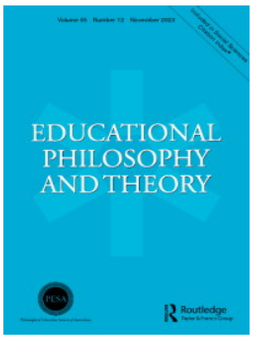

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Educational Philosophy and Theory

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rept20

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To cite this article: Georgina Tuari Stewart, Te Wai Barbarich-Unasa, Dion Enari, Cecelia Faumuina, Deborah Heke, Dion Henare, Taniela Lolohea, Megan Phillips, Hilda Port, Nimbus Staniland, Nooroa Tapuni, Rerekura Teaurere, Yvonne Ualesi, Leilani Walker, Nesta Devine & Jacoba Matapo (31 Oct 2023): Experiences of indigenous (Māori/Pasifika) early career academics, Educational Philosophy and Theory, DOI: 10.1080/00131857.2023.2271649

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2023.2271649

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND THEORY
https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2023.2271649

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ABSTRACT

This article presents narratives from 13 Indigenous early career academics (ECAs) at one university in Auckland, New Zealand. These experiences are likely to represent those of Indigenous Māori and Pasifika ECAs nationally, given the small, centralised nature of the national academy of Aotearoa New Zealand. The narratives contain testimony, fictionalised vignettes of experience, and poetic expressions. Meeting the demands of an academic role in one's first years of working at a university is a big deal for anyone; the extra pressures and challenges for Indigenous Māori and Pacific staff are immense, yet little understood by White 'others.' A writing workshop was the initial catalyst of this collective writing project. Through these insider narratives, this article presents a collective description of, and response to, the experience of Māori and Pasifika early career academics.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 3 October 2023
Accepted 3 October 2023

KEYWORDS
Māori academic; Pacific academic; early career academic; academic development

Introduction

In 2015, AUT (Auckland University of Technology, aut.ac.nz) embarked on a homegrown programme of recruiting annual cohorts of doctorally qualified early career academics of Māori and Indigenous Pacific identity. AUT is the university in Aotearoa New Zealand with the highest proportion of students who are the first in family to attend university. It is our emerging observation that these 'first in family' effects continue all the way along the career pipeline from pupil to professor, contributing to the ongoing lack of ethnic diversity in the academy (McAllister et al., 2019, 2022; Naepi, 2019).

The lack of Māori and Pacific academics in our national universities is a matter of concern for the central funders and policy makers. Pressure is increasingly being brought to bear on the individual universities to fairly represent their populations in their student participation and achievement. The competition between universities for Māori and Pacific academics is being ratcheted even higher by new rules for the PBRF, whereby Māori and Pacific academics attract a premium weighting over their non-Māori/Pacific colleagues (see www.tec.govt.nz). The need for support for Māori academics is reflected in the national programmes, Te Kei (Māori academic

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career development) and Piki Ake (transition from student to academic), both being run under the auspices of Te Pōkai Tara Universities New Zealand.

When it started in 2015, the AUT programme was intended to provide a career pathway primarily for their own Māori and Pacific doctoral graduates, and thereby to help ameliorate the lack of Māori and Pacific academics in the teaching staff in particular. The programme was left to generic systems to manage, however, and many of the appointees floundered. Attrition rates were high (around one-third overall by 2021) and while some had gone on to other university or industry jobs, others had left in unhappy circumstances. The 2020 cohort gathered information and presented a report to the VC, following which a programme review and refresh was completed. The programme was re-branded as Eke Tangaroa, invoking the metaphor of navigating the academic ocean. The appointees are known as the Kaihoe (paddlers), and a new role of Kaiurungi (navigator) was established, to which the first author was appointed, starting in August 2021.

A request came from the Kaihoe for a writing workshop, run by the Kaiurungi in late March 2023, which catalysed this collective article, as a way to work together and to document the programme, explore our experiences as Māori and Pacific academics, and encourage the Kaihoe to use narrative and poetic genres in writing research. Some commented it was the first time 'since school' they had written in this way. Collective writing is a recent but growing format for writing educational research (Jandric et al., 2017; Peters et al., 2021). Collective writing seems an ideal way for a group convened by Māori and Pacific identity to explore how those identities play out for early career academics in Aotearoa New Zealand (McAllister et al., 2022).

