

'FETUIAKIMĀLIE, TALKING TOGETHER': PASIFIKA IN MAINSTREAM EDUCATION

MERE KĒPA

Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga

LINITĀ MANU'ATU

Auckland University of Technology

ABSTRACT *In this article we describe the development of a new qualification in early childhood education, Pasifika. We present an indigenous Tongan and Māori critique that challenges the consultation process and methodological content of the new qualification. The notion of FetuiakiMālie is drawn upon to debunk the mainstream notion in education that culture is static, passionless, superior and universal.*

KEYWORDS

Early childhood, Pasifika education, Tongan, Māori, Tertiary education, FetuiakiMālie

INTRODUCTION

On 30 June 2004, the School of Education at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) was advised that the proposal to offer the Level 7 National Diploma in *Teaching Early Childhood Education, Pasifika* had been approved by the New Zealand Teachers Council. On 28 July 2004, the Diploma was launched in a ceremony held at the University's Ngā Wai o Horotiu Marae. This paper presents the forms and functions leading to the launching of the Diploma.

In the School's attempt to include and emphasise the complex Pasifika communities, their intimate knowledge and perspectives in the creation of the Diploma, the staff recognised that its organisational structure should reflect the Treaty of Waitangi and the Pasifika people it aims to train and educate. As part of its new network of relationships, the School set up the Development Team consisting of academic and allied staff across AUT, the Pasifika Educators Network (PEN), the Pasifika Consultative Group (PCG) and its Early Childhood Education subgroup. The PCG membership was drawn from all the educational sectors including early childhood education. The purpose of the PCG extends beyond the requirements for the production of the Diploma. However, the knowledge, skills, calibre and experience of the membership are seen as vital and invaluable to the creation of the Diploma and the training and education of Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, Niue, Tokelau and Cook Islands Māori students at all levels within the School.

As members of the Development Team, the writers acknowledge that our understanding and commitment to the creation of the Diploma is shaped by our experiences in the field of *Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*,

Migrant Issues in Education, Māori Education and Indigenous Education. This understanding and commitment both influences the questions and production of this article, and may not reflect the opinion of the School of Education. We hope sincerely that the critique that follows will contribute significantly to meaningful intellectual dialogue and will support the production (not in the manufactured sense) and implementation of social policy that includes the language and culture of Tonga, Samoa, Niue, Tokelau, Fiji and the Cook Islands in the education system that prevails; that is, mainstream education.

Thus, an indigenous Tongan and Māori critique, that challenges the consultation process and methodological context of the National Diploma and its attendant mainstream or Western knowledge systems, is presented. As educationalists and researchers, we are interested in the implication of this critique for both the theory and practice of Pasifika in mainstream education. Therefore, this article will discuss the struggle with science and ultimately with some important features of mainstream education encountered by the Development Team throughout the 18-month process leading to the inaugural ceremony. To carry out the critique, the influences of Tongan language and culture, in particular the notion of *FetuiakiMālie*, will be drawn upon in order to debunk the mainstream notion in education that culture is static, passionless, superior and universal.

The article commences on a personal note with a brief discussion of the influence of science, Christianity and mainstream education on Tongan people in the Kingdom and Aotearoa/New Zealand. The mainstream assumption, of a single kind of experience of education and its abstract goals for educating and training Tongan students enrolled in the National Diploma, will be questioned. An indigenous Tongan conception of consultation and methodology, it is claimed, offers a more complex vision of Pasifika in mainstream education. Hence, the notion of *FetuiakiMālie* will be used to conceptualize how collaboration for consultative tasks, educational participation as a responsibility to the community as well as a way of acquiring power and wealth, respect for and use of the languages and cultures of the Pasifika peoples, and consensus decision-making convey important indigenous Tongan ways of understanding Pasifika in mainstream education. Finally, the inaugural ceremony to launch the Diploma will be discussed in order to convey the concept of *FetuiakiMālie* in practice.

A PERSONAL NOTE ON SCIENCE AND MAINSTREAM EDUCATION POLEMICS

To begin on a personal note, during the process of doctoral study my (Tongan author) views on mainstream education changed. Before 1995, I believed in the idea of science (meaning knowledge) as truth and in general or mainstream theory as a way of social reason that must be defended to sustain a good society. I was influenced greatly by Christianity and the mainstream education system exported from Aotearoa/New Zealand and reproduced uncritically at Tonga High School, and later received by me in three universities and a college of education in Aotearoa. By the time my doctoral thesis appeared in 2000, I was already moving towards an indigenous standpoint. The move from an assimilated, marginalized and

Christianised Tongan to an indigenous perspective came quickly. A major encouragement for the change was a deepening understanding of my philosophical and down-to-earth relationship with the Fonua (land, country) of my birth and then extending my cultural political, economic and educational relationships with Te Whenua o Aotearoa (land, country). The relationship between the Fonua and my indigenous turn tells a story that I believe is central to Pasifika in mainstream education polemics. Put simply, the thoughts, passions, feelings and emotions, well up in my body, soul and mind of the homeland departed.

