
Vagahau Niue for Teaching and Learning
in

New Zealand Schools

School of Education

Rosa Matafenoga Kalauni

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ABSTRACT

This study employs autoethnography as the research method for exploring some of my experiences as a *tagata*¹ Niue working to support the development of *Vagahau Niue*² for learning and teaching in New Zealand schools. Four initiatives that I was involved in are described and analysed for the purpose of connecting my ethnographical story to wider cultural, political, and social implications and understandings of the struggles a minority language group undertake to survive in Aotearoa New Zealand today. In the process of undertaking the autoethnography I found that my understanding of things Niue and my perceptions of self and agency changed over time. Analysing the interactions, I had with others as part of the initiatives I was involved with showed me that cultural influences, cultural perspectives and misunderstandings can seriously impact how we see ourselves. My own story reinforces how important it is for learners to have access to their own languages and cultural heritage in education settings because of the complex relationship between language, culture and educational achievement.

¹ *Tagata Niue* refers to a person of Niue origins or a person identified as Niuean.

² *Vagahau Niue* refers to the language spoken in Niue and by people of Niuean origins

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defines in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning"

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Balan.", is enclosed within a thin black rectangular border. The signature is written in a cursive style.

20 December 2019

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³ *tulou* – refers to a humble acknowledgement of someone

⁴ *tagata Maui* – refers to a person of Māori origins.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This dissertation is a personal narrative that explores my involvement in the development of *Vagahau Niue* in the New Zealand education system. It explores four significant periods of time that were crucial to my growth as a *tagata Niue* living in New Zealand and to the development of *Vagahau Niue* for teaching and learning in New Zealand schools. The narratives outline my actions as I attempt to negotiate and look at others without judgement so as to reach a rich understanding of interactions in order to serve and contribute to my continuing commitment to the Niue community, culture and the development of the *Vagahau Niue*.

There are over 26,000 Niueans living in New Zealand. Of this group, 18% (Statistics New Zealand [SNZ], 2014) report they are speakers of *Vagahau Niue*. In 2008, *Vagahau Niue* was listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2008) as an endangered language. Some of the students in schools come from homes of the 18% who speak *Vagahau Niue*. Little is known about this group specifically in terms of academic achievement but in general Pasifika students are usually over-represented in statistics about underachievement. This dissertation is concerned with the future survival of *Vagahau Niue* in New Zealand for its own sake, but also because of the very important relationship between language, culture and educational achievement.

Ko au ko Rosa Jackson Matafenoga Kalauni Viliko

I am Rosa. I identify as a *tagata Niue* thriving in education in my adopted whenua⁵ of Aotearoa. I was born into a half cast family and raised in Niue Island, which is a small remote rock in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. I grew up surrounded by the riches of language, culture

⁵ *Whenua* refers to a country or land

and the values of island life, sprinkled with European ancestry that influenced and shaped my identity. I took for granted the importance of these influences on me as I journeyed through my teens, hungering for the opportunities and motivations beyond Niue. I left Niue at the tender age of 15, with a desire to become an architect. I had thought that the opportunities and acceptance of a female in a male dominated career would be better. I was wrong. Further education and career pathways in New Zealand proved that New Zealand was just as conservative as my little rock, Niue.

After three years of study at the University of the South Pacific, I became a teacher. It was an interesting journey into teaching. I had just turned 21 when I returned to Niue in 1983 with a degree in education and a diploma in teaching that I did not know what to do with. I reluctantly started teaching in Niue in late January the following year. I lasted two terms. Being 21, I was not ready for teaching. I returned to New Zealand thinking that I could have another go at securing an architectural degree or even a degree in civil engineering. I came up short in three areas: I did not have the pre-requisites of a school certificate B pass in the technical curriculum area, and I suspect that my gender and ethnicity may have been contributing factors. So I went back to teaching.

Fortunately, my teaching experience took a turn for the better. It went from not too bad to a 360 degrees turnaround in my 3rd year of teaching in New Zealand. This was the year after I took the *Vagahau Niue* classes from Hillary College on a trip to Niue. The growth in *Vagahau Niue* language use was evident in the learners. I felt a great sense of achievement. It motivated me to do better.

My journey as a *tagata Niue* teaching in New Zealand secondary schools began in 1987 and continues to this day. Today, I tell people that education and teaching chose me.

Niueans living in New Zealand

Today New Zealand is home to second, third and fourth generation Niueans who have braved an era of being referred to as niggers, fobs, coconuts and 'Oahuans' (Cobley, 2013). While assimilating into a way of life foreign to them, Niueans have adapted and adopted the role of continuities and process change to adjust in order to be relevant in the social, political and cultural contexts (Jones, McCulloch, Marshal, Smith and Smith. 1990).

Niueans started arriving in New Zealand in the early 1950s to work in the factories as the New Zealand economy took off post-World War 2. Prior to that, 150 Niuean volunteers, who answered the call from New Zealand, signed up with the New Zealand Armed services. They were soon deployed to join the *Māori* Battalions on the battlefields in Egypt. Since then the active presence of Niuean people were in factories, being employed as unskilled and semi-skilled labourers. As Niuean people tried to assimilate and appropriate a New Zealand way of life their language became neglected and its use irrelevant and abandoned. This abandonment of language by earlier Niuean migrants was a political phenomenon that suited their circumstances at the time and not a linguistic judgement (May, 2011). Nonetheless, the decline of its use continues and today, fewer than 11% of the Niuean in New Zealand speak *Vagahau Niue*. This language phenomenon will be further explored in the self and identity narrative in chapter 3.

By 2013 *Vagahau Niue* was spoken by only 18% of the Niuean community living in Aotearoa, an obvious decline from 23% reported in the 2011 census (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). Of the 26,000 who identified as Niueans, 79% were born in New Zealand, and to further complicate the language issue, 75% are mixed race (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). Considering that there was a 1716 (Statistics Niue, 2017) Niuean speaking population living on Niue, the 18% *Vagahau Niue* population living in New Zealand is a cause for concern.

Niueans in New Zealand schools

Very little is known about the 79% 2nd and 3rd generation New Zealand-born Niueans in compulsory education. There are no specific studies or data associated with this category of people. Identifying, examining and filtering through the ethnic and cultural influences on learners could be the important ingredient to the success of their educational outcomes. The multiple cultural identities and capitals of New Zealand born Niuean learners are complex, just as it is for other second and third generation Pasifika learners (Rubie-Davies, Peterson, Garrett & Watson, 2012). New Zealand's diverse environment of people from many different ethnicities had further complicated the learning issues for these learners in school.

The National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) success of New Zealand born and raised Niueans rests heavily on how well they navigate social, political and cultural issues. Growing up Niuean in Aotearoa sometimes means schools are foreign institutions for learners. Most are caught between the two sets of cultural values – the Niuean values that

exist in the language of Niuean homes and the societal values outside the homes they grow up in. Many are nurtured surrounded by *Vagahau Niue* and Niuean cultural values, and schools may be ill equipped or are not able to offer the cultural experiences needed to draw the best out of these learners. This is documented in the *Ua Aoina le Manogi o le Lolo* (Ministry of Education, 2009) which suggests that the learning focus needs the stimulants of ideas that are familiar to the learners to be able to make improvements and gains. With that in mind, sadly it is important to note that research based educational outcomes, learning styles knowledge and learning strategies suitable for second and third generation *Vagahau Niue* learners is still lacking.

Vagahau Niue in the New Zealand Curriculum

The first national New Zealand curriculum was established in 1993 after a comprehensive review of earlier education syllabuses and guidelines under the Achievement Initiative policy (MOE, 1993). The Ministry of Education had only officially added the 'Learning Languages area to the curriculum document which was released on the 6th November 2007 (Ministry of Education, 2007). These were designed for the English medium teaching and learning in years 1-13 (MOE, 2007).

