

8:00	9:00	REGISTRATION OPEN				TALANOA Welcome tea/coffee and light refreshments Networking opportunity for attendees		
9:00	9:00	CONFERENCE OFFICIAL OPENING						
9:15	9:20	WELCOME TO GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY Elder Uncle Ted Williams						
		Senior Executive Griffith University						
9:25	9:35	WELCOME FROM APEN Founding Director - Bronwyn Williams						
9:35	10:10	KEYNOTE SPEAKERS PANEL - READING THE TIDES TOGETHER: LEARNERS, FAMILIES AND FUTURE LEADERS The panel explores intergenerational and culturally rooted approaches to education, highlighting Indigenous knowledge systems, shared leadership, and community-led learning as pathways to empower learners and improve educational outcomes for Pacific communities.						
		Moderator: Tofa Amanda Moors-Mailei Associate Professor Eseta Tualaualelei, Dr Patrick Thomsen and Dr Levi Fox						
10:15	10:30	MORNING TEA						
10:35	11:15	Community-led Co-design (Part A) Debra Thompson, Robati Harrison PACIFIKAI, Children’s Health Queensland	Exploring the Significance of Publishing Books as Pasifika Educators – Navigating the Anxieties, Challenges and Opportunities: The Lived Places Publishing Pacific Islander Studies Collection Dr Patrick Thomsen University of Auckland	Au Waka Nua: Navigating Self & Belonging Melissa Malu & Elijah Lemusu Australian Museum – Pasifika Team	Learning from Missteps - Building Ethical Integrity in Pacific Research Tuilelepa Pani Patu, Leilani Fatupaito Australian Pasifika Educators Network	Māori and Pasifika Students: Perspectives on University Rebecca Wren, Dr Lucy Champion, Dr Vaoiva Natapu-Ponton, Professor Andrew Harvey. Pathways in Place, Griffith University	Phenomenal Educators Framework Pale Sauni, Saylene Tanielu-Ulberg Ako Aotearoa	
11:20	12:00	Reirei – A Child’s Way (Part B) Charyse Mansell, Sione Takau PACIFIKAI, Children’s Health Queensland	Mate Ma’a Tonga: An Insider View of Pasifika Secondary Schooling in Auckland/QLD. Siosiu Pole Marsden State High School	Navigating changing times through Poetry Dr June Perkins Gumbootspearlz	Reweaving the Mat: Embedding Pacific Epistemologies into Evaluation Practice in Australian Higher Education Amanda Moors-Mailei, Bronwyn Williams, Vaoiva Natapu-Ponton, UTS, Western Sydney University, Griffith University	Tutalanoa: Indigenous Pasifika Grounded Methodologies for Knowledge Sharing. Dr Wani Erick. Moui Olaola/ North Queensland Pasifika Children's Ground	From the Village to the Cloud: Building a Sovereign Platform for Pacific Stories Theresa Tupuola-Sorenson Pacific Kids' Learning	
12:05	12:50	LUNCH					The Indigenous HDR Internship Program (Video Presentation) Dr Innez Haua Macquarie University	

12:55	1:25	KEYNOTE SPEAKERS PANEL - NAVIGATING LEADERSHIP PATHWAYS - PASIFIKA VOICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND BEYOND This panel shares the journeys of Pasifika leaders as they navigate institutions, balance cultural integrity with professional demands, and create pathways for the next generation. Moderator: Paniani Patu Panellists: Dr Agapetos Aia-Fa'aleava, Cathleen Hafu-Fetokai, Esita Sogotubu					
1:30	2:10	Navigating Currents with Toi Aroha: A Pedagogy of Empathetic Artistry Tiaho Selwyn-Jordan	Negotiating the SET Plan in Southeast Queensland: Pasifika students' experiences Tami Hammond University of Southern Queensland	Malaga - Past, Present, Future James Petaia The BUSY School	Pacific Bilingual and Immersion Education (PBIE) in Aotearoa New Zealand. Dr Vaka-Vivili Ministry of Education, New Zealand	Pacific Island Student Association (University of Melbourne) Our story. Kylie Hatch, Koto Qalo University of Melbourne	From Village to Vision: Empowering Pasifika Students in Higher Education at Western Sydney University. Jane Sio, Aleisha Kamsoo Western Sydney University
2:15	2:55	The Real Nursing Problem: From the Classroom to the Workforce Krysta Davis Griffith University	One Tatau, Two Worlds: Our Motifs. Our Stories. Our Tatau Dr Agapetos Aia-Fa'aleava University of Sunshine Coast	Pacific Vibe Performing Arts James 'Chief' Grace Pimpama State Secondary College	Kuini Pele: Circles of Strength – Faith, Healing, and Leadership for Pasifika Women Sarai Tafa Nekawa Ltd	From Grassroots to Greatness: Reframing Wellbeing Across the Sporting Pathway. Shane Senituli, Carlos Matautia Maximize Performance	A strengths-based mapping of the student experience among Pasifika higher education students Beni Cakitaki University of Melbourne
3:00	3:15	AFTERNOON TEA BREAK					
3:20	4:10	KEYNOTE SPEAKERS PANEL: SHIFTING THE CURRENT: PASIFIKA BLUEPRINTS FOR EDUCATION Examines the urgent changes needed within education systems and showcases strategic, culturally grounded innovations already being led by Pasifika communities. Moderator: Dr Ruth (Lute) Faleolo Desiree Guttenbeil, Theresa Tupuola-Sorenson, Misi Matauaina, Robati Harrison, Ronaldo Tago, Kiana Hansford					
4:10	4:20	Closing comments - APEN Founding Director - Tofa Amanda Moors-Mailei					
4:20	4:30	Group Photo					
4:30	4:30	Official close of 2025 APEN Conference					
6:00	9:00	Conference Dinner Vaiola (Ticketed event) 30 Andrew Avenue Tarragindi 4121					

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One Tatau, Two Worlds: Our Motifs. Our Stories. Our Tatau.