To explore these complex issues, we are using auto-research, by which we mean approaches whereby the author views their own life as a source of 'data' including autoethnography (Stewart, 2023b). Writing about one's own life and experiences naturally includes narratives, and opens the door to poetic genres in research. Narrative research honours the universal traditions of storytelling as a powerful vehicle for teaching and learning, especially about identity (King, 2003). Narrative forms of research meld together 'data collection and analysis' in the holistic practice of writing (Stewart, 2021). Narrative research has long found favour among Māori scholars, such as the Pūrākau method (Lee, 2009).

This article brings together all these aspects—collective writing in an autoethnographic key about issues of Māori and Pacific identity for early career academics at a university in Aotearoa New Zealand. There are only eight universities in the country, and they are centrally funded, so these experiences are likely to be fairly typical of any of the eight. All the Kaihoe at AUT were invited to write a piece of up to 500 words, and about half of them did so, all included below, arranged and curated by the first author. During the writing of the article, Nimbus accepted a job at another university, hence she mentions the end of her time with the programme in her narrative.

It is time to turn to the Kaihoe narratives.

Narratives

Unfoldings

Deborah Heke, 2021 Cohort

Eke Tangaroa is a metaphor that describes the journey of an early career academic: the potential journey, the unfolding journey, and the journey that brought us all to where we are today. I knew this journey was a challenging one. I had heard the horror stories from colleagues who were burnt out from the additional cultural labour required of them in their roles. I had been privy to the personal experiences of colleagues who struggled to balance being both Māori and an academic, some deciding to choose the former over the latter. I had heard these stories

and more, and I was keen on *not* adding my name to the list of early career casualties. I was interested in mapping a course for my journey that would allow me to experience those two parts of me in complementary, constructive ways.

Optimism is a characteristic that I believe our navigating ancestors must have had in excess, to be able to look out into the vastness of the ocean and believe that they could find something beautiful and bountiful on the other side of it. That optimism would have been peppered with a healthy dose of realism and supplemented with the trusted tools that they were confident would keep them safe on their journey. As an optimistic Eke Tangaroa Kaihoe I have come to know some of the realities of academia, but I bring with me a toolkit and whakapapa of strength, determination, cheekiness, creativity, and care. This whakapapa comes from ancestors who did hard things in hard times; who withstood challenges, made a nuisance of themselves, used what they had creatively, and made sure to look after each other.

In different ways and at different times I have had to implement these tools from my whakapapa in my role as an academic. I've stood at crossroads of my career and made challenging decisions about which direction to take. I've discovered new parts of myself, within this role, and used that knowledge to manaaki others. I've pushed at the boundaries, challenged the status quo. I've combined creativity and convention. I've asked stupid questions and made mistakes along the way. And I continue to learn my craft—the hoe, the waka, the great expansive ocean that is academia.

Despite the challenges, I am buoyed in knowing that I share this Eke Tangaroa waka with fellow Kaihoe and a Kaiurungi who have a shared vision. We are intent on navigating this journey in a way that means those who come behind us, will face fewer of the challenges we did. Just as our own ancestors tried, tested, failed, and triumphed on our behalf, we acknowledge them, and those of our colleagues who struggled before us. We learn from them, we learn from our own experiences, and we keep moving towards that beautiful, bountiful destination.

The only way is up?

Rerekura Teaurere, 2020 Cohort

That day in 2020, when I got the letter advising me I had been appointed as a Lecturer at AUT, was an absolute high point, coming soon after completing my doctoral thesis, and following a wonderfully engaging recruitment process. After that, things seldom felt as good again. I was one of four appointed in the 2020 cohort of the Māori and Pacific ECA (early career academics) programme. Only two of us remain. My cohort took our concerns to the senior leaders of the university, following which the programme was re-born as Eke Tangaroa. Without becoming stuck in the past, it is worth offering my story as a cautionary tale of what didn't work for the programme in its original form.

In 2020, I had been living in the Cook Islands for nearly 10 years where I had completed my doctorate at USP and where my daughter had been born and raised. I moved back to Auckland to take up my job at AUT. I was attracted to the idea of being supported in a programme that understood my needs as a Pacific academic, but that turned out to be a false promise. The reality is that I never did find out who was responsible for me and the other ECAs in the programme. My line managers and school leaders were never clear about their roles and responsibilities in respect of the programme. I didn't meet the other ECAs until months after I had started, and then only by chance. In these and other ways, communication about the programme was poor.