The absence of *Vagahau Niue* in the New Zealand curriculum was noted when the initial Pasifika Education Plan (PEP) 2001 – 2005 was published for schools (Education Review Office, 2019). This was the Ministry of Education's effort in providing a strategic direction for improving educational outcomes for Pasifika learners in New Zealand. With some pressure following community consultation, a team of Niuean pulotu started writing the *Vagahau Niue* curriculum document for the New Zealand schools. In June 2005, the *Vagahau Niue* curriculum document was launched as an additional language in the Learning Languages curriculum area. It was hoped that this would continue to build the strengths of the 113 students who were learning *Vagahau Niue* in secondary schools in 2000. But by 2005 the number of *Vagahau Niue* learners had dwindled to 41 (MOE n.d). *Vagahau Niue* continues to be a language which can be offered in schools, but like all other languages in the 'Learning Languages' curriculum area, it is not compulsory.

Research Question and its significance

My guiding question for this autoethnography asks: **What are my experiences in relation to the development of the teaching and learning of *Vagahau Niue* in mainstream education?**

This autoethnography is written to explore my experiences as a *tagata Niue* in the mainstream teaching environment in New Zealand schools. These experiences will outline my contributions to the Niue community with the hope that I can further encourage others to be warriors of cultural identity. I am of the belief that the foundations I have helped establish will one day grow to help the next generations of Niueans find their voices and reaffirm their identities as *tagata Niue* living in Aotearoa. It is important that generations of Niueans are encouraged to develop the confidence they need to embrace their cultural distinctiveness and acknowledge that it matters.

My study is framed around concepts of self, language and culture using the autoethnography method. I will outline my journey into developing *Vagahau Niue* in the New Zealand education system and explore the impact it has on my identity (Reed Danahay, 1997). To ascertain the influence of language on identity and achievements in education as seen in the works of Franken, May & McCormish (2009), I will closely examine the events that influence the changes I went through, the political positioning of *Vagahau Niue* in Aotearoa, and the outcomes for second and third generation Niuean learners in New Zealand schools.

The study is significant as there is no available research about *Vagahau Niue* in the context of New Zealand education. This will be the first of its kind and as such, it is important that this story be told. The many challenges I faced as a person with a standing in the Niuean community will outline the work being undertaken in margins common and may be familiar to those in minority groups.

Chapter overview

This dissertation examines four significant periods of time that were crucial to my growth as a contributing *tagata Niue* living in Aotearoa and to the development of *Vagahau Niue* for teaching and learning in New Zealand schools. It is organised into seven chapters and consists of an introduction, the description of the methodology, the literature review, the four critical experiences and a conclusion.

The first chapter focuses on the background and context of this study followed by the research question. This investigation study draws attention to the significance of my experiences in pertaining to the development of teaching and learning *Vagahau Niue* in

mainstream education.

Chapter 2 presents a critical literature review on culture and identity and their relationship to achievement outcomes for learners. The literature review identifies and highlights some of the challenges for a minority group in mainstream education. Included in this chapter is a description of the methodology used for this study.

Chapter 3 explores what it means to have a strong cultural identity as an educator. This chapter is a collection of expressions and reactions to experiences and events that helped reclaim my identity as a strong *fifine*⁷ *Niue* teaching *Vagahau Niue* in a secondary school in Auckland. This story is the awakening to the idea of language revival and revitalizing the awareness of cultural identity.

Chapter 4 is an investigation of strategies that helped me grow leadership skills and strengths to pursue other avenues for *Vagahau Niue* outside the traditional classroom. It was a time of struggle where social and political tensions in my place of work further compounded the rules of collegial engagement. Sometimes the pushbacks were more to do with political issues surrounding language use in both English and in *Vagahau Niue*. To achieve the goal of implementing a *Vagahau Niue* programme, I had to step outside compulsory schooling to enable the development of *Vagahau Niue* in the community setting.

Chapter 5 examines my experiences in the writing of the first *Vagahau Niue* curriculum document for the New Zealand Learning Languages curriculum area. I titled this chapter 'Reshaping *Vagahau Niue*'s Language Identity' because I believe that a simple translation of a foreign language into *Vagahau Niue* defeats the purpose of the document that is supposed to teach *Vagahau Niue* in its entirety. This narrative explores challenges of using language that is inclusive of cultural elements, and principles of bilingualism and values that are important for identity. The approach by the Ministry of Education at the time was to translate existing languages curriculum documents and these lack the very essence of what makes Niue and its language unique.

Chapter 6 presents an account that examines different attitudes and different perceptions of leadership. It inspects aspects that challenge what I call my 'cultural leadership identity'. The narrative in this chapter relates moments of victory peppered with the discomfort of being challenged as a cultural and community leader. The invisible and

⁷ *Fifine* refers to a female person in *Vagahau Niue*

unknown facet of a community leader in the secular sense is founded in the ignorance and perceptions of those foreign to the cultural idea of a community leader. In this case, a community leader is not a role one seeks, rather it is born out of respect in recognition of someone's ability, whose presence commands mana and effects community mobilisation.

Chapter 7 draws together some of the themes that have emerged in the previous chapters. It outlines possible guidelines for future development of teaching and learning *Vagahau Niue* in New Zealand schools with reference to concepts of identity, culture and language.

CHAPTER 2 – METHODOLOGY & LITERATURE REVIEW

Methodology

An autoethnography is a study of culture and self (Chang, 2008) whereby subjects recount events that impact on the way they behave and how they relate to others. This is supported by Ellis's definition of autoethnography as, 'auto' to mean self, 'ethno' as culture and 'graphy' to mean to write (2004). This explains that an autoethnography is a qualitative research method that presents narratives of experiences and people that surround the subject at the time. It is further explained by Chang (2008) as a variety of narrative inquiries that researchers use to 'utilize ethnographic methods to bring cultural interpretation to the autobiographical data of researchers with the intent of understanding self and its connection to others' (p. 56). In a similar school of thought, Ellis (2004) also describes this research method as an inquiry that connects the autobiographical and personal to cultural, social and political experiences.

This study examines four different events which occurred as part of my work towards supporting the development of *Vagahau Niue* in New Zealand. It will also invite readers to join my journey of self-reflection whilst advancing *Vagahau Niue* in the New Zealand education system. These events will be described and analysed for the purpose of connecting this ethnographical story to a wider cultural, political, and social implications. It will also share understandings of the struggles a minority language embarks on to survive in Aotearoa New Zealand today. The following four chapters consist of recounts and analysis of experiences befitting the time in which they occurred. The first narrative is focused on my Hillary College *Vagahau Niue* teaching experience. The next chapter outlines the occurrences during the time of writing the initial *Vagahau Niue* curriculum for schools in New Zealand. The narrative in the third chapter focuses on experiences in leading Pasifika literacy professional development at Aorere College while exploring possibilities for *Vagahau Niue* beyond formal classroom settings. The last chapter expresses views about the challenges I encountered as a

community leader while working through the *Vagahau Niue* unit standards from the initial inception to the review that took place in 2019.

The purpose of this research is to explore self-awareness and make connections with culture and relating to others in a diverse society. Culture is commonly defined as a set of behaviours that explain and different groups of people. Chang (2008) described this as an instructional tool to articulate ideas on practices to 'gain profound understanding of self and others and function more effectively with others from diverse cultural backgrounds' (p. 13). Agar (2006) on the other hand described cultural understanding as being able to function fluidly in a complex society. It is understood that this examines the relationships between people with the same patterns of behaviour, therefore, this dissertation is about finding myself in the context of others where negotiations can be either gains or inconveniences. The complexities of interacting, making connections and collaborating with others in this autoethnography provides an insight into the negotiations of complex dilemmas. The way around the social, the cultural and political relationships therein are complicated and multi dimensional.