Dr. Agapetos Aia-Fa'aleava, University of the Sunshine Coast

Abstract

This seminar explores story-sovereignty through a Pasifika-led, creative-led research approach that centres the voices of non-Samoan women and Fa'afafine who carry the malu. The malu, a measina (treasured cultural knowledge) of Samoa, signifies shelter and protection, and has increasingly become a powerful symbol not only for Samoan women but also for non-Samoan women and fa'afafine who embody its cultural meanings in diverse ways. Through a Talanoa-based methodology and the application of various Pasifika research frameworks, such as Tatau Framework, that emerged from my thesis, this seminar will highlight lived-experience stories, cultural belonging, and the articulation of culture as it is protected and passed on. Anchored in open, respectful and relational dialogue of the vā, this seminar hopes to create a condition for knowledge to flow in ways grounded in Indigenous values, while allowing space for creativity, innovation and Indigenous futurism. By using these methods, this seminar will demonstrate how Indigenous research practices can generate culturally safe and transformative spaces where both ancestral knowledge and contemporary realities coexist. Beyond storytelling, this seminar emphasizes the broader benefits of Pasifika Indigenous knowledge systems within academia, especially through public outreach programs. It will illustrate how these frameworks enrich research, teaching, and engagement by fostering reciprocity, inclusivity and cultural integrity. This seminar will affirm the place of Pasifika knowledge within higher education by demonstrating how it can guide respectful collaborations and build stronger connections between universities and our Pasifika communities. This seminar will honour the malu as both a cultural legacy and a living practice that continues to protect, empower and inspire. Samples of my documentary of One Tatau, Two Worlds will be used to illustrate the power of Pasifika methodologies and frameworks in academia.

Reweaving the Mat: Embedding Pacific Epistemologies into Evaluation Practice in Australian Higher Education

Amanda Moors-Mailei, University of Technology Sydney, Bronwyn Williams, Western Sydney University, Dr Vaoiva Natapu-Ponton, Griffith University

Abstract

While Western-centric methodologies continue to dominate research and evaluation in higher education, there is growing momentum among Pacific scholars to reclaim and reassert Indigenous Pacific frameworks that are relational, values-driven, and grounded in ancestral knowledge systems. This presentation contributes to this movement by proposing a reimagined approach to evaluation that draws from key Pacific epistemologies, Fa'afaletui, Vā and Talanoa. Rather than treating these frameworks as tokenistic cultural add-ons, we present them as foundational philosophies that can transform evaluation practice in universities. We argue that these epistemologies offer more than methods, they represent relational ethics, power-sharing paradigms, and community-accountable ways of generating and making meaning from knowledge. This approach also centres Indigenous notions of wellbeing, truth-telling, and the spiritual-social-political dimensions of equity evaluation often missing in Western evaluative models. Drawing from our lived experience as Pacific educators and researchers across three universities, UTS, WSU, and Griffith University, we will reflect on our efforts to embed Pacific ways of knowing into equity evaluation practice through research projects, community programs, and student-led initiatives. This presentation invites critical discussion on the limits of current evaluation tools and offers a pathway toward decolonising how we define, design, and deliver evaluation in education.

PACIFIKAI: Community-led Co-design – PART A

Debra Thompson, Robati Harrison, Children's Health Queensland

Abstract

This presentation explores Pacifikai: Community-led Co-design, a pioneering project that redefined how health promotion initiatives can authentically centre Māori and Pacific Islander communities. The project set out to redevelop the identity and branding for Good Start, a Queensland Health initiative supporting the health and wellbeing of Māori and Pacific Islander children and families. Alongside this, the team sought to co-create a transferable framework that could be used to guide culturally grounded co-design projects across Children's Health Queensland and the broader health sector.

A community-led and culturally safe approach was adopted from the outset. Māori and Pacific Islander community members were engaged in creative, hands-on activities that invited them to shape the new identity design, rather than simply provide feedback. The research team used action learning and research-through-design methods to iteratively reflect, adapt, and develop the Community-led Co-design Framework. Central to this process was the principle of “connection before content,” prioritising the building and nurturing of the vā (relational space) before moving into workshops and formal design activities.

The process resulted in two major outcomes: the creation of Pacifikai, a bold, culturally grounded brand identity that authentically reflects community values and voices; and the development of a Community-led Co-design Framework that provides a practical tool to embed cultural integrity and shared ownership in future health promotion projects.

This work demonstrates the transformative potential of community-led co-design. By shifting power to communities and embedding lived experience at the centre, outcomes become more relevant, trusted, and impactful. The presentation will provide participants with insights, strategies, and practical examples of how co-design can be implemented in education and health contexts to advance equity, identity, and wellbeing for Pasifika learners and communities.

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PACIFIKAI: Reirei – A Child’s Way – PART B

Charyse Mansell, Sione Takau, Children’s Health Queensland

Abstract

This presentation showcases Reirei, a culturally safe, Pacific-led health and wellbeing program designed by Pacifikai to improve the health knowledge and lifestyle behaviours of Māori and Pacific Islander children. Delivered across primary and secondary schools in Brisbane and Cairns, Reirei represents one of the first school-based, Pacific-led health initiatives in Australia. Its aim is to address health inequities by embedding cultural relevance in nutrition, physical activity, and wellbeing education. The program is delivered by a multidisciplinary team comprising Māori and Pacific Islander Multicultural Health Workers, a Senior Nutritionist, a Multicultural Coordinator, and a Program Manager. Each school term targets a key health priority: Term One focuses on Healthy Kai and the five food groups using culturally relevant examples such as Taro Leaf; Term Two promotes vegetable consumption through hands-on cooking and the “Eat the Rainbow” approach; Term Three emphasises physical activity, highlighting links between movement, screen time, and sleep; and Term Four reinforces hydration through the key message “Water is Life.” This structure ensures holistic, culturally informed learning experiences that are interactive and engaging.