Later, my fellow cohort members became my support network at AUT. At one stage, we were invited to an online meeting to meet some of the senior leaders of AUT. We were talked down to by people who had no idea who we were. We were told the meeting was being

recorded, so when invited to give feedback about the programme, little was said. As time went by, I could not see how being appointed through the programme made any difference to my employment experience. Nothing was being offered through the programme itself, nor in my own school.

I have learned many lessons through being employed at AUT, and not trusting other academics higher up on the ladder of institutional power is one of those lessons. Things have been done in which my work has been appropriated and used unfairly by others. I am the only Pacific academic in my school, and this experience made me feel vulnerable and unprotected. Recently the only Māori academic in my school left, as well as other colleagues I was close to. As a result, my feelings of isolation have only increased. There have been clear improvements since the programme transitioned into Eke Tangaroa. I have received support from the Kaiurungi, and participated in the network. I am hopeful that no other appointees will be left to sink or swim in the depths of the academic ocean.

Navigating two worlds: Embracing my Māori academic identity

Megan Phillips, 2017 Cohort

As I sat in my annual career-planning meeting with my head of department, I couldn't help but feel a sense of confusion. Having completed one full year as an academic, the question was posed: 'Do you want to be a Māori academic or a disciplinary academic?' I grappled with the notion of how to separate my Māori identity from my disciplinary knowledge. That puzzle sparked a journey of self-discovery, prompting me to ponder the essence of what it means to be a Māori academic.

Growing up with both Māori and Pākehā parents and family, I had often questioned my place in this world and struggled to define my identity. Cultural incompetence, the colour of my skin, and a lack of connection tormented me and left me with an overwhelming feeling of not being 'Māori enough.' These longheld feelings, coupled with the challenges of being an early career academic, opened a tumultuous path, filled with self-doubt and constant introspection.

As the years passed, my perspective shifted. I found solace in the company of others like myself, drawn together through initiatives like Eke Tangaroa and Te Kei. Reconnecting with my te reo Māori journey, reading academic articles on Māori identity, delivering a talk to the faculty on 'what it meant to be Māori at work' and meeting Māori academic and non-academic leaders, allowed me to explore my Māori identity and the multifaceted nature of being a Māori academic. It has become evident that my Māori identity and my disciplinary pursuits are *not* mutually exclusive, but rather intertwined aspects of my being.

After six years at AUT I have come to embrace and understand my identity as a Māori academic. For me, it signifies being a bicultural Māori academic, acknowledging and celebrating my mixed-Māori heritage, while conducting research in my disciplinary field, with benefits for both Māori and Pākehā. This reframing has provided me with a new-found sense of comfort, enabling me to bring my whole self into my academic role, and granting me permission to navigate both worlds.

Paddling the waka/va'a

Yvonne Ualesi, 2022 Cohort

Like all good plans I had one: to submit my PhD in February 2019. But my plans were disrupted by illness and the global pandemic, with lockdowns starting in early February 2020. Academic institutional plans don't consider the realities that doctoral candidates face, particularly those who are Pacific or Māori, and who have many layers of personal, cultural, community, and, importantly, financial challenges to even consider doing a PhD. Sink or swim.

Sometimes good plans turn to custard. My doctoral scholarship ran dry, and I had to get a job, so for the last few months of writing my PhD thesis, I was working at a polytechnic as a senior lecturer and academic lead of an ITE degree programme. Following my oral examination in November 2021, I was pronounced Dr Yvonne Ualesi. I was overworked, under-resourced, disillusioned, and wondered if I would ever land a position at one of the eight universities in the country. I applied for Eke Tangaroa, and never looked back. I became a Lecturer in the School of Education at AUT. Sink or paddle.

Six months on, there are two things I am sure of: Māori and Pasifika academics are highly sought after, yet few institutions genuinely take up the challenge of creating spaces to support and develop us. My experiences of Eke Tangaroa are varied, but mostly positive. I am under no illusion that I entered a programme that has evolved over time; there are ripples of uncertainty as a paddler. I entered turbulent waters, at a time when people were being made redundant in rocky post-pandemic financial straits. I reflect with thanks that despite the challenges, people stay. Some stay for the student teachers, who we hope will also stay for the tamariki they will teach in the future. You see, plans need to change. One thing remains the same: despite the challenges, we are resolute in our role as Kaihoe. Paddle.