This study may not be in favour of symbiotic relationships between *Vagahau Niue* and culture which people are affected by, therefore the structure by which any identity discussed in this study may falter from a structure of culture. The constructions of interactive communication and meaning making may play the subject of this study such as that described by Chang (2008) in *Autoethnography as method*. The analysis of experiences and interpretations of the narratives and descriptions encountered in this research will be looked at as a cultural verstehen (Weber cited in Chang 2008) to show where my actions attempted to look at others without judgement. This I believe will attain a richer understanding of interactions that are useful to serve in my ongoing commitment to community, to culture and to the development of *Vagahau Niue*.

My story is unique. It is a story of hardship framed around the development of *Vagahau Niue* and culture using the autoethnography method. It elaborates on the concepts of cultures I embrace as a web of self and others (Chang, 2008) when trying to find myself in transnational spaces (Nibbs & Brettell, 2016) between the geographical locations of New Zealand and Niue.

The following section reviews the literature in areas of significance to this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between language and identity

According to research language and identity go hand in hand (May, 2014; Anae, 1998; McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2016; Te Huia, 2017). This is crucial when one examines the conflicting experiences that exist within mainstream education for it plays a role that either add value or marginalise an individual or groups of people. A study by McCaffery (2016) recognises that identity and language are the driving factors of success for our Pasifika learners. These are important aspects to consider when targeting strategies towards improving outcomes for them and the communities they belong in. This thinking recognizes that attitude towards identity and language are critical to the progress of *Vagahau Niue* and its position as a realm language.

The Pasifika Education Plan (PEP) had been criticized as ineffective in addressing the identity and language issues for Pasifika learners. The PEP (2013), PEP (2017) and the Learning Language Guide by the Ministry of Education (2002) failed to acknowledge the importance of maintenance and support for heritage languages as minority languages in Aotearoa. The absence of official programmes to assess using the Best Evidence research was noted in McCaffery's (2006) pilot study on building bilingual pedagogical through critical action research. It explores the effectiveness and potential of bilingual programmes to raise Pacific students' academic achievements. This also highlighted the absence of critical factors for bilingualism in the PEP document. The point of contention was that such a bilingual programme would have contained costs and the need to provide the desired research evidence would require time, effort and expertise. The monitoring report (2015) had also picked up on a gap in the PEPs suggesting but these largely ignored the importance of the identity of a learner. The Ministry of

Education had instead focused and emphasized on learning another language which is often a language other than a learner's heritage language.

A learners capital wealth is another important factor that the Ministry of Education ignored in the PEP documents despite the 2013 vision to see, "Five out of five Pasifika learners participating, engaging, and achieving in education secure in their identities, languages, and cultures, and contributing fully to Aotearoa New Zealand's social, cultural, and economic wellbeing" (Ministry of Education, 2013). The importance of identity and cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) would be appropriate to consider according to Cahill (2006) as this will also allow students to experience success. With positive learning experiences, learners should be able to confidently navigate successful pathways forward and further develop conditions for strong and successful Pasifika communities where opportunities and engagement (Harkess, Murray Parkin & Dalgety, 2005) are pragmatic and meaningful to individual learners.

Another relationship between language and identity is the collective identities (May, 2014) or the generic ethnic identification (Yosso, 2005). McCaffery (2010) describes this grouping as the pooling together according to their geographical location, eg the Pasifika peoples of Aotearoa. This relationship needs to be further examined if further understanding is given importance (Bishop, 2008), in particular, the collective Pasifika data in NCEA. Statistics had continued to show us pictures of underachievement (MOE, 2015). Rather than a collective identity and generic regional identity, Pasifika data needs to be more specific for each ethnic group. A good example is that of the 90% Niuean learners who left Niue High School at the end of 2018 attained NCEA level 3 certificate (Togahai, 2018). This by far is a great success compared to the 28.7% of all Pasifika school leavers in New Zealand who left High school with NCEA level 3 in the same year (MOE 2015). In addition, 18.3% Pasifika learners left high school with less than a National Certificate of educational Achievement at level 1 that year. The Niue example had highlighted that these students can do better. The figures may not be comparable, but these signal the need for detailed analysis of each ethnic groups.

A more meaningful data could emerge if figures are to break away from the collective identities we are pooled in. It would be helpful to support a collection of learning experiences that may give the best possible approach to essentially make a change for learning outcomes of students in each Pasifika ethnic groups. Sweeping statements like 'Achievement Through Pasifika Cultures and Languages' (MOE, 2012) that used to launch the Ministry's Pasifika Education Plans appeared to deliver a message of collectivism and tokenism with a few buzz words to make schools believe that these will serve our Pasifika learners.

Language and Educational Outcomes

A review of research in education by May in 2014 supports the notion that literacy in any first language influences the quality of learning by tapping into the patterns in which we think and process information. Most importantly it embraces identity and a person's sense of belonging. It also affirms that culturally connected education enriches a child's thinking and therefore increases opportunities for learning and achievement in learners (MOE, 2012). This is the thrust that saw the Ministry of Education developing the idea of bilingual education in ECE. Findings by the Education Review Office (ERO) in 2018 show improvement in learning outcomes for Pasifika learners in Pacific ECE services in critical and creative. These are essential for success according to McCaffery and et al (2003). To succeed in education, students need to have strong oracy in their heritage language as a basis for developing literacy and thinking skills (MOE, 2003).

The expectation is that there must be a more productive approach to teaching and learning for Pasifika learners as seen in the Pasifika Education Mentoring Report (2015). It suggests that an absence of a more direct effort to teach Pasifika Languages effectively in schools is the contributing factor in underachievement of Pasifika learners. The removal of the specific language targets from the Pasifika Education Plan (PEP) in 2013 advocates that the Ministry of Education does not value the place of Pasifika languages in education and that these languages do not have a significant importance over the languages of economics. This is despite the findings of McCaffery and Tuafuti (2017), May (2009), Kahakalau (2012) that strongly suggest that literacy proficiencies in the first language help advance learning. A strategic goal of first language literacy was significantly missing from the curriculum framework but is an important element to consider for the PEP.

The PEP goal for the period of 2013 to 2017 is to,

"... to achieve optimum learning by promoting closer alignment and compatibility between: the learner's educational environment, and their home and/or cultural environment, so that communities, education providers and services, are using their individual, collective and cultural connections and affiliations to work together towards better outcomes and better results" (PEP 2013-2017. P3)

The educational outcomes and the negative Pasifika achievement results suggests that these did not deliver what it purport to serve. Results from NCEA roll based year 13 students

attaining university entrance during this period shows a progression of 34.9% in 2013, 28.9% in 2014, 29.5% in 2015, 30.7% in 2016 to 32.3% at the end of 2017 (NZQA, 2018).

With the PEP, the assumption, and the expectation that learning strategies support the 'one size fits all' practice is good for all learners (Wilkinson, 1998). Furthermore, the Ministry of Education had also highlighted the significance of knowing the learners in the classroom. This suggests that the Ministry of Education expects teachers to learn more about individual learners without giving them the tools on how to do this successfully. I believe that a learner's 'language of the heart' is important factor to consider. It has failed to deliver.