Evaluation of Reirei demonstrates significant improvements in knowledge, attitudes, and practices among participating students. Outcomes include stronger engagement in health activities, enhanced cooking and food preparation skills, healthier lifestyle choices, and positive behaviour changes. The program has also expanded steadily, reaching more schools each year and strengthening its impact within Māori and Pacific Islander communities. As one of the first of its kind in Australia, Reirei highlights the effectiveness of culturally grounded approaches in school-based health promotion. This interactive workshop will provide conference participants with the opportunity to experience Reirei activities first-hand, offering practical strategies, culturally informed tools, and adaptable methods for engaging students in health education. The session will demonstrate how programs that centre culture and community can contribute to long-term improvements in wellbeing for Pasifika

Au Waka Nua: Navigating Self & Belonging

Melissa Malu & Elijah Lemusu, The Australia Museum

Abstract

Wansolmoana Connect is an engagement program targeted to the Pasifika diaspora in association with the Australian Museum’s new permanent gallery, Wansolmoana (meaning – One Salt Ocean). This exhibition delves into the unique ties of Pasifika peoples, highlighting the significant kinship relations, environmental knowledge and oral histories. Wansolmoana showcases over 300 objects of Pasifika heritage that are established in three themes of deep connections, identities, and disruptions. Wansolmoana shares stories both from the Pacific region and the Australian diaspora, providing a crucial educational resource to Pasifika peoples in connecting further to their unique heritages. Wansolmoana Connect aims to pioneer a youth and young adults program based in traditional wisdom, supported by cultural knowledge holders and presented to the Pasifika diaspora using strategic and impactful contemporary methodologies. This evidence-based program, "Au Waka Nua" under Wansolmoana Connect, will contribute to building Pacific cultural education while using creative and expressive applications to support Pasifika in self-navigation, identity, and belonging.

The Indigenous HDR Internship Program - Video Presentation

Dr Innez Haua, Macquarie University

Abstract

This video presentation will discuss the MQU Indigenous HDR Internship Program designed and facilitated out of the Centre Critical Indigenous Studies at Macquarie University. This program is a year-long program and prepares HDR’s (higher degree research) candidates (or postgraduate students) for a career in academia. The program which has been running for four years, was initially designed for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander postgraduate students however, over the past 2 years the program has extended its participant scope to include global Indigenous postgrads, including Pacific HDRs.

The program aims to (1) equip future academics with the knowledge of academic language, process, and procedure; (2) build the teaching capacity of Indigenous HDR candidates; (3) develop candidates’ research portfolio and familiarity with research opportunities; and (4) create a safe space for Indigenous HDRs for learning, and foster connection and community.

This presentation will speak briefly to the design, objectives and outcomes of the program for Pacific postgrads in Higher Education and the program’s intention to create a culturally safe community, a whānau of Pacific, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and global Indigenous postgrads during their research journey and their aspirations as Indigenous scholars towards a career in the Australian academy as a Pacific academic.

Pacific Vibe Performing Arts

James Grace (Chief), Pimpama State Secondary College

Abstract

Pacific Vibe Performing Arts is a program at Pimpama State Secondary College on the Gold Coast designed to utilise music, dance and acting. This enables students the opportunity to learn about their culture and identity. In addition, they can express this new knowledge in who they are and where they come from. The foundational performing art components are based on Polynesian and Māori customs. However, many forms of performance expressions like Latin dance and hip hop are adopted and embraced. We learn from all types of cultures within our community which also includes our Indigenous students and staff. Pacific Vibe also serves as a place where students can support each other in both performance, academic commitments and community service. Building an environment that promotes our school values of perseverance, respect, integrity, dedication and empathy is

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essential. The original program started in 2009 at Varsity College on the Gold Coast where it was called Hip Hop Avenue. Pacific Vibe was implemented at Pimpama State Secondary College in 2022. With a school population of just over 1300 students, half of our cohort are from Māori and Pacific Island heritage. We have approximately 150 students who have registered their interest in being part of the vision and a regular performance team of 60 students. The program is open to all students and staff.

Malaga - Past, Present, Future

James Petaia, The BUSY Schools

Abstract

The Malaga Program was established to address persistent inequities experienced by Pacific learners in mainstream schooling. Its purpose was twofold: to strengthen the cultural connectedness and wellbeing of Pacific students, and to equip teachers—Pacific and non-Pacific alike—with culturally responsive strategies that enhance teaching and learning in the classroom. Grounded in talanoa methodology, the program created spaces for authentic dialogue, academic support, and community belonging. The program engaged Pacific learners through after-school study sessions, mentoring, and collaborative learning environments facilitated by Pacific and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) staff. Teachers were supported through professional learning that emphasized cultural knowledge, relational pedagogy, and curriculum accessibility. Data was collected through assessment tracking, teacher feedback, and student reflections. The Malaga Program demonstrated clear academic and social benefits for Pacific students. Assessment completion rates improved by an estimated 20–25% across senior subjects, while student engagement and retention increased, particularly in Years 11 and 12. Qualitative feedback highlighted that students felt a stronger sense of belonging, identity affirmation, and motivation to succeed. Teachers reported greater confidence in embedding Pacific cultural perspectives into lessons and noted stronger classroom relationships with Pacific learners. Importantly, the program revealed the need for ongoing leadership support, sustainable funding, and systematic recognition of equity programs in schools. The Malaga Program highlights the importance of culturally responsive, community-driven initiatives in improving equity outcomes for Pacific students. By combining academic support with cultural affirmation, schools can foster both achievement and belonging. Recommendations include - Embedding cultural knowledge and relational practices in teacher professional learning, Establishing sustainable leadership and funding support for equity programs, Recognising and celebrating Pacific learners’ identities as integral to their academic success, Encouraging educators to actively learn about their Pacific students’ families, communities, and values. The Malaga Program offers a model for culturally grounded equity initiatives that can be adapted across diverse school contexts to transform the educational experience for Pacific learners.