In the Eke Tangaroa programme

Te Wai Barbarich-Unasa, 2022 Cohort

The transition from doctoral studies to a full-time academic position can be daunting. This shift involves a steep learning curve, particularly in terms of navigating the academic bureaucracy and developing teaching and research skills. Being a Māori early career academic in a predominantly non-Indigenous academic environment presents unique challenges, which mean my new role as a lecturer would be a huge undertaking, not only in teaching and learning, but research and academic citizenship as well. Having only been a research officer beforehand, I was oblivious of the full extent of the role of being a career path lecturer. To embark on a teaching journey is a heavy load, involving preparation, teaching, pastoral care, marking, and administrative tasks. Not only that, but 'teaching' includes supervising postgraduate students. The reality of all of this was a big shock to the system.

I take on all wero (challenges) presented to me with open arms, but can't help feeling like some sort of imposter. Who am I to review and assess other people's mahi (work), when I have only just finished my own doctoral studies, and don't know anything? As Māori, we are a very humble people who struggle to accept praise and acknowledgement. Continued requests and praise for the mahi undertaken is still a space of discomfort and awkwardness. A fitting whakatauki (proverb) is 'Kāore te kumara e kōrero mō tōna reka' - the kumara does not brag about its own sweetness.

Another big challenge I have had to navigate has been the demands from colleagues - requests to be on their research projects, various advice required, and invitations for guest lecturing. I was aware that there are not enough Māori in academia to meet the demands, but I did not know just how significant this was. Although we hope to offer support for our peers, at times the demand can be overwhelming, and I have to protect my time and capacity. It is also extremely important to navigate these requests in a mana-enhancing way (mana is a complex concept; here meaning something like 'personal dignity') and ensure I stay tūturu (committed) to my own interests. Despite these challenges, being a Māori early career academic can also be a rewarding and fulfilling experience.

I never thought I would be an academic

Hilda Port, 2022 Cohort

When I was 14, the 'academics' found me too difficult to work with, so they removed me from their school. If I didn't fit in at school, how was I going to fit in at university?

Nevertheless, I went to university and got a degree, then a masters, then a PGDip. Then people in society talked to me differently. They stopped and listened to what I had to say. For the first time, I had a voice that was heard, without the need to shout - and then I was encouraged to go back and do my Doctor of Philosophy. This was strange, because I did not belong in this academic world. Inside I was still a 14-year-old kid who was 'not academically inclined.' I was an imposter in a foreign world where I was still working out how, and if, I wanted to fit in.

Then I was encouraged to apply for the Eke Tangaroa programme. How does an academic imposter fit in the academic world? Thoughts of imposter syndrome flitted through my mind. As I took my place among the academics who had recently taught me, I had mixed feelings about where I sat in this Eke Tangaroa space. Was I there as the token Pasifika staff member who could work in the bicultural space effectively and fluidly? Was I there because I had the knowledge and confidence where others may have felt inadequate? Or was I there to tick a box that showed society that our university was doing the 'right thing' and providing a programme for Māori and Pasifika early academics? Whatever the reason, I was here to stay. Through Eke Tangaroa I will make my mark on this university. I will impact the lives of the students I work with, and I will honour the role that I have been given, because that is who I am.

The 'face' of the Māori and Pacific early career academic programme

Nimbus Staniland, 2017 Cohort

A few months into the role, I'm asked to appear in a promotional video to talk about how I'm doing things differently, how this programme is transforming me, and how I'm transforming tertiary education. Truthfully, I still feel like I'm finding my feet. I've noticed that my employment agreement looks the same as my non-Māori colleagues. A list of academic tasks and expectations. There is no mention of Te Reo Māori, tikanga or mātauranga. But now I'm the face of the Māori and Pacific Early Career Programme. I'm out, in that respect. As the camera rolls, I say something about normalising the use of Te Reo in my classroom, while wondering to myself, 'Is that enough?'

When I started this role, I felt ready and armed with a confidence and commitment to create spaces for Māori perspectives in the classroom. I had been appointed a mentor, that I thought would help me to continue to grow and develop, but interactions were limited. As the years passed, I frequently questioned the impact I was having. As the workload increased, the time for establishing and developing relationships decreased. The more mainstream my teaching became, the less confident I felt in my ability to form narratives that critiqued the mainstream and offered up alternative ways of knowing. Maybe I should read some more? I'm expected to engage with this knowledge in my own time. In the spaces between, at the margins, at the periphery. I take Te Reo classes in the evenings. I read the history books and the leadership books and the books about Te Tiriti to upskill for these service expectations and prepare for the questions that will come.