Racism and system construction are also critical factors to consider when dealing with agency and learners as individuals. The epistemological understanding of the learners in the classrooms is the approach McCaffery (2010) suggested as critical in creating a reflective learning environment for all learners. Bishop, (2008), Youngs, (2007) and May, (2014) suggested that the ethnocentric views and neo-liberal influences appear to be serving our Pasifika learners to become productive people of Aotearoa but these do not serve all learners of Pasifika backgrounds. To be aware of such learning disparities, information and data on race, cultural practices and cultural values merit further analysis. With the current achievement statistics for Pasifika learners in general (Harkess & et al, 2005), it is an area to think about in research (Amituanai-Toloo, McNaughton, Lai & Airini, 2009).

Another dimension that this could be further explored to progress positive outcomes for learners of Niue descent can be enhanced through the learnings from the *Māori* experience. Bishop (2008) defines Māori bilingual practice as having valuable knowledge by simplifying the commodifying elements that develop more meaningful classroom experiences. Bishop (2008) also argues that there are aspects in a system that enable students to access further capital and to create an enabling environment where learners reform social and cultural capitals to thrive.

The ideas above are used and extended in the following chapters as I analyse my experiences. The transitional spaces I am privileged to experience had allowed me to navigate the historical, political, social and cultural connections (Adams, Ellis & Jones, 2014; Chang, 2008) for the best responsible approach towards empowerment and self confidence. It also allowed me to explore, examine and investigate events in my journey with *Vagahau Niue* in the New Zealand education system. It had significantly impacted on my identity and how this *gahua* enabled me to explore my 'self' (Reed-Danahay, 1997). To ascertain the influence of

language (Franken, May & McComish, 2009) on my identity and achievements in the New Zealand education system, herein is a close examination of events that encouraged my personal growth as a *tagata Niue* and the changes in a position for *Vagahau Niue* in New Zealand schools.

CHAPTER 3 – Reviving my cultural identity

Rediscovering my Niue-ness through teaching Vagahau Niue

Introduction

This chapter discusses events that brought me to the realisation that language and culture are important components of ones' identity. It is about a young teacher whose cultural identity came into question and the impact of her Niue-ness on her then existing set of beliefs and values. *Vagahau Niue* walked her down the known and yet unknown path in the margins of mainstream education in New Zealand. What a Niue person should be, could be and would be sets a backdrop that shapes the journey she took as each challenge brought understanding and empathy. She was grabbing with her own identity. I am this teacher. The experiences discussed in this chapter are centered around the theme of who I am and what *Vagahau Niue* and culture means to me. My experiences in teaching *Vagahau Niue* at Hillary College (as it was known then) wove together my sanitised version of cultural 'self' with new understanding of what it meant to stand tall and introduce myself as a *tagata Niue*.

The beginning of my journey

In 1989 I was interviewed for a Mathematics position at Hillary College (now Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate) in Otara. Sitting across the table from the then-Principal that afternoon, I listened as he spoke enthusiastically about his vision for Hillary College to be the only secondary school in the country to offer five Pacific languages – Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island Māori, Niuean and *te reo Māori*⁹. It sounded amazing, but his next question made me uncomfortable. "Would you be interested in teaching *Vagahau Niue*?", he asked.

The idea of teaching *Vagahau Niue* both excited and intimidated me. Excited because of my Niuean upbringing. *Vagahau Niue* was my first language, and the chance to do something brand new so early in my teaching career was intimidating. This would be new territory and was unheard of. Later discussions with one of my community *matua*¹⁰ brought on new energy and

⁹ *te reo Māori* – refers to one of the official languages of Aoteroa spoken by the people of the land

enthusiasm. I was made to believe that it was a privilege to walk into such an opportunity. I was overwhelmed but was ready to accept it. The intimidation I felt at the time was rooted in my Niuean upbringing where *Vagahau Niue* was discouraged at school. I come from a *hafakasi*¹¹ family and had left Niue as a young teen, a crucial time for identity development. In New Zealand, I surrounded by friends and adults of predominantly European heritage. I became a 'sanitised' Niuean, walking and talking *Palagi*¹² and had succeeded educationally with a degree from the University of Auckland and a teaching diploma from the Auckland College of Education. These academic qualifications were rare for a *tagata Niue* at the time so, while I was considered successful in my Niuean environment, I was almost completely Pākehā-fied by the time I began teaching at Hillary College. My friends were Palagi, my work ethic was Palagi, even my time management was *Palagi*! The professional challenge I confronted made me realise that I had drifted away from my *Vagahau Niue*, my Niuean community and my culture.

This came to me as I stood before my year 9 class on my first day as a *Vagahau Niue* teacher. Why wouldn't I feel intimidated? I was lost for words. No amount of preparation would have covered me that day. The introductions went reasonably well, the DO NOW task, the learning intentions and the lesson outcome failed miserably. On reflection, the beginning lesson was too ambitious. My planning had ill considered the language levels and the language needs of the learners in my first class. I realised that this class was not going to be a total immersion experience in *Vagahau Niue* nor would the year 10 class. The lapse introduced me to bilingual education that evening. The next day, I ran a survey in English and the learner responses from the survey showed interest in oracy and traditional practices. This gave me hope and I changed my approach. The next lesson was getting learners familiar with the production of letter sounds. Armed with a guitar, an *ukulele* and a hollowed-out tree trunk, I had the instruments needed for more sound production. The new approach was to learn *Vagahau Niue* through songs. In contrast to the first lesson, it was a huge success. From then on, I knew I was going to love teaching this class.

Intimidation and Fear

Intimidation and fear were part of the emotional context which I stepped into at Hillary, and I did not fully appreciate the mammoth challenges I was to face almost immediately. Firstly, it

¹⁰ *Matua* – refers to one who is mature and is respected for wisdom experiences of having lived a long life.

¹¹ *Hafakasi* – refers to those who are mixed blood – A *Vagahau Niue* transliteration of 'half caste'

¹² *Palagi* – a reference to a person of fair skin with European origins. Palagi in *Vagahau Niue* means 'derived from the sky'

was the year Hillary College was to host the ASB Auckland Secondary Schools Polyfestival¹³. (This event will be referred to as Polyfest in this dissertation). Being the only Niuean on staff, I was thrust on to the Polyfest *komiti whakahaere*¹⁴ to coordinate the sixteen secondary schools registered to perform on the Niuean stage that year. Secondly, I was preparing our own school's five-item cultural performance for Polyfest which is always time-consuming and stressful. This was compounded by the fact that I was limited on that front too. And thirdly, I was the sole *Vagahau Niue* teacher in the entire country. I found nothing more intimidating than that. I was designing a *Vagahau Niue* programme for Years 9 and 10, and the anxiety of writing it without the guidance of a proper curriculum was overwhelming. Self-doubt set in, as the uncomfortable moments outnumbered the victorious feelings in the many social and political fronts I encountered. The fear of failure and disappointment were my driving energy.

I took on the job of teaching *Vagahau Niue* at Hillary College with an expectation that there would be unsupportive behavior and hostility from different groups of people. This was the start of my journey to experiences and realisations about education, identity and connection with others in the teaching arena. At the same time, a couple of appalling incidents in my community caught my attention. In one, a Pasifika teenager was held on the ground and the words FOB spray painted on his stomach. In another, a NZ Herald headline proclaimed that Pasifika learners were underachieving in general. There was an added dimension of the consistent onslaught of derogatory comments and name calling in the wider society such as 'FOBs' (fresh off the boat), 'coconuts' and 'niggers' to name a few.

Drawing strength from others

At the same time, I was comforted by the approach of Polynesian activists who used brains and strategy as a form of protest exemplified in the history of Polynesian Panthers. It was a dark winter's day and I had had a pretty rough day, so reading about the affirmative actions by the Polynesian Panthers piqued my interest. Their movement fascinated me. I admired their bravery and their fearlessness. Investigations into the Polynesian Panthers' activities was a turning point for me. I found myself thinking about my students and wondering

¹³ ASB Auckland Secondary Schools Polyfest is an annual Pasifika cultural event for secondary school students. Schools compete against each other for awards that recognise cultural items that are specific to each island group. There are 5 performing stages, one for each of the Pasifika culture groups (Māori, Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga & Niue). I will be referring to this event as the Polyfest in this dissertation.