From Village to Vision: Empowering Pasifika Students in Higher Education at Western Sydney University

Jane Sio and Aleisha Kamso, Western Sydney University

Abstract

Pasifika students remain under-represented in higher education in Australia, with only approximately 23.5 percent entering Bachelor-level courses- far below the 41.6 percent for the general population (Gerace et al., 2023). In Western Sydney, which is home to nearly 79 percent of Sydney’s Pasifikapopulation, just 22.3 percent hold a bachelor's degree or higher. These disparities spotlight the urgent need for culturally responsive, community-driven educational pathways. Western Sydney University’s Pasifika Achievement to Higher Education (PATHE) program- established in 2012 as a “by Pacific, for Pacific” initiative- responds directly to this need. Rooted in lived experience, PATHE operates across three engagement pillars: university, schools, and community with the intention to increase participation of Pacific communities in Higher Education. Co-designed and student-led initiatives such as IMUA, AUPAC, the PATHE Awards, and fellowships foster inclusive, culturally affirming spaces where Pasifika students can thrive. Tauhi vā- the nurturing of relational connections, is central to PATHE’s work with current Pasifika students at Western Sydney University. This presentation will explore how empowering relationships between the PATHE team and students nurture identity, belonging, and confidence. Drawing on talanoa and qualitative narratives, presenters. Jane Sio and Aleisha Kamsoo- both former PATHE school-to-university participants- will share their lived experiences. They illuminate how culturally safe environments enable students to embrace their identities, own their narratives, and leverage resilience, innovation, and pride in their academic and professional pathways. By showcasing a model grounded in cultural belonging, youth leadership, and community collaboration, this session contributes to several APEN sub-themes: Pasifika student engagement, culturally grounded pedagogy, youth voice and leadership, wellbeing and belonging, and Indigenous knowledge-sharing. It invites participants to envision future-focused, Pasifika-led strategies for higher education transformation.

Navigating changing times through Poetry

Dr June Perkins, Gumbootsppearlzpress

Abstract

Pasifika people have always been orators, and poetry has its beginning in storytelling and remembering of histories and genealogies as well as strong connections to songs. This interactive presentation shares a constellation of Pasifika poets, world and adapted poetry techniques, and group methodologies for composition and performance. These will be interactively examined to empower participants to participate in and facilitate collaborative poetry composition into their own contexts. Suitable for all levels of experience with poetry. June Perkins will also share specific examples of collaboratively produced works, power you up to be excited about doing this yourself and demonstrate the democracy and unity in diversity within poetry with a place for every voice.

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The Real Nursing Problem: From the Classroom to the Workforce

Krysta Davis, Griffith University

Abstract

Nursing has been the backbone of healthcare for over 200 years, embodying compassion, advocacy, and holistic care. Nurses are present at the beginning and end of life, acting as the eyes and voices of patients while bridging gaps within the healthcare system. Generations of nurses have served this purpose and today the Bachelor of Nursing continues to evolve offering opportunities in professional development, academic research, and post-graduate studies. Despite being one of the most trusted industries in Australia, behind the public perception the nursing profession has shifted and is overshadowed by the toxic workplaces, lateral violence, ageism and cultural insensitivity for nursing students. Lateral violence is commonly experienced on placements yet dismissed as exaggeration; students are devalued and disrespected through ageist attitudes; curricula remain overloaded, outdated, and poorly aligned with real-world practice; and cultural blindness persists, with little integration of multicultural care models despite 29.3% of Australians being born overseas and over 5.5 million speaking a language other than English at home. As a final-year nursing student, I argue that these issues are rarely acknowledged, overshadowed by an industry narrative that portrays education through a rose-coloured lens while silencing the voices of those most affected. We are not quotas or boxes to be ticked. We are the future of nursing, and we deserve respect, representation, and an education system that prepares us for the realities of practice.

Pacific Island Student Association (University of Melbourne) Our story.

Koto Qalo & Kylie Hatch, University of Melbourne

Abstract

The establishment of the Pacific Island Student Association (PISA) at the University of Melbourne marks an important step in celebrating diversity, fostering belonging, and strengthening community within the Victorian higher education landscape. Victoria is home to one of the fastest-growing Pacific Island communities in Australia, and with that growth comes the responsibility to create spaces where culture, identity, and aspiration are nurtured. Culturally grounded approaches such as talanoa are central to how Pacific students and communities share knowledge, foster trust, and build relationships. Embedding these approaches into student life enhances wellbeing, creates stronger peer-to-peer support networks, and reinforces a sense of belonging. Importantly, it also helps shape more inclusive educational environments where diverse ways of knowing and being are recognised and valued. The Pacific Island Student Association (PISA) at the University of Melbourne does not stand alone, it is nurtured, guided, and strengthened through its close relationship with the Oceania Institute (OI). This connection is central to how Pacific students experience belonging, cultural pride, and leadership within the University. The Association also embodies Victoria's broader commitment to multiculturalism, education, and equity. By supporting Pasifika students, PISA contributes to strengthening pathways for future leaders who will continue to advocate for their communities, contribute to local and regional development, and carry forward the traditions of resilience, faith, and community that define the Pacific. In this way, the Pacific Island Student Association not only enriches campus life at the University of Melbourne, but also strengthens Victoria's reputation as a place where cultural diversity is celebrated and where all students are empowered to thrive, belong, and lead PISA welcomes the opportunity to present at APEN to tell our story of how we started, our vision and our story and why this is such an important step in the Victorian Higher Education space

Pacific Bilingual and Immersion Education (PBIE) in Aotearoa New Zealand

Dr. Margaret Vaka-Vivili.