I teach in a business school, management, and HR. And yet, as a Māori and academic, there is often an expectation that I will know, consult, translate, advise, and educate on all matters of relevance to Māori. I'm not a historian or a Māori historian, I'm not a legal scholar, or a Māori legal scholar. I wasn't around in 1907 when the Tohunga Suppression Act was enforced to be able to tell you about the varying Māori perspectives on that issue at that time—though I have been challenged on that point. So I do feel deeply this expectation to understand these issues and to be able to explain (and defend) to Pākehā, tauiwi, and at times Māori, the rationale behind national and organisational objectives to support and protect Māori interests, including that of employees, students, researchers and wider communities. This knowledge motivates my

own research interests, and helps me to make sense of the 'tricky ground' (Smith, 2008) on which I find myself as Māori woman academic (Stewart, 2023a).

After six years, my journey with this programme comes to an end, but many questions remain. Am I having an impact? Is it enough? I still haven't taught a Māori paper. I have consulted on curriculum review to include Māori content. I've served as a representative on Diversity and Research committees with expectations of input from a Māori perspective. I've delivered Vision Mātauranga policy workshops and spoken on leadership programme panels with academic staff audiences. I am frustrated that most of the opportunities to have in-depth cross-disciplinary kōrero with my Māori and Indigenous colleagues have occurred when we are 'performing' for non-Māori audiences. I'd love more safe spaces to go deep with our kōrero. I put my head in another book, feeling anxious about being observed as I learn about what is often described as 'too political' and often too personal.

A better life

Cecelia Faumuina, 2022 Cohort

As a young person born and raised in Tāmaki Makaurau, I was aware that my parents had immigrated here to provide a better life, not only for myself and my siblings, but also for my extended family members - those who shared our home, and those back in the home island nations, Samoa and Tonga. Throughout my schooling I was always encouraged to do my best so that education could help me flourish. It was always the hope of my parents that being educated would give me more options for a life in which I could choose where I wanted to work, how I wanted to live, and, most importantly, how I could use my time so that in turn, I could give back to my community.

For the last 20 years I have worked as a teacher in various intermediate and secondary schools in Auckland, and it has always been my aim to encourage the young people I have taught, no matter what culture they come from, to create the best versions of themselves, whether they plan to go on to tertiary education or not. Everyone deserves the opportunity to strive to be their best, to reach for the hopes and dreams that they know and feel are within their reach. In reflecting on *why* I teach, I understand that:

Amataga (Beginning)

I teach in places
that have opportunities
I never had
growing up
When students flow through the gates
Some look like me
…. many years ago.
Being dropped off by a parent
who is sleep deprived and irritable
from working night shifts

to make ends meet.
I take those kids
To festivals
'Glorified picnics', my colleagues tell me
But I take them, so they can hear their stories
through poetry, sound and dance

From cultures less bleached.
Giving voice
Proud and raw in the world.

The ones who join the 'cultural' groups
who stay behind after school
to find something deeper
Creating from the centre of their lives.

Faiva | Fai vā
Woven as fine mats
Beaten as ngatu
Knocked together into harmonies
Sustained by church choirs,
Family gatherings, kapa haka
Kava ceremonies
These are the kids from in-between
Voices finding connection,
The Plastic Polynesians,
Fia Pa¯lagi, 'afakasi - half castes…
Belonging to each other.

As an early career academic in Eke Tangaroa at AUT, my goal is to continue to provide hope and encouragement for students here through teaching, and also to add my voice to research in academia: a voice of experience as a child of immigrant parents, who battled to make sense of my two worlds that seemed at odds with each other, by focusing on the beauty that lies in being from 'in-between' - so that others may continue to strive towards their own version of a better life.

The double-edged sword of Eke Tangaroa

Taniela Lolohea, 2021 Cohort

There is a natural pull towards the programme—a wish to contribute to the need for greater representation of Māori and Pacific peoples in academic spaces, to encourage younger Māori and Pacific to prosper at universities, or to offer alternative views and ways of being and doing. There is also a push away from the Eke Tangaroa programme, which comes from the sense that perhaps one wouldn't be an academic without this programme - that one is undeserving, lacking in expertise, or just not up to it. These opposing forces make up part of the daily internal combat to navigate academic spaces.

This internal struggle is further exacerbated when one is situated in the science disciplines, which have been placed at the top of the hierarchy of higher knowledge and expertise. My internal questions about my position in the academy centre on validity, comparison, privilege and necessity. What is my validity as a scientist, amongst such distinguished intellects? How do I challenge myself, without tying an anchor to my ankle? What privilege do I have, and at what cost? How does this privilege look to my peers and those around me?