¹⁴ *Komiti whakahaere* is a group consisted of representatives from Pasifika islands who manage and co-ordinate the Polyfest event on behalf of the Principals Association.

what contributions they could make to society beyond secondary school. From then on, I was determined to find ways around the education framework that would provide long term benefit for *Vagahau Niue* learners. Armed with planning skills, I started designing the programme based on themes using topics of cultural practices, arts and crafts, performing arts, and cultural sports. That is it! I told myself, as I fearlessly stepped outside the box. The second year we kicked off term 1 with learning *Vagahau Niue* through song and dance, term 2 with arts and crafts, term 3 was a heavily reading and writing unit of work grounded on cultural practices, and term 4 designed for summer with cultural sports. During that time, I was never short of community support. Niuean People from the community would voluntarily appear during class time to help with learners. I welcomed the outpour of skills support to help with vocabulary drill exercises, to songs and to prepare traditional dishes. I had found a magic combination!

I was making headways with my teaching programmes, and the coming together of the Niue community. The niggling side issue of self doubt from experiences in my first year of teaching *Vagahau Niue* became less and less prominent. Throughout that year I had to contend with the whispers and overt use of phrases my community crowned me with. In the Niuean community, there has always been a struggle with who is a true Niuean, and the Otara Niuean community made sure I knew it. The echoes of “not a true Niuean”, “a *fia palagi*”, “plastic Niuean”, “she’s a half caste, we can’t expect much”, that had been ringing in my ears began to slowly fade away as I grew more fearless in my approach to fostering cultural identity in my learners. I grew a determination to prove them wrong. I started spending time with a grassroots weaving group of elders in the weekends and accepted invitations to Niuean events. I was excited and still intimidated, but I was in.

The school trip to Niue

One target I had set in my first year at Hillary College was to take my *Vagahau Niue* classes to Niue because all but one of the learners was either a second or third generation New Zealander. After months of fund-raising activities, fifteen very excited students, one overwhelmed young teacher and seven parent supporters flew to Niue during the October holidays. Some of these parents had left Niue when they were young, so students were not the only ones going through this identity discovery. The trip fed their hunger for self-knowledge and further developed relationships with those in their *Vagahau Niue* environment.

I had not fully appreciated how this trip would impact on the students and accompanying adults. All were spoiled with cultural activities like *uga*¹⁵ baiting and hunting, taro planting, and collecting *kai moana*¹⁶. Most importantly we were learning from visits to cultural historical sites where participants made links between the histories and new information.

Analysis

After five years, the learners who started with me began to master conversational language. Being able to speak *Vagahau Niue* was a personal reward for their time and effort. The classes had provided a solid foundation on which the learners could continue to build on their *Vagahau Niue*, a language central to their identity (Baker, 2006; Cummins, 2000; May, 2009; Tuafuti & McCaffery, 2005). One challenge for learners was the lack of opportunity to make use of the language since most were often not exposed to fluent *Vagahau Niue* speakers. This reflected in the plight of migrants from the 1950s and 60s. Many were discouraged from speaking the language or felt that competence in English is of higher importance than maintaining their mother tongue.

I had spent the best part of my first year at Hillary College studying attitudes of others towards Pasifika. I watched, listened and took note of actions exhibit by my own people in the Niuean community as well as those in the hierarchy in education. I noted behaviours that I would now deem as a tearing down of ethnic identity. Micro-aggressions coming from colleagues were often not helpful, such as when organising cultural activities associated with Pasifika communities. The use of the phrase “their thing” by colleagues always gets me. It was one of the most unsupportive statements I have had to deal with. The term ‘their thing’ denotes a distancing from participation and not offering support. My Niuean identity was continually challenged in this manner, and being confronted with such unkindness, over time these minor aggressions began to erode at the very core values I hold so dear.

¹⁵ *Uga* – a coconut land crab. It is a popular delicacy of the people on Niue. It is now a protected species that there is a ban of its importation.

¹⁶ *Kai moana* – refers to sea-shells and crustaceans collected from the reef for the purpose of consumption.

Another element of challenge was the general public perception of Pasifika people as passive and who appear to place very little value on their own languages and cultures (Si'ilata & Barkhuizen 2004). McCaffery (2005) explains this as the internalisation of English as the language of education. The implications of these behaviours and attitudes warn us of the danger we have placed ourselves in by chasing the dream of success in a free land. We have had to learn to relate to others in a dominantly Eurocentric society in a way that will gain us acceptance, rather than in a way in which we can advance ourselves. This acceptance retained Niuean values as secondary to Eurocentric values and ideas. As a people we need to examine this internalisation of acceptance (McCaffery 2005) for it do not give value to who we are as a people (Si'ilata & Barkhuizen 2004). Historically we were taught to not make a fuss about things, and I believe this is the birthplace of our lack of self-confidence, shyness and the lack of belief in our abilities that give us the reputation as a passive group of people.

During my time at Hillary College I realised that I needed to work with others in my Niuean community to recraft our social and personal positions to enable change (Noels, 2009) like the progress made by others before us such as that made by Polynesian Panthers of the 70s and 80s. Through the inspiration of the actions by the Polynesian Panthers, many Pasifika people were able to free the shackles of 'secondary-ness'. The echoes of this lack of self-belief was reflected in actions of earlier Pasifika people accepting the situations they were in, resigned to the factory occupations, maintaining their position in low paid jobs and getting by on minimum wages. The words of one young female Panther echoed sentiment that Pasifika people should adopt awareness of our own abilities to improve our situations:

"If I hadn't joined the Panthers, I wouldn't have become aware... I would have been the quiet Pacific Island person in the corner, that sort of 'yes sir'" (Anae, Tamu & Iuli, 2015, p. 38).

For this reason, I am grateful for the experiences at Hillary College for they allowed me the autonomy to explore the curriculum in the New Zealand education setting.

The phenomenon of assimilation, we termed '*fia Palagi*', is best described as a Pasifika person in a deficit position (McCaffery and McFall-McCaffery 2005; Helu-Thaman, 2002). We can still observe this today in our communities. I had often have conversations with Niueans in New Zealand who feel the uncertainty and self-doubt of who they are. They carry a sense of shortfall with our own language and culture and identities that negotiate their modern world (Helu-Thaman, 2002). We were made to feel the shame of being different because we ill prepared ourselves to fit in. There was always the self defeating laments of, we were not white enough

and we speak a different brand of English. This feeling of shame is the basis of discussion in Chapter 4.

The activities and strategies I put into place at Hillary College in 1990 were designed to support the role of self, language and culture. These are important elements in the lives of our young learners as these secure an internalisation of who he or she is. Without these, we are unable to project confidence in who we are. Gibbons (1993), an advocate for empowerment, refers to language and identity as values that I now consider too important to be left in the hands of the powerful. To empower our young people, we need to help them recognise self, the identities they hold and the cultures that define them (Anae, Tamu & Iuli, 2015; Smith, 1998; McCaffery, 2005; Noels, 2009).