Abstract:

Bilingual education in Aotearoa represents a dynamic and evolving approach to linguistic and cultural inclusion towards biliteracy particularly in the context of its bicultural foundation, and growing multicultural population (May, Hill, & Tiakiwai, 2004, Ministry of Education, 2023). Research indicates that bilingual education can enhance cognitive flexibility, cross-cultural understanding, and educational equity (Shil, 2024; van den Noort, et.al. 2019). Aotearoa's demographic shifts have prompted parallel interests in bilingual programs for Pasifika utilising a dual-language framework that supports both heritage language, cultural values & identity and competence in dual language settings and academic achievement (He Kupu, 2025; Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2025; Ministry of Education, 2019). Rooted in the Treaty of Waitangi with Pacific peoples as Tangata Tiriti from Moana Nui a Kiwa (Jackson, 2021), Pacific Bilingual and Immersion Education (PBIE) in Aotearoa commenced as a recognized educational pathway during the rapid expansion of Te reo Māori bilingual programs. PBIE emerged from the growing understanding of bilingual education's value for language revitalization, building on the momentum of the Kohanga Reo movement of the 1980s (OECD, 2023; Tennant, 2011; Timms, 2013). The NZ Ministry of Education acknowledged the need for Pasifika wellbeing and belonging in learning environments for an overall academic success for all ākonga. Recent development was the launch of the [Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020–2030](#) (APPE), in July 2020 evolving from its predecessor Pasifika Education Plan 2013–2017 identifying 5 major key systems shifts to enable equitable access to education by our Pacific ākonga. In 2023, the plan was [refreshed](#) to include a stronger focus on Pacific languages in education, with expanded actions to support bilingual and immersion pathways. PBIE is offered in bilingual units under the New Zealand Curriculum pathway and has shown promising outcomes in language proficiency, cultural engagement, and student confidence. Currently the Ministry supports five languages under this program: Gagana Sāmoa, Lea faka-Tonga, Te reo Māori Kūki 'Āirani, Vagahau Niue and Te Gagana Tokelau from Early learning through to NCEA – senior secondary although the Ministry for Pacific Peoples' recognised list comprises nine languages. Common challenges across these services include resource limitations, workforce (teacher training), and policy consistency. Language is deeply tied to cultural identity and community wellbeing. A Samoan proverb; A leai se aganu'u, ua po le nu'u translates to "When you lose your language, you lose your culture, and when there is no longer a living culture, darkness descends on the village". This proverb underscores the importance of bilingual learning in maintaining our Pacific cultural heritage and identity in Aotearoa (Sio, 2022). This abstract explores the historical context, current models and future prospects of PBIE in Aotearoa, highlighting its role in shaping an inclusive and linguistically rich biliterate cohort of the next Pacific generation in society.

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Phenomenal Educators Framework

Pale Sauni, Saylene Tanielu-Ulberg, Ako Aotearoa

Abstract

The Phenomenal Educators Framework (PEF), pioneered through the research of Dr. Cherie Chu-Fuluifaga (NZ) and expanded in professional learning and development (PLD) by Aiono Manu Fa'aea, provides a transformative model for strengthening Pacific cultural centredness/capability in education.

It is grounded in ten traits of a phenomenal educator, and the framework highlights the importance of relationality, cultural humility, service (tautua), and collective responsibility.

1. [Fenua](#) (The Pedagogy of Reflection): A commitment to self-reflection and continuous learning to improve teaching practices.
2. [Moana](#) (Know Your Pacific Learner and Context): A deep understanding of the students' backgrounds, needs, and the cultural context of their learning.
3. [Vaka](#) (Educate with Phenomenal Pacific-Centric Methods): The use of teaching and learning methods that are culturally relevant and effective for Pacific learners.
4. [Le Teu le Va](#) (Building Teaching and Learning Relationships): The art of fostering strong, positive relationships with Pacific learners to create a supportive environment.
5. [Ola](#) (Develop Phenomenal Practices): The continuous effort to develop and refine teaching practices to achieve greater effectiveness.
6. [Teatea](#) (Instil Motivation and Good Work Habits): The ability to motivate students and help them develop strong, positive work habits.
7. [Aupuru](#) (Embrace Creativity and Enthusiasm): A teacher's ability to be creative, enthusiastic, and bring passion to the learning process.
8. [Putuputu](#) (Construct a Pacific Learning Community): The creation of a learning environment that encourages a sense of community among Pacific learners.
9. [Arofa](#) (Enable Mentoring): The capacity to facilitate natural mentoring processes, guiding students and managing the challenges that arise.
10. [Ti'ama](#) (Deconstruct and Emancipate Experiences): Empowering Pacific learners to understand and critically analyse their own learning experiences, leading to greater self-determination.

PEF is not only a lens for reflecting on practice but also a guide for reshaping pedagogy, leadership, and institutional culture in ways that centre Pacific learners and communities.

This presentation outlines how the framework connects research and praxis, affirming that phenomenal educators are catalysts for systemic change in ensuring that our Pacific values, voices, and aspirations remain central to educational futures.