The ongoing struggle comes in waves, which increase in height and frequency as academic accolades, invitations, awards and praise roll in. Looking back, this internal struggle was always present in my undergraduate study, continuing through postgraduate, and now into the academic position. It is the other side of the double-edged sword of Eke Tangaroa.

The Eke Tangaroa programme offers support from the VC office, to the Head of School, to the programme leadership. The support of like-minded peers in the other Kaihoe, who are no doubt experiencing similar internal struggles, is priceless. Perhaps the real value of the programme is to help and nurture Māori and Pacific academics as they move through academic spaces and confront these internal struggles.

'That Māori bit'

Dion Henare, 2022 Cohort

'Oh, by the way…'
He stops me as we pass in the corridor,
'… that Māori bit. I don't think it quite like… y'know… fits.'
I try to keep the panic from changing my expression. The Māori bit of what? Me?
The 'Mōrena' bit of the email I sent yesterday? Or the korowai bit of my profile picture?
Did he meet my family recently? Or see a photo somewhere? Is my grandad that 'bit' he's talking about?
It could be something from a faculty email I've forgotten about or haven't seen yet. Or Matariki? That's next week.
Something in the news maybe? The road signs probably. Or sports related? I need to watch more of this stuff so I'm ready.

'In the draft of that paper you sent…' he prompts slowly.
I'd panicked for too long.
'Oh' I try to laugh, 'sorry, forgot about that.' He must think I'm an idiot.
'It's just that the rest of the paper is so… technical and detailed, really empirical, and science-y,' he continues, 'And I mean, I like the Māori bit, it's really cool and interesting stuff. Could probably be a whole separate paper to be honest. Aim it at a different journal.'
'Right.' I say vacantly, my head awash with my grandad, faculty emails, and road signs.
'But you've got to think about international reviewers, right?'
'Right.' I nod.
'You'll have to define all those words for them, and they clash a bit with the more technical language. It just starts to change the whole focus. It might slow down the reviewing process too. And there's a word limit to keep in mind, you don't have space for every great idea' he offers with a smile. 'Anyway, it's your paper! Just something to think about.'

And I do think about it. I think about it all day.
Embarrassed. He thinks I'm stupid, an imposter. One of 'them' – not a real scientist. Maybe that stuff didn't make sense.
Annoyed. Of course it makes sense, it's important and interesting. It just doesn't fit some boring, superficial, science aesthetic.
Guilty. He didn't even say anything bad. He liked it. He's trying to be helpful and now I'm overreacting. Why am I even dwelling on it?
And confused. What am I supposed to do? Is there anyone here that I can talk to, who actually understands?

The above fictionalised vignette is an attempt to use the short story genre to capture a subtle category of conversations I've had through my years of study and work, whereby a steady current pushes against any attempt to be Māori in science. This is not a critique of anyone who may inspire anything in the vignette. My colleagues have invariably done their best to look out for me, and are expressing the demands of the system we work in. For me, the answer to the

final question is what makes all the difference. My short time in the Eke Tangaroa programme has been the first time that I've been able to answer that question with a 'yes.'

Sit, face, relate, stand, make

Nooroa Tapuni, 2017 Cohort

we sit. facing each other around a circular table. this sitting and facing allows the opening of relational space, a circularity of exchange between the collective us, the we, where we make present our ancestors. in this context the boundary, tapu that encircles the multicoloured collective I, is that of leader.

we face. in relation to surface on which our responsibilities are inscribed. argue points that are swiped to the margins as disturbance, regulated by recursion seeking homeostasis. that of control.

we relate. silent on contested ground.

i stand beyond the context of the table. the boundary of leader that encircles brown skin does not hold the same value as that which encircles white. brown skin is considered the partition. leadership is transgressed. regulated homeostasis by the collective we. the wall, brown skin rendered porous, broken and invisible.

i make present ancestor to encircle boundary. to face that which seeks to engender a porosity made by transgression. my caution in this system of exchange is my ancestors' caution. my anger is theirs. i as in connection to ancestor, as in tu (to stand) as opposed to tu ke (to stand in difference). We stand.

He kākano ahau

Leilani Walker, 2021 Cohort

From the bow I spied a solitary Pōhutukawa
Flanked by pines,
Crown greyed by salt,
Wind-trained and bowing inland.
'Kuhu mai,'
I have waited so long for you.