This resonated for me with my own identity crisis of '*fia palagi*', which McCaffery & McFall-McCaffery (2005) characterised as the 'societal deficit construct' of Pasifika peoples and languages in New Zealand. It was a construct formed out of boundaries where I belong as a *tagata Niue*, with *Vagahau Niue* as my language, Niuean as my ethnicity and geographically someone from the Pacific. The sense of self in relation to the group of people defined by the above boundaries paralleled that of Chang (2016) who believes that someone who associates culture with a group of people within a geographic locality and who speaks the language of that place form their construct of belonging. For me, these created an environment where I felt I had to leave parts of me behind to 'get ahead'. I was internalising the idea that English, as the language of economics, is the dominant force I needed to get ahead (Anae, 2001) in the society I was part of.

Bombardment by the negative perceptions of Pasifika people was a constant reminder that to get ahead I had to shed my Niuean-ness. Being *Pākehā-fied*, or becoming Palagi-like, meant I lost contact with my island community. I rarely attended community events held on behalf of, and for, Niuean generations. I had forgotten the 'taste' of Niue, I was living on English grammar, having breakfast, lunch, and dinner on *Pākehā* social etiquette and performing in professional attire. I was deeply rooted in a social-constructionist approach to culture, a stereotypical 'societal deficit construct' thinking (Newton, Yates, Shearn & Nowitzki 2007), like many other Niueans I knew. On the other hand, an attitude of openness to diversity and willingness to engage with others moved me further away from ethnocentrism in identity construction that is valid and valued (Bennett, Bennett & Allen, 2003).

The challenge of using language to reaffirm the principle of identity through learning *Vagahau Niue* in the classroom or establishing a sense of self through Polyfest activities was

frightening. Teaching second and third generation Niuean learners who were conversing, thinking, and even dreaming in English was a challenge. I was an average *Vagahau Niue* speaker with realistic expectations for my learners, but it was difficult to know where to start. While most of the learners understood *Vagahau Niue* to some extent, the situation was far from the bilingual aspirations we had for our programme. Many learners arrived in my classroom with limited linguistic resources to unpack new learning. Their exposure to multi-phrase speech, and code switching in *Vagahau Niue* was the norm.

Moving from total immersion English classes to a bilingual classroom gifted me the opportunity to be an agent of collaborative creation, empowering learners to be enthusiastic about bilingual education. Ellis's (1991, 1993) principles of instructed language learning were the guideline for developing a bilingual education programme in *Vagahau Niue*, aiming to engage the learners without them feeling intimidated. Their own cultural, linguistic and intellectual capitals were valuable resources that they brought with them, rather than being considered problems to be solved. It took me three years to show value added to learning when these capitals were embraced, and another two years to fully understand the role of culture and identity in learning. This was clear for all involved on this journey with me when one of my *Vagahau Niue* students ascended the stairs to the stage to receive the Hillary College Dux Award. It was a moment that brought the Niuean community together, where praise and celebration of achievement is one and same.

The trip to Niue was an exciting venture for the school group. The learners I was working with inspired and motivated me to expose them to where language lives, breathes and is spoken in its natural environment. For the students, it was an exciting learning opportunity; for the parents, it was the realisation that *Vagahau Niue* can be as important as, or in some cases more important than English. It was a journey of revitalisation, maintenance, reconnection and preservation of the *taoga*¹⁷ central to their identity (Newton & et al 2007). It was where culture resides according to Chang (2016). Our journey of self-discovery and empowerment through rich experiences started on this trip. It was a valuable opportunity for parents and learners on the trip to relate to their surroundings and further develop their abilities and confidence to embrace their identity.

¹⁷ *Taoga* refers to something precious, a treasure

Conclusion

My experiences at Hillary College brought about a realisation that duality could bring greater benefits. On reflection, I absolutely love the catch phrase 'blessed with bilingual brains' as uplifting and affirmative. It came down to a sense of belonging and having agency of choice. Cultural identity is supposed to be the heart that necessitates social connectedness, and yet I had many years trying to fit the mold of another cultural identity. That was before Hillary College and the realisation that breaking away from that mold would yield power that I never thought I could have. On reflection, the trip to Niue was one of the most rewarding and intense experiences of my teaching career.

My struggles at the time were in framing the diminishing and disempowering effects of living in a multicultural society. Sometimes the strategies used were challenging and confronting but they brought about change in attitude and behaviour to recognise and value contributions for all learners and parent groups. With these actions visibly effective in some corners of social development I was encouraged, and so were many in the communities I served. Making small gains, and seeing that a community can overcome some struggles, made me brave.

We needed support. Our heritage language was waving a slow farewell; our identities were at risk. We had allowed others to give us permission to place limits on ourselves. It made us afraid to step out of our comfort zone. But the active strategies implemented at Hillary College that were widely supported by the school and the wider community were empowering. In growing a strong cultural, social and political identity, the experiences had strengthened my resolve to further develop strategies that embraced cultural values and grow strong Niuean identities.

CHAPTER 4 – Struggling with my political identity

Vagahau Niue in the New Zealand curriculum

Introduction

This chapter discusses the issues I encountered while in the process of writing the first *Vagahau Niue* curriculum document in 2003. Experiences at Hillary College had positioned me as knowledgeable with curriculum design and equipped me with skills for effective learning approaches so that I could contribute confidently to this work. I had wanted the curriculum document to reflect the cultural dimensions, but it was not to be. This chapter examines the negotiations and discussions that took place in the writing process and the absence of celebrations I had hoped to gain for our youth who lamented the dreams of our early Niuean migrants. The foci in this chapter are challenges associated with cultural pedagogy, inequity and the dichotomy of Polynesian issues.

Culture Counts

In 2003 the Ministry of Education (MOE) was holding a community consultation *fono*¹⁸ where an announcement was made that there was funding allocated to develop Pasifika Languages curriculum documents. It was well received. I had attended this *fono* with an open mind. In that cold hall in a winters evening, a shift in the MOE's goals for Pasifika was quite evident. The announcement suggested that attitudes towards bilingualism were more open and receptive to change. To my joy, this meant the future of Pasifika languages will have the inclusion of *Vagahau Niue* in the New Zealand curriculum. It was a move that added a welcome layer of acceptance and integration.

An existing small group of Niuean teachers, some of whom were present at the *fono* got together after the meeting and began discussing ideas and values of culture counts. Filled with anticipation and excitement for our *Vagahau Niue* learners we approached the change with a plethora of suggestions. After this meeting, four of us educators of Niue background met with

¹⁸ *Fono* refers to a gathering, meeting or a get together to discuss concerning matters common to a group of people.

representatives from the Ministry of Education to further explore their intentions and offer our views and ideas for the planned *Vagahau Niue* curriculum document. Soon an invitation to a writing workshop arrived in the mail from the Ministry of Education. “I’m excited” I told my Principal when I applied for leave. I joined two other educators on the *Vagahau Niue* curriculum document panel for a first workshop day.

The Cultural inequities

We commenced with optimism that this work would help support our *Vagahau Niue* learners to achieve better in education but the excitement of finally feeling accepted, recognised and valued was soon dissipated. Rather than a process that reflects the position I held regarding *Vagahau Niue* and where it sits in the curriculum framework, we were quickly drowned in the undercurrents of ‘second-ness’. We sat through session after session on language progressions and elements of language. We talked with enthusiasm about a document that would acknowledge and show appreciation of students’ cultural heritage in a New Zealand classroom. We explored possibilities to develop culturally responsive pedagogy and be inclusive with the language medium of exchange. But sadly, we were simply asked to translate content from the German and Spanish curriculum. The frustration for me was an absence of the cultural elements and values that *Vagahau Niue* carries. Instead, a *palagi* was telling us how to write in our language. I was uneasy about this inequity as the content had no relevance to Niue concepts of value. The framework we were made to work with did not, and could not, do what it was supposed to do. It was a difficult task trying to shape Niuean concepts into a different school of thought, different language structures, different cultural concepts and different ways of expressing ideas.