Exploring the Significance of Publishing Books as Pasifika Educators – Navigating the Anxieties, Challenges and Opportunities: The Lived Places Publishing Pacific Islander Studies Collection

Seuta'afili Dr Patrick Thomsen, University of Auckland

Abstract

As custodians of the world's greatest ocean – our Moana/Oceania – Pacific stories are some of the world's grandest. Despite this, Pacific voices have often been marginalised and misrepresented across epistemes, as a result of (neo)colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, globalisation and many other axes of oppression that have accompanied Euro-American hegemony. Our Pacific, however, is a diverse, mobile, innovative collection of spaces and places, spanning thousands of years of settlement and migration, crafting rich cultural traditions of storytelling as a central technology of knowledge transfer for many generations. In this session, I propose to talanoa with Pasifika educators around the significance of publishing their stories, research and knowledge in book form as a taonga or treasure, to be shared with our children and future generations. The interactive talanoa will also unpack the anxieties and challenges Pasifika educators face when thinking about publishing their work in book form, with the objective of demystifying the book publishing process. The session will also introduce participants to the newly established Pacific Islander Studies Collection launched by Seuta'afili Dr Patrick Thomsen and Dr Moeata Keil, through Lived Places Publishing in New York, with the stated goal of making book publishing accessible for Pasifika knowledge holders in all their forms. Books, that it is hoped, will help to fill a major gap in Pasifika-led, created and disseminated resources that can be used in education for Pasifika learners and pedagogical resources for Pasifika educators in our classrooms. The Pacific Islander Studies Collection Editors currently have an open call for potential authors, which will be extended to all participants and their Pasifika networks of knowledge holders

Māori and Pasifika Students: Perspectives on University

Rebecca Wren, Dr Lucy Campion, Dr Vaoiva Natapu-Ponton, Professor Andrew Harvey, Griffith University

Abstract

There are nearly 500,000 Māori and Pasifika people living in Australia. Despite this substantial population, university attainment rates for Māori and Pasifika students are approximately one third of those of other Australians, and little is known about their experiences at university. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the experiences of Māori and Pasifika students at a university in South-East Queensland, Australia. Thirty-one students participated, ranging in age from 18 to over 51, with 66 percent aged between 18 and 24 years. Of the participants, 25 were female. Recruitment was carried out through Pasifika groups, posters around Griffith University's Logan campus, and word of mouth. Recruitment for the survey was carried out through Pasifika groups, posters around Griffith University's Logan campus, and word of mouth. The survey included demographic information, cultural background details, and questions about participants' university experiences, challenges, motivations, and strengths. The questions specifically explored their reasons for attending university, support they received to attend university, personal and cultural attributes that supported their studies, and the challenges they faced. Frequency charts were used to analyse the survey data, and qualitative responses highlighted several key themes. Many students emphasised the importance of social connections, family responsibilities, and the desire to contribute to their communities. They also discussed challenges such as mental health issues, financial stress, and difficulties managing work-life balance. Based on these findings, it is recommended that universities offer culturally responsive support services and mentoring, provide targeted financial assistance and scholarships, and implement mental health and well-being programs tailored to the needs of Māori and Pasifika students. These measures would help improve the likelihood of successful enrolment, retention and completion of university studies.

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Kuini Pele: Circles of Strength – Faith, Healing, and Leadership for Pasifika Women

Sarai Tafa, Nekawa Ltd

Abstract

Pasifika women in Australia navigate complex intersections of identity, wellbeing, and leadership, balancing cultural expectations, intergenerational responsibilities, and personal aspirations. There is a growing need for culturally safe, community-designed frameworks that affirm identity, support holistic wellbeing, and foster leadership pathways. This presentation introduces the Kuini Pele Empowerment Circles, a grassroots initiative developed by Nekawa Ltd. that integrates faith, healing, and leadership development to address the specific challenges Pasifika women face. The circles are designed around a Roots, Ripples, Rise framework—a structured progression that supports women to - Roots: reconnect with cultural identity and heritage, Ripples: acknowledge and process shared struggles, including mental health, relational, and identity issues, and Rise: activate purpose, leadership, and community impact. Drawing from both Indigenous pedagogies and contemporary wellbeing practice, Kuini Pele Circles use talanoa-based facilitation, storytelling, and collective reflection as methods for knowledge-sharing and healing. Early outcomes from pilot circles and a leadership retreat show that participants report increased confidence, strengthened sense of belonging, and renewed motivation to contribute to family, church, and community leadership spaces. The session will share findings from circle participants and leaders-in-training, highlighting the role of peer mentorship, spirituality, and cultural grounding in shaping effective education and wellbeing models. The workshop will also provide a practical demonstration of the circle approach, offering participants insight into facilitation techniques, reflective prompts, and culturally responsive methods that can be adapted to other Pasifika learner contexts. By positioning wellbeing as foundational to leadership, Kuini Pele offers a community-designed, scalable model that contributes to broader educational goals of engagement, retention, and aspiration among Pasifika learners.

From Grassroots to Greatness: Reframing Wellbeing Across the Sporting Pathway.

Shane Senituli, Carlos Matautia,

Abstract

We spend years preparing athletes to perform, but how much time do we spend preparing the system to care for them? This seminar challenges the prevailing assumption that athlete wellbeing can be reduced to a hire, a one-off workshop, or a scheduled hour before or after training, as if care can be outsourced, siloed, or delivered on demand. Instead, it reframes wellbeing as a collective, cultural, and systemic responsibility. While all athletes deserve systems that uphold and uplift their wellbeing, this seminar invites a deeper look through a Pacific lens, one in which wellbeing is inherently collective, relational, and cultural (Keung, 2018). Drawing on research and practice across education, community, and elite sport systems in Australia and New Zealand, the session posits that wellbeing must be embedded early in an athlete's journey, as a shared, long-term responsibility, not a late-stage intervention. By the time Pacific athletes reach the professional arena, particularly in high-collision codes like rugby league and union, many have already borne years of cultural tension, family separation, and systemic misrecognition (Lakisa et al., 2019). They wear an invisible cloak of responsibility: to honour family, carry collective expectations, and repay the sacrifices made on their behalf (Keung & Enari, 2022). When sport systems fail to acknowledge this cultural load, what begins as purpose can harden into pressure. Pacific understandings of wellbeing emphasise spirituality, connection to culture and familial responsibilities, elements that are rarely accounted for in high-performance environments (Keung, 2018). This seminar explores how Indigenous concepts such as vā (relational space), mana (inherent worth), and tautua (service) can inform the design of athlete development systems that honour identity, engage family, and embed connection at every stage of the sporting pathway. These cultural principles are not add-ons, they are foundational to the wellbeing of Pacific athletes and offer powerful entry points for system change. The session offers both practical tools and critical provocations for those working across education, sport development, and community leadership. It invites a shift from transactional models of athlete care to systems rooted in relational transformation. Because preparing athletes is not enough. We must also prepare the system.