'The soil is acrid and full of scoria'
But, finally
A place to stand – space to grow – aye?

'The cliffs are steep and, in the night,'
The island rumbles and recloaks itself in stone.
But it's the same everywhere – I guess.
I dreamt of your coming.

'Fingers reddened on unkind rock,
Grip this place, little rata.
Beneath a hostile canopy,

Snake your way in search of sun, little nikau.
Please don't leave.
Trusted shield,
Shade and water the seedlings, little ngāio.

You will bend to the wind off the sea but
You Can Not Break.
Be the forest, little seed.'

Blessing

Dion Enari, 2021 Cohort

I always wanted to be an academic so that I could better advocate for our people. I grew up in Kelston then moved to Queensland for high school and university. Even though I was in Brisbane, I was aware of the Eke Tangaroa programme, and hurried to finish my PhD to qualify for the next intake. I knew that such a programme, offering permanent fulltime academic jobs for Māori and Pasifika, was a very rare opportunity.

I love many things about this programme, but what I love most is that it allows me to bring my whole self, my Samoaness and the learnings I have from Māoridom as a kid growing up in Kelston, and it is appreciated by my colleagues. I have performed Māori oratory and Samoan dance in this programme and it has been received in the way that I presented it, with love and respect. I also love that this programme protects me from being culturally prostituted (Enari & Lemusuifeauaali'i, 2021) or bogged down fulfilling cultural roles beyond our job description and on top of the work we already have, as happens to so many Māori and Pacific academics.

I believe this programme provides a base on which to build the next generation in our Māori and Pacific army to decolonise and indigenise academia. I hope many more come on board our waka, and that other universities around the motu and the world adopt similar programmes, to nurture and strengthen the next up-and-coming bright Indigenous minds. As a Samoan, Pacific, Indigenous scholar, I *know* when I am a tick-box; a token brown academic, used for political point-scoring (Enari & Matapo, 2021). This programme is not like that. It's been like a family. Those before me in the programme became my helpful older cousins, showing me the way. In turn, I have done the same for the cohort that came after mine, with aunty Professor Georgina Stewart protecting this process.

May many more Maori and Pacific academics both in Aotearoa and around the world come through this programme. Our waka is sailing and we are steering in the same direction, for the betterment of our people, both now and those yet to be born. Alofa atu.

Conclusion

These narratives offer a window into the breadth and depth of the experiences of Māori and Pacific early career academics, ranging widely, from the highly positive, to the opposite. These narratives have a powerful affect, bringing the reader up close in very personal terms to the complexities of being a Māori or Pacific academic, with all the inbuilt tensions and paradoxes. The emotional impact of these stories is key to their critical teaching power. This article adds to a small tranche of research (cited prior) on the topic of Māori and Pacific equity in the academy of Aotearoa New Zealand. It is likely to be useful to those supporting Māori and Pacific academics in other universities and programmes.

It is important to document the experiences of Māori and Pacific academics as part of the work of countering prevailing dominant assumptions based on Whiteness. The writing project

that led to this article provides another route to inform discussions about academic equity in our universities, these narratives supplementing and enriching the data collected using statistics or surveys in the previously published research. The racism in our academic systems and institutions is well hidden, often visible only to the victim in the moment, but one unanticipated benefit of Eke Tangaroa is shining a light on the dark, dubious assumptions behind how things are done in some parts of AUT. Perhaps, in future, the Eke Tangaroa model will become standard across all the universities of Aotearoa New Zealand. Let's keep watching this space.

Open reviews

Emerging from the in-between spaces

Nesta Devine

The narrative technique used in these stories has its advantages and disadvantages: It shows us clearly the pain and joy experienced by individuals but is open to the charge that these experiences are anecdotal, that not too much can be generalised from them. It is always the case that young academics are likely to find themselves lonely, and, sadly, exploited. The difference in these stories is beautifully explored by Megan Phillips: being Maori or Pasifika is intrinsic to the person, not separable from a notion of academic identity or from disciplinary knowledge. These early career academics record their travails and triumphs from a clearly marked cultural perspective. In these narratives a lot of pain surfaces, either because of neglect of these young kaihoe, or because of ignorance, mistrust, and misapprehension as to the part Maori knowledge plays in the wider academic world.

Part of the marked cultural position which defines this group is clearly a need or preference for a programmme like Eke Tangaroa which brings together people whose culturally marked position gives them a distinctive take on the training and support they receive. Rerekura Teaurere and Dion Henare show graphically what can happen when support is lacking or misconceived.