In the absence of cultural pedagogy, I was torn between ‘being right’ and ‘be grateful’. I was constantly reminding myself to be grateful that a genuine opportunity had presented itself to put in place bilingual strategies towards addressing the cultural and identity issues relating to Niuean learners. I was excited about a document that could be used as a tool to recognise Niuean learner’s prior knowledge. Within this work bubble we looked at different ways of processing cultural concepts, whereby these would not only be documented but also recognised. We explored the ways in which different linguistic systems affect the thought systems and cultural behaviour of language users (McCaffery 2005).

But the reality was that working through the Pasifika Education Plan (PEP), the German curriculum documents and the Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) documents, we were none the wiser about the goals for *Vagahau Niue*. Expedience and efficiency were the emphasis for the task. Time and money seemed to be the deciding factors and we were left in a dilemma. Should we follow directives from the power source and secure a *Vagahau Niue* curriculum or push ahead with what we believed was the right thing to do at the risk of losing the support of the MOE. Humility won the day and we *fakatulou*¹⁹ to the offer on the table despite it not feeling right. It was an imbalance that we as a group wrestled with throughout the writing process.

The cultural imbalances

The first example of this inequity was when the MOE advisor insisted that we include a topic on technology. His explanation was that it was current at the time and popular among our learners. In English and German, perhaps yes, but in *Vagahau Niue* it was very difficult to express. The sample piece of writing we were given to translate was on technology and social media, but *Vagahau Niue* as a language did not have the words needed to translate the content. At the risk of compromising the writing workshop and the MOE funding, our objection was noted but not favoured. As an alternative I offered stories to do with hair cutting ceremonies in New Zealand, explaining that this cultural practice is different to the form that is practiced on Niue. Despite receiving a lukewarm reception, these eventually became exemplars across the Curriculum Levels 1 – 8. Aligning this change with the content in other languages was an interesting turning point for all three of us writers on the panel but it also felt a bit like dissecting and brutalising the inner core of my identity.

The second example of this inequity was translating concepts from English that are foreign to the *Vagahau Niue*. When this happens, the introduced idea does not yield the same understanding in a cultural context. The concept of ‘a happy family’, for example, illustrates this inequity. It generated a wide range of possible translations but none of them satisfy the true meaning of ‘a happy family’ as it is understood in English. The cultural dimension and understanding of this concept was unclear in the Niuean cultural context, as *Vagahau Niue* acknowledges sadness as part of life, and in order to live a fulfilled life one must embrace all emotions. The tacit understanding in ‘a happy family’ suggests that there is ongoing joy in this

¹⁹ fakatulou – humbly accepted

family; *Vagahau Niue*, on the other hand, describes incidences and events where joy is expressed, in which happiness is a momentary feeling that belongs to a time and place. For an event like a funeral, which bring sadness, an added grammatical element is needed, as the use of verbs and descriptions relate to a time and a moment – ‘*kua tagi oi oi*’ translates to ‘wailing’, which would not sound right if translated into English as ‘a sad family’. To ‘shout with joy’ seems a simple enough idea, but ‘*kalaga mo e fiafia*’, using the conjunction ‘with’ to match the English language structure, does not quite capture the meaning that fits with the *Vagahau Niue* expression of ‘*Kalaga fiafia*’.

The dichotomy of the Polynesian volume

The third issue was the dichotomy of loudness and quietness. As a rejuvenated Niuean at this important writing workshop, I encountered an incorrect assumption and reaction from a person in a leadership position, who had mistakenly interpreted my quiet demeanour in the meeting as unconcerned, disinterested and intimidated. While these views are shared by many in such positions, I felt judged by it and became exasperated. Finding my minority voice in meetings is sometimes hindered by time, and my quiet disposition in a meeting allows me time to think things through thoroughly and digest ideas. While waiting for an appropriate moment to raise an issue, object to an idea or contribute positively, it can get tricky when there are other pressing issues that need addressing before anything else can be decided on.

This person had pulled me aside after a meeting to ask why I was so quiet. With a thousand highways criss-crossing in my head, I did not know how to respond to the question. I had wanted to communicate a contrary view, but the moment did not present itself and out of respect I had not interjected. Our *talanoa*²⁰ protocols are different. With such misconceptions, I was quick to reassure him that I could contribute to robust discussion in a *talanoa*, but to speak for the sake of speaking is not in the best interests of the *gahua*²¹ before us. I did not want to come across as insincere, but would we have even had this conversation if he did not assume that all Pasifika people are loud? Because of my demeanor, most of the hard questions never got voiced in the meeting while engaging with the *Vagahau Niue* curriculum development.

At our last meeting to conclude the work, a few other prominent *Vagahau Niue* experts

²⁰ Talanoa – cultural concept of a discussion

²¹ gahua – Vagahau Niue term in reference to work, task or a job

were invited to join us. Our retired *matua* who worked in education wrapped up the meeting with one of her original songs that praises ancestors for their blessings and foresight, while urging the young to hold tight and embrace their identity. She followed this with words of hope and encouragement and after all the struggles with the curriculum document, I felt her words deeply. Her wealth of knowledge came across as if she had uprooted her Niuean-ness, brought it to Aotearoa with her, and carried it while she chased the dream. Her revelation was sensational and rich with metaphorical perceptions of the world of education. I felt protected by her wisdom.

Analysis

Dreams of the land of milk and honey had brought Niueans to New Zealand since the 1950s, but generational transfers had become weaker over time to the point that only 11% of Niueans were speaking the *Vagahau Niue* (Statistics NZ, 2016). Many of my own relatives who were born in New Zealand do not speak Niuean, even though their parents use the *Vagahau Niue* predominantly at home. Influences of a working culture, or the culture of economics, had made sure that there was no room to be Niuean if one were to get ahead in the climate of personal progress in New Zealand. Instead, many just focussed on becoming productive citizens of Aotearoa like my uncles and aunties who arrived in the 60s and 70s, and my cousins who are second generation New Zealanders.

While we dream, data of ongoing underachievement of Māori and Pasifika learners in education had seen these groups in the spotlight on the MOE priority lists in the 1990s. They were identified as the most ‘at-risk’ learners, leading to the catch cry of ‘the long brown tail’ of on-going negative educational outcomes. Community and professional meetings of the time were dominated by this discussion, as the MOE actively reached out to Pasifika communities in several community consultation *fono*.

Identifying as and being identified as a Pasifika person meant a societal perception of me belonging to a group that disadvantaged me in the worst possible ways. This was reflected in tense discussions when emotionally driven communities shared their despair about the education outcomes of their children. One such meeting, at a full to capacity in an Otahuhu church hall on a cold winter night I watched a MOE presentation complete with data, excuses posed as

explanations, and future ‘goals’ that gave me (and those around me) very little confidence that the days of the long brown tail was going to end.

On the brighter side the work by McCaffery & Tuafuti (2005) on empowerment through bilingualism in Auckland primary schools helped revive the confidence of a generation of Pasifika parents to actively participate and add value to the learning of our young ones’. They view the bilingual approach of using the thinking language as the quickest and most efficient way to gain conceptual and academic language (McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2017). This in reference is known as ‘additive bilingual education’ and is promoted as a positive programme with goals of biliteracy, academic success and language maintenance by Cummins, (2000); McCaffery and Tuafuti, (2003) and Tuafuti and McCaffery, (2005). Believing that the *Vagahau Niue* curriculum document was gearing towards the principles of bilingualism was encouraging. This approach we advocated for *Vagahau Niue* to not only help raise achievement for learners but could also serve to closing the widening gap between the older generations and the young.

