned the Vaka to Fiji. Through this ‘journey’ the Vaka has extended its reach to include teachers, school principals, education officers, research students, teacher educators, educational administrators and educational leaders in the journey. We have also extended the Vaka to include Pasifiki people from the diaspora as well as Oceanic researchers from Australia, New Zealand and beyond. We have grown from a small gathering of 60 people to 500 registered for a Vaka conference.

But our journey has also been an opportunity to learn new forms of ‘conferencing’ that reflect our vast Ocean home. As such we have explored new platforms for hosting the Vaka and new (but old) forms of communicating and sharing our stories. These platforms are efforts to reflect our diversity and our willingness to be inclusive, to bring in our voices and our processes into the gathering.

## What is the new platform for the Vaka Pasifiki?

In the 2018 Vaka Pasifiki we introduced four new platforms for the expressing of ideas and sharing of learnings at the Vaka Pasifiki Education Conference.

1. Tok stori drawn from the Melanesian approach to storytelling and consensus building. Participants were invited to Tok stori on the sub theme of ‘Pikinini blong mi’. The Tok stori sessions were ‘chaired’ by a Melanesian scholar. The Tok stori sub theme focused on the Pacific child, with questions about our children’s health, their safety, aspirations and challenges.

2. Ako is drawn from the Polynesian term that is a reference to learning and education. In this sub theme participants were invited to focus on the learning context for the Pacific child, by drawing on the Polynesian traditional notion of learning – that is based on demonstration of skills and sharing of knowledge from a relational perspective. In this sub theme, the participants explored learning for the child, through formal, informal and non-formal learning, new pedagogies that are emerging and exploring the relevance of their learning to an increasingly diverse, fluid and changing world.

3. Maneaba is based on the Kiribati traditional governance system where the community’s issues are presented, debated and resolution is agreed upon. This was an opportunity for critical reflection for the Pacific regional organizations that serve the education sector. This sub-theme included participants from the USP, the SPC, national universities, development partners and international universities and institutions who were interested in Pacific education and their role as regional educators. The Maneaba session deliberated on issues of regionalism, relevance, purpose and shape of future regionalism. The Maneaba was guided by His Excellency the High Commissioner of Kiribati to Fiji, Mr. David Ateti Teaabo with kind permission granted by the Kiribati government to utilise this knowledge forum.

4. Lan is based on the Marshallese language that refers to the sky. In this session we invited the star gazers, the navigators, the Moana and the Maui to take us further, to dream for us a new space, and to draw up a new direction to go forward. This sub theme invited innovators, creators, builder, designers, crafters, artists, musicians, poets, dancer and performers to share aspirations and hopes for our children and our future. In this sub theme, we hosted demonstrations of ideas and concept papers through art

(different forms) poetry, oratory, music, performance, as well as the use technology and traditional media for expression of ideas.

Our experience with the new Vaka platforms has encouraged us to continue with these platforms into future Vaka Pasifiki Education Conferences. We also recognised that there was some shortfall in the logistics and also the eventual publication of ‘papers’ from the conference. In shifting the platform for the Vaka, we had not fully prepared for the shift required in the logistics as well as in the reporting of such a dynamic new platform. But that is part of the journey, we learn and continue to grow as we weave a stronger ‘sail’ for our Vaka.

This book presents selected papers from the Vaka Pasifiki Education Conference 2018. The publication of these articles has been deliberately published as an e-book, making it freely available and accessible for our Pacific students and researchers who have traditionally been marginalized in accessing these scholarly articles. Most of the articles presented in this book are drawn from the Ako sessions with a few articles from the Lan sessions. It seemed to suggest that these sessions were the easiest to be translated into this written form. We will continue to explore future Vaka, more relevant ways to present ideas and stories from the Tok Stori and the Maneaba platforms.

There are a total of 14 papers presented in this e-book covering various topics from Pacific languages to home-school relationships, Mathematics, open schooling, climate change, teacher education and tertiary education. Collectively, these papers represent the diversity of issues and challenges that we are facing in our education systems and the various efforts we are making to find relevant solutions.

The authors who have kindly contributed their writings also showcase a new wave of emerging Pacific scholars. They come from national universities, regional and from international universities and each have been welcomed on board the Vaka. The authors are Pacific people living in the Pacific countries, as well as Pacific people in the diaspora, as well as Oceanic people from around the region. We hope that this is an indication of the journey ahead for the Vaka and the new order of Oceanic regionalism.

## References

Fua, S.J. 2017. ‘Ilo. In: Peters M.A. (eds), Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory. Singapore: Springer. [https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-287-588-4\\_13](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-287-588-4_13)

Kavaliku, S.L. 1966. Educational re-organization for national development in Tonga. Wellington, Victoria University. (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis).

Sanga, K., Reynolds, M. 2020. Knowledge guardianship, custodianship and ethics: a Melanesian perspective. *AlterNative* 1-9 DOI: 10.1177/1177180120917481

Taufe'ulungaki, 'A.M., Johansson Fua, S., Manu, S., & Takapautolo, T. (2007) Sustainable livelihood and education in the Pacific: Tonga Pilot study. Suva, Fiji, Institute of Education, University of the South Pacific.

Thaman, K.H. Concepts of Learning, Knowledge and Wisdom in Tonga, and their relevance to modern Education, *Prospects*, Vol. XXV, No.4 December, 1995