Mate Ma'a Tonga: An Insider View of Pasifika Secondary Schooling in Auckland

Siosiu Pole

Abstract

There's more to being a Pasifika secondary school learner in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, than just being part of the statistics and graphs. There's something unique about who Pasifika students are as learners, and the values they bring into the classroom. As part of Pasifika history in Aotearoa New Zealand, Pasifika students have been in Auckland secondary schools for more than 50 years, and in that time their journeys have been researched and documented by many academics and social researchers. But many of these reports focus on the negative aspects and failures of Pasifika learners. It is important that schools, teachers and policy writers are continuing to re-examine, discuss and deliver strategies and methods that suit the way Pasifika students behave and interact in the classroom environment.

This research draws on Pasifika education research and policy literature alongside personal narratives and autoethnography to examine the experiences and achievements of Pasifika secondary students from my unique insider perspective as a Tongan teacher and school leader. The ongoing challenge of Pasifika students experiencing lower academic success is my motivation to undertake this research to find the underlying reasons.

One important finding is that there is a lack of empirical and statistical research producing robust and quantitative data about the experiences and achievements of Pasifika secondary students. Despite the extensive body of literature on Pasifika education, most of the findings, theories and policies being suggested are developed primarily based on assumptions and opinions. There is reliable evidence to show that Pasifika families in Auckland are concentrated in the lowest socioeconomic bands, yet these wealth gaps are ignored in favour of holding schools responsible for student achievement. My research reveals that secondary schools tend to delegate the achievement of their Pasifika students to the few Pasifika teachers and school leaders on their staff. Pasifika education policy continues to rely on cultural responsiveness, while teacher expectations of Pasifika learners continue to be influenced by deficit thinking. Under these conditions, it is no surprise that Pasifika secondary students continue to experience underachievement.

APEN CONFERENCE 2025: Session Abstracts

Learning from Missteps: Building Ethical Integrity in Pacific Research

Tuilelepa Paniani Patu, Leilani Fatupaito

Abstract

Ethical research with Pacific communities in Australia is not merely a matter of procedural compliance - it calls for a relational, culturally responsive approach rooted in values of respect, reciprocity, and community leadership. While robust ethical frameworks have long guided Pacific research abroad, in Australia these approaches remain underdeveloped, inconsistently applied, and often misinterpreted. This gap has tangible consequences, particularly when research practices misrepresent community intent, overlook cultural protocols, or fail to uphold the *vā* - the sacred relational space that enables Pacific people to thrive.

This interactive workshop invites participants into *talanoa* to examine current codes of ethical practice in Pacific research, exploring both their strengths and limitations. Drawing on principles such as informed consent, indigenous cultural and intellectual property, and community control, we will collectively inquire into what ethical, culturally attuned research looks like in practice - here, on Australian soil.

Using narrative-based inquiry, we will engage with stories of practice that illuminate recurring tensions, such as deficit-based framing, inadequate consent processes, and the marginalisation and exploitation of Pacific voices.

Anchored in principles shared across Pacific Indigenous research frameworks, the session will explore how trust can be restored when *vā* is violated, what principles must guide research with Pacific communities in Australia, and how institutions might move beyond performative inclusion toward genuine relational accountability. This session offers not only cautionary insights but also pathways toward research that honours Pacific ways of knowing, being, and relating, and strengthens ethical research integrity that seeks to serve, not simply study, our communities.

Negotiating the SET Plan in Southeast Queensland: Pasifika students' experiences.

Tami Hammond

Abstract

In 2006, the Queensland Government introduced the SET (Senior Education and Training) Plan, requiring all Year 10 students to outline their post-secondary goals and study paths. The Plan's success depends on thorough creation and execution by a skilled professional, and inconsistencies in preparing and delivering SET Plans can disadvantage some students' post-secondary pathways. For example, despite strong secondary school performance, the proportion of Pasifika students pursuing tertiary education is significantly lower than the Australian average. Research demonstrates this is partly due to a lack of understanding about the pathways required to access tertiary education rather than a lack of ability. This underscores the urgent need for the SET Plan to meet the needs of Pasifika students.

This study offers new knowledge about how Pasifika students experience career mentoring in Queensland secondary schools, a crucial aspect of their educational pathways. It also considers the possibility of inequitable outcomes within processes such as the SET Plan and factors that could contribute to this. By responding to calls for more research on Pasifika learners in Australia, this study explores their experiences at a crucial educational juncture. The potential for improved SET Plan experiences, informed by the study's findings, holds promise for ensuring that Pasifika students' post-secondary aspirations are met with appropriate and culturally sensitive pathways. Additionally, the findings will offer valuable insights for educators, aiding in developing tools to improve the equitable delivery of the SET Plan.

This exploratory study utilises a critical paradigm viewed through a transformative lens, which aligns with the principles of social justice. The study's commitment to disrupting the status quo informed the choice of *talanoa* as a culturally relevant data collection method. Reflexive Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the data, first inductively and then deductively using Bourdieusian theory. Data analysis has identified crucial insights, uncovering patterns that could significantly influence our understanding and strategies. This study is focused on students' perceptions of the SET Plan process; parental perspectives and longitudinal research are important directions for future research.