The crystallization of an affirmative indigenous and immigrant Tongan standpoint brought to the surface a new set of internal tensions and struggles. Validating a concept of indigeneity, which meant relating an affirmative distinctiveness and community around Tongan language and culture has necessarily entailed challenging core assumptions of the mainstream education system. Therefore, those ideas, beliefs and practices that were marginalized and censored within the mainstream education regime for reasons related to an indigenous Tongan discourse, remained stigmatized.

I learned that the inclusion of Tongan language and culture within the English-speaking mainstream education system could coexist easily with the oppression of the other Pasifika cultural communities. Indeed, my call for the validation of Tongan language and culture in the Diploma tended to reinforce a discourse that understands the inclusion of other languages and cultures in the education system that have numerical dominance, thus relegating to a marginal and devalued status the beliefs and practices of the numerically weaker Pasifika peoples. As well, a bilingual, bicultural and biliterate Tongan conception of education conflicted with the view held by my colleagues who relate with the myriad cultures of Fiji, Samoa, Niue, Tokelau and the Cook Islands.

In this regard, tensions broke out in the Development Team around issues of numerical rank. I protested the tendency among the Samoan people, in particular those representatives from the Ministry of Education, to reinforce that specific cultural group's numerical dominance and the homogenizing discourse of the mainstream or Pālangi education, which oppressed those of us whose experiences tied us to both our own Fonua and the Pālangi knowledge system. Whereas I wished to make space for bilingual, biliterate and bicultural education, Tongan and English others aimed to challenge the very rendering of Tongan language and culture as a relevant part of mainstream education. That latter challenge also found expression among the assimilated sector of the Pasifika communities who not only opposed the idea of reducing Pasifika to a Tongan methodology and content but also criticized the notion of reinforcing what they took to be a marginalising strategy towards their personal culture.

Also, internal divisions surfaced around the mainstream conception of Pasifika education. The construct projected ideals of assimilation by way of dismissing and devaluing Pasifika languages and cultures and imposing English language and a single kind of experience of education and its abstract goals. For instance, charges were levelled that this kind of education reflected conventional values of the largely white, professional, management class who control the social, political and cultural institutions. The mainstream construct of Pasifika holds no sense of connectedness

to our personal Fonua and the Treaty of Waitangi; no sense of place in all sectors of the indigenous peoples of Tonga, Samoa, Niue, Fiji, Tokelau and the Cook Islands, including over-stayers, those on work permits and tourist visas, short-term residents, long-term residents and citizens. The point to be emphasized is that the mainstream construction has "put together that what ought not to be put together" (Bohm, 1994, pp. 3-4). Thus, the white, professional management class consciously or unconsciously constructs Pasifika without recognition of the concepts of collaboration for consultative tasks, educational responsibility as a communal task, respect for and use of the languages and cultures of the Pasifika peoples and consensus decision-making. Such thinking would engage in an active, not a passive, relationship by the Pasifika peoples with Pasifika in mainstream education.

What is clear from the discussion so far in this article is that it is insufficient for the Development Team simply to sit in meetings called by educationalists from the Pālangi, English-speaking mainstream culture to receive their transmissions about Pasifika in the Diploma. What is missing in the process are; political critique of Pasifika in mainstream education, economic understandings of Pasifika as a marketing tool, respect for and use of the diverse Pasifika languages, warm social relationships, emotions, feelings, passions, gods, spirits and ancestors, and bringing together narratives of pain and suffering in a context of love and hope.

CONCEPTUALISING FETUIAKIMĀLIE

It would seem reasonable to suggest that what is required is bringing together the Development Team to listen to each other think about mainstream systems of knowledge and conception of education. We talk together not only about ways of thinking grasped by the people of Tonga, Samoa, Niue, Tokelau, Fiji and the Cook Islands but the hierarchies of knowledge also. In doing so, imagination, creativity and faith would enrich and extend in deep, trustful and hopeful ways the education dialogue and context.

This commitment to and understanding of education transformation the authors call FetuiakiMālie. We posit the concept in order to imagine a strategy of naming (including) the Fonua of Tonga, Samoa, Niue, Tokelau, Fiji and the Cook Islands and sharing the language, beliefs and aspirations of these cultural communities marginalized in mainstream education; of questioning the Pasifika peoples' relationship and responsibility to the Treaty of Waitangi; and of creating critical understanding of the religious, political and economic forces that weigh heavily on the people.

Therefore, FetuiakiMālie cannot be merely a flavour or an essence! As a concept, FetuiakiMālie brings together people to talk about our sense of place. The interrelationship between Fetuiaki and Mālie fosters and encourages relationships grounded on trust, respect, kindness, generosity, sincerity, emotion, feelings, experience, reason, intellect and honour. Thus, FetuiakiMālie accentuates intellectual and community leadership, friendship, closeness and alliance amongst people living in Aotearoa/New Zealand denied the value of our perceptions, passions, experiences, traditions and customs.