Te Wai Barbarich-Unasa explores the particularity of the imposter syndrome for early Maori and Pasifika lecturers when the lack of self-confidence is compounded by the demand from colleagues, research projects, editors, to be 'the Maori voice' or the Pacific voice in various university forums. This conflict is further complicated by a sense of communal obligation, reiterated by several writers, most tellingly by Taniela Lolohea, to be on those teams for the benefit of students, particularly for the benefit of students from their own communities, often first-in-family themselves and badly in need of role models and supportive figures. But realistically, people have to consider their own welfare, or they join the many who have given up on the university and left for other jobs.

I was very moved by Cecelia Faumuina's poem Amataga. These 'in-between' spaces are in effect the spaces we almost all move in, and we have to be proud in acknowledging these complex inheritances and encouraging others to find the strength and beauty in the in-between, because this is our future in Aotearoa New Zealand. When Nooroa Tapuni says 'brown skin is considered the partition' that is largely but not absolutely true: it's not the colour of skin that evokes the tūpuna. Leilani Walker shows the complexity of these relationships in her lovely little anthem, full of love for the past and hope for the future.

The collection ends on a strong, confident, politically aware note from Dion Enari. Conscious of potential scarcity of jobs for Pasifka and Maori, conscious of potential tick-box exploitation, and yet rejoicing in the opportunities for love, growth, respect offered by the programme, Eke Tangaroa, under the guidance of its Aunty Professor Georgina.

So yes, these component particles of this paper are individual, autochthonous, anecdotal. But together they add up to a statement about safeguarding a precious group of people from

the potential isolation and exploitation of Maori and Pasifika early career academics, and advocate for a programme which offers the protection and developmental possibilities that a well-run collective, respectful and affirming programme can provide.

'Pull up a chair, Sis'

Jacoba Matapo

I open my peer review with an approach to join the authors metaphorically sitting around the circular table, engaging in a collective exchange of experience while simultaneously reflecting and anticipating a future for Māori and Pacific academics within the academy that goes beyond an equity-based position for participation. Reading, sensing, and traversing the article has personally triggered memories of my academic journey within the university, specifically the additional layers of invisible cultural labour and the tensions in carving out an academic pathway that brings together my passion for Pacific scholarship and the discipline of education.

I would like to start with an indigenous standpoint, recognising the shared ancestral histories and genealogy between Māori and Pacific peoples, including Te Moana Nui a Kiwa (Pacific Ocean) that echoes across the cultural and epistemic realms of both Māori and Pacific communities. This ethos captures the profound connections between the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand, and the wider Pacific, emphasising shared heritage, values, and aspirations. In this context, Eke Tangaroa emerges as a significant programme to bridge the existing representation gap in the academic sector, particularly among Māori and Pacific populations.

To grow Māori and Pacific academic capacity, it is fundamental to ensure these academics see themselves represented across higher academic positions. The current state of representation of Māori and Pacific academic staff in New Zealand universities is a stark issue. The data from the Ministry of Education's 2022 Academic Staff reporting (published in 2023) paints a bleak picture: across the eight universities in New Zealand, Māori and Pacific academics significantly trail in representation at senior levels. The presence of merely 60 Māori professors (4.4% of the total) and 10 Pacific professors (0.7% of the total), along with their relatively low representation at the associate professor level. There are 75 Māori associate professors (5.7% of the total) and 25 Pacific associate professors (1.9% of the total), which underscores a systemic issue that demands attention. This underrepresentation not only signifies a loss of diverse perspectives in the senior academic realm but it also reflects the institutional barriers faced by these communities.

The lack of representation can lead to a deficit in culturally relevant education and research, which is crucial for addressing the unique challenges faced by Māori and Pacific communities, which is the impetus for the shifts in PBRF weightings for Māori and Pacific academics. The inclusion and recognition of Māori and Pacific academic contributions within the university setting enriches the academic environment far beyond addressing equity concerns.

These contributions provide unique perspectives and insights rooted in indigenous philosophies, promoting a more holistic and interconnected understanding of the world. The contributions of these scholars challenge the predominantly Western-centric viewpoints elevated within the academy, thereby encouraging a more inclusive, diverse, and critical academic discourse. Through this review and reflection, I hope that the systemic transformations required within the institution are not only acknowledged but earnestly acted upon to ensure that the wealth of knowledge and perspectives of Māori and Pacific academics are duly valued and integrated.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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