Navigating Currents with Toi Aroha: A Pedagogy of Empathetic Artistry

Tiaho Selwyn-Jordan

Abstract

As master seafarers, Pacific Peoples have long navigated shifting currents with resilience, innovation, and adaptability. The ocean was the first classroom, the stars a guidance system, and song a living treasury carrying memory and meaning across generations. These ancestral ways of knowing remind us that story, science, and art are inseparable, and that knowledge lives in both practice and narrative, always relational, always embodied.

This session draws on that inheritance to introduce *Toi Aroha*, a values-based pedagogy grounded in Indigenous worldviews. Developed over twenty years of arts education across Oceania and Australasia—including a decade teaching undergraduate programs at NIDA, The Australian Institute of Music, and UNSW—*Toi Aroha* is a pedagogy of empathetic artistry shaped by values of *whanaungatanga*/relationality, *manaakitanga*/support and service, and *kotahitanga*/unity and belonging. *Toi Aroha* has guided performers at pivotal transitions: from student to professional, ensemble to lead, and stage to screen. Resisting competitive models and reconditioning binary thinking models, *Toi Aroha* celebrates the characteristics of artistry centring and grounding learners in self-efficacy. Delegates will explore *Toi Aroha* practices through reflection, collective song, and *Talanoa/pūrakau*/storytelling. These activities demonstrate music as a repository for memory and belonging across cultures. Examining the narrative dominance in non-Indigenous songs and the equally resonant functions of *waiata*, Australian First Nations songlines and *Talanoa*, the legitimacy of Indigenous traditions as living treasuries of history, culture and identity are affirmed. In turn, learner aspiration expands making space for broader ways of knowing and practice. In this session delegates are affirmed in their role as chief navigators guiding Pasifika students through shifting currents in changing times. It explores *Toi Aroha* and its adaptability for classrooms and staffrooms, creating empathetic cultures of belonging and resilience. Inspired by the ancestral knowledge that guided our peoples through vast oceans unaided by modern technology, *Toi Aroha* places oars in the hands of educators, nurturing their strength, their joy, and their creativity to propel their *waka/vaka*/vessel tenaciously onwards toward abundant shores.

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From the Village to the Cloud: Building a Sovereign Platform for Pacific Stories

Theresa Tupuola-Sorenson

Abstract

In rapidly changing times, we must carry our stories, languages, and ancestral knowledge into the future in ways that centre cultural sovereignty and digital equity. This interactive session will introduce the Pacific Digital Library - a dynamic, Pacific-owned platform that houses multimedia animations in 12 Pacific languages and English. The crisis of language loss and cultural erosion in our young people calls for more than just representation. It calls for a radical paradigm shift in education technology, systems and processes not externally developed but community driven. As Bird (2022) powerfully states: "When Indigenous language technologies come from outside, they often have the opposite effect to what they seek; however, when developed from within communities, they become powerful instruments of expression." This session asserts that we must claim our space in the digital va as an act of resistance, revitalisation, and sovereignty.

Created by Pacific Kids' Learning (PKL), the platform functions as a living archive and a learning ecosystem. It is built on a village-centred production model, that exemplifies what culturally responsive education looks like in the digital age; where communities, elders, artists, authors, educators, and youth are given the agency to co-design educational resources that reflect their lived experiences, cultural values, and linguistic heritage. By digitising these stories through 2D, 3D and VR animation, the platform provides culturally affirming, engaging, and accessible resources for Pacific learners, families, schools, communities and cross sector industries across the world.

The workshop will demonstrate how the platform strengthens intergenerational language transmission, supports wellbeing and belonging, and rightfully positions Pasifika youth as cultural knowledge-bearers and future ancestors - in both local and digital worlds. Workshop participants will leave with insights into how culturally grounded, community- designed digital tools can strengthen education delivery, promote equity, and affirm identity across all settings. More than just a presentation, this session is a call to action - to inspire and encourage Pasifika to lead boldly in actions that lead future generations closer to cultural sovereignty and self-determination.

This presentation honours Indigenous approaches to knowledge-sharing and asks: how can digital spaces, especially in the context of growing diaspora, serve as authentic extensions of our cultural villages?

Totalanoa and PI Indigenous Approaches to Knowledge Sharing.

Dr Wani Erick, Amelia Battes

Abstract

Totalanoa is a grounded research methodology that represents an Indigenous approach to understanding and generating knowledge, aiming to enhance Pasifika Indigenous participation and access to health service delivery in Queensland. Totalanoa's approach underpins cultural safety and the colonisation theoretical framework. The fundamental principle is to create lasting change by giving people a choice, giving them their voice, and allowing them to express themselves in a way that makes them comfortable, especially when accessing service delivery. The strategy of Queensland's Pasifika Families Ground is to unearth and empower QLD PI families in how to shift their attitudes towards health and well-being. To gain momentum in participation towards their well-being and accepting ownership in their care. Likewise, systemic changes in health service delivery require a shift in mindset and approach. Some of the reasons why QLD PI families have a lack of uptake of health services are that systemic and structural changes in service delivery have yet to happen. Prescribed solutions don't always work, and health service delivery needs to change in its systemic attitudes when looking after a person "deemed as different", people that are diverse in their ways of knowing, people that are viewed as culturally different, yet work hard to survive in the mainstream with a strong sense of belonging as everyone else. The findings of my research reveal specific power dynamics that are often taken for granted by child health service providers. A service user, for example, an Indigenous Pasifika person, questions their safety. This can only mean that they want what is best for their health. With "QLD Pasifika Māori Families Ground", we start with the tamariki/children. It is the foundations they are born into that we need to maintain, i.e., to speak their own language, to be proud of their identity, and to be accepted as part of the mainstream. And when families are encouraged to participate in their care, this can only spell success for some of them. The theoretical lens of Cultural Safety does not examine a person's culture; instead, it equalises power dynamics that are often ignored within a relationship.