FetuiakiMālie addresses a conception of authority, not in the institutional sense of a bureaucratized university system but, rather, as a framework to claim the authority of Tongan language and culture, among other groups' discourses. In this sense of FetuiakiMālie, authority means physically listening to each other naming our place and our people. This conception of authority is much richer and addresses more directly the contradictions and tensions between goals of collaboration, hierarchies of knowledge and consensus. This thinking resists enduring views of the Pasifika peoples as a homogeneous group and people who immigrate and migrate to Te Whenua o Aotearoa simply for training, job and income opportunities. In this intellectual sphere, FetuiakiMālie raises questions about common experience as the production of knowledge, the authority of Pālangi English-speaking educationalists' perception of Pasifika, and the character of our cultural, political and economic struggle.

FetuiakiMālie places greater emphasis than mainstream education on understanding the Pasifika peoples and our sense of place in the personal Fonua and Te Whenua o Aotearoa, which does not easily translate into tightly focused mainstream systems of knowledge. The intellectual creation puts emphasis on an interrelated approach to Pasifika in mainstream education. Hence, we believe that by bringing critical perspectives, concerns and outlooks to the heart of educational debate on the Diploma, the Development Team would better understand the Pasifika peoples' complex relationship to the personal Fonua and Te Whenua o Aotearoa. This would better inform the membership of the current social contexts in which all of us learn, work and live.

FETUIAKIMĀLIE IN NGĀ WAI O HOROTIU

Now, we want to turn briefly to the Pōwhiri or ceremony whereby the Diploma was launched. Confirming faithfully what FetuiakiMālie means in practice is difficult. It is easier to describe various methods and techniques than it is to provide a coherent framework. But the concept can be authenticated by the Pōwhiri held by the School of Education at Ngā Wai o Horotiu. Although oftentimes described as a welcome, the importance of the Pōwhiri extends well beyond a reception for visitors. It is the encounter bringing together the people and diminishing the distance between say, Fonua and Te Whenua; the Pasifika peoples, Pālangi and Tangata Whenua; the celestial and the earthly, to orate our relationships and the distinctions amongst us. As Mason Durie (2003) put it, "Achieving balance between commonalities and uniqueness provides a special blend of hospitality and in turn offers insights into people's pursuit of collaboration and consensus without sacrificing differences" (p. 54).

The innovative ceremony organized by some of the Pasifika Educators Network placed great importance on the broader set of spiritual, physical and social relationships that produce education and sought balance across the communities concerned with the Diploma. Arranging culturally significant encounters is a responsibility with which the connected educationalist must engage with insight, compassion, confidence, experience, wisdom and forbearance. Occasions, such as the Pōwhiri at Ngā Wai o Horotiu, cannot be manufactured artificially for Pasifika

in mainstream education since the purpose of ceremonial ritual carried out on marae is an encounter to strengthen relationships and to include others. The point being emphasised is that without proper consideration of all the communities and our spiritual, intellectual and professional leadership, a well-intentioned act of participation could be seen simply as therapeutic. Bringing together the Pasifika peoples, Tangata Whenua and Pālangi, requires the educationalists to trust each other, to respect each other and the capacity to include each other.

In this action, the Pōwhiri becomes FetuiakiMālie where all the cultural communities talk openly about the Diploma and critique its cultural, political and economic complexities in our own way (meaning language and cultural practice). It is by calling into question the universal and abstract claims of mainstream education; the term Pasifika as a marketing tool; the points of tension between the Pasifika Consultative Group and the Pālangi educationalists over reimbursement for advice; the intricate consultation process; the new networks of relationship; and the production of content reflecting the breadth and depth of values, traditions and experiences that mainstream education becomes inclusive. These developments within the Pōwhiri reveal the shortcomings apparent in the enactment of the Diploma. In the attempt of FetuiakiMālie to talk to these issues, a more complex conceptualization of the Diploma, and its methodological and consultation process, is being developed. In brief, it is through the ceremonial ritual of the Pōwhiri that FetuiakiMālie becomes visible.

FINAL REMARKS

Overall, the Development Team opened up a way to create Pasifika in mainstream education whereby the staff and the students might deepen our understanding of education, establish research opportunities and attract Pasifika students to all levels of study in the School of Education at AUT. The methodological context has raised painful tensions within education for each member of the Development Team. Finally, the Pasifika Consultative Group has learned deeply about our marginalization in our own Fonua and Te Whenua o Aotearoa.

Most important, the National Diploma in Teaching Early Childhood Education, Pasifika has become authenticated. In particular, the Tongan, Samoan, Niue, Samoan-Cook Island Māori and the Cook Island Māori, and the Tangata Whenua educationalists (PEN), in relationship with our Pālangi colleagues at the School of Education, have an exciting challenge ahead. Both personally and collectively, the educationalists can no longer teach only universal and abstract knowledge in the Diploma. The tide has turned and the educationalists must think of ways to educate and train teachers who will strengthen children who speak Tongan and English, Samoan and English, Fijian and English, Cook Islands Māori and English, Niue and English, Tokelau and English in order that they become bi-cultural, bi-literate and bi-lingual citizens in a complex Aotearoa/New Zealand.

REFERENCES

- Durie, M. (2003). *Launching Māori futures*. Wellington: Huia Publishers.
 Bohm, D. (1994). *Thought as a system*. London: Routledge.