This document was a historical development for a realm language in New Zealand. I had always held in high esteem the privilege of being a migrant from a ‘realm’ nation, tied to a constitution that enabled me to feel entitled as a Niuean residing in Aotearoa. I was now in a position where certain rights applied to the *Vagahau Niue* that did not apply to other languages outside the realm countries which are; Niue, The Cook Islands, Tokelau and Ross Dependency (New Zealand Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2000). Despite the constitution between Niue and New Zealand not specifying its obligation to the *Vagahau Niue*, I felt that New Zealand had failed me by not recognising her administrative responsibility to Niue as a realm country, its culture, its people and its language. There was no recognition of the status or position I had expected New Zealand to place on *Vagahau Niue* rather, I had perceived and encountered attitudes from certain government departments that cast *Vagahau Niue* as secondary in priority to the languages of economics, and secondary to languages with large populations or number of users.

Using the German language curriculum document as a basis for this was fraught with difficulties. The Niuean cultural content and concepts were undervalued in this context, in the sense that depth and understanding were not sufficiently met. It would have made sense to shape it around the *te reo Māori* curriculum instead, because our shared values and oral traditions as illustrated in the Qualitative Teaching Research and Development Project on Māori learners (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2009). The Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) research also strongly supported the principle of cultural identity and culturally

connected ideas, but these were not evident in the initial curriculum documents. May (2004) described this social connectedness in his abstract at the *Hulaaga fono*²² in Wellington in 2009 as an important element in upholding the sense of identity.

The examples I was asked to think about and produce during the writing process made it a painful exercise as they demanded a subtractive thinking when directly translating concepts, contents and phrases from English that didn't naturally fit in *Vagahau Niue*. The work was bigger than we expected, there were many learning curves, and the requirement for expediency and efficiency only served to destroy the confidence I had in myself to walk tall and strong as a Niuean. It took me back to the time when I had to pretend that I was assimilated into the *palagi* world by denying who I am.

Cummins (2000), Tuafuti & McCaffery (2008) and May (2002) explained that the resistance, alienation and disempowerment of students who have experienced 'subtractive' pedagogies of language and literacy learning is the core issue behind their underachievement. The lack of robust culturally responsive pedagogy and relational pedagogy point to systemic failures in education and here we were perpetuating the issue by following instructions. It was not much different from the 'yes sir' Pasifika example. This exercise was somehow a disempowering process and was counterproductive to the work we completed, even though it was an effort to address the educational failure of Pasifika learners.

I am critically aware of the psychological, structural and material disempowerment (not to mention physical violence) that many students have experienced in education. With limited resources, very significant components in the *Vagahau Niue* were not given the importance we would have liked the document to have. The rhythmic patterns and highly metaphorical style of *Vagahau Niue* were considered too complex for the curriculum document. While relevant language features such as cultural expressions, phrases central to cultural practices and metaphors had no place in the documents we were working on. The cultural components that enhance the relationship between language and identity were not accommodated.

The schooling Improvement Research by Amituanai-Tolua, McNaughton, Lai & Airini (2009) arrived five years too late, we would have loved the support of their recommendations to use Niuean metaphors in order to incorporate Niuean identity and values. May's 2009 briefingpaper to the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs on Pasifika languages strategies urged the government to consider more meaningful strategies when addressing the ongoing failure of

²² Hulaaga fono is a biannual Vagahau Niue community conference held at different cities to attract and expose as many Niuean as possible.

Pasifika learners. The rules of exchange and the power sharing interactions within the setting as May (2009) described would have made our process and progress more meaningful, but instead we had to follow the status quo served by the Pasifika Education Plan (PEP).

While the PEP 2009-2012 was clearly well intentioned, it had failed to achieve the goal it *demands with its own objectives*:

“The education system must work for Pasifika so they gain the knowledge and skills necessary to do well for themselves, their communities, Aotearoa New Zealand, the Pacific region and the world.” (MOE, 2009. p. 2.).

The collective pooling of all Pasifika languages in the PEP has little consideration to the diverse nature of Pasifika peoples. An added factor that is significant to this argument is that, today, many *Vagahau Niue* learners are second and third generation New Zealanders. The renewed vision in the second PEP plan (2017) document of, *“Five out of five Pasifika learners participating, engaging and achieving in education, secure in their identities, languages and cultures and contributing fully to Aotearoa New Zealand’s social, cultural and economic wellbeing”* (MOE, 2013. p. 2.) was ineffective in achieving its purpose. It was significantly different from the earlier one by putting responsibility back on the learner, as a diversion from a flawed system.

Williams (2009) criticism of this as befitting a neoliberal and postcolonial theory of education highlighted the current and popular public discourse that leads us to believe that the system is fair for all learners. The blame for negative Pasifika outcomes is deflected as students’ failure to engage in learning. The 2018 NCEA results perpetuates the earlier reports on Pasifika under achievement, showing 40% of Level 2 NCEA graduates are not sufficiently literate or numerate according to a 2014 report by the Tertiary Education Commission. And for the majority in that 40% are Pasifika learners, the system had failed them.

The effects of these negative outcomes on communities are enormous, especially when previous statistics tell us that in 2009, 24.2% of all New Zealand born Niueans left secondary schools without qualifications, and 7.3% attained a Level 5-6 diploma (Statistics New Zealand, 2009). The challenges for our Niuean learners have been those of retaining identities, language and cultural values while functioning as New Zealanders in a largely monocultural society (McCaffery, Villars & May, 2008; May, 2000; & May, 2001). This important facet of education needs serious consideration if the strategic plans proposed to aid *Vagahau Niue* are to generate positive results and embrace the cultural principles of culture, identity and agency. It would

need direct intervention and assistance to strengthen the inter-generational links (Cahill, 2006), to make positive shifts in educational achievement outcomes of Niuean learners while maintaining the *Vagahau Niue* and, in effect, the identity of our young.

Last but not the least, the perception of Pasifika as loud people is an incorrect assumption. The dichotomy of loudness and quietness is a common perception that derailed many of the interactions I engaged in. *Being loud can be part of a person's personality but it must not be part of one's identity.* The loudness associated with the celebratory manner projected by Pacific people in lively events is not part of our everyday actions. I understand my culture as deeply emotional, a culture that wraps events around the themes of joy and happiness and cries of despair and disappointment. We, as a people, are loud when we are happy and loud when we are sad which explains the public perception of Pasifika people as 'loud, brown and proud'. But this misconception detracts from the humility that most Pasifika people operate with and expect.

CHAPTER 5 – My identity within the community

Venturing with Vagahau Niue beyond compulsory education

Introduction

The decade 2003-2013 was the busiest period in my career in education. Motivated by the concept of culturally responsive and relational approaches, I had actively implemented strategies to support the learning experiences of Pasifika students in secondary education. After establishing the *Vagahau Niue* learning programme at Aorere College and facilitating the Home and School Partnership (HSP) pilot programme, I took on a lead role of facilitating a school-wide Pasifika Adult Literacy professional learning programme. Further leadership experience came with the *gahua* for the Pasifika Island Schools and Community Peoples Liaison (PISCPL) programme, as well as leading the petition to government to reinstate the publishing of school resources in Pasifika languages. On top of these commitments, I led community involvement in developing a community bilingual curriculum for adult literacy (2005), the *Vagahau Niue* Mind Your Language programme (2005), and served the organising committee on the biannual *Hulaaga fono*²⁴ (Wellington 2007 and Christchurch 2009). With energy levels elevated and burning fire in my belly, I was highly motivated to continue to paddle the *vaka*²⁵ of revival, maintenance and retention of the *Vagahau Niue*.

This chapter outlines some of the key experiences I had as part of my involvement in these projects and some of the challenges I faced in relation to ideas about self, culture and identity.

Creating an opportunity for *Vagahau Niue* language learning at Aorere College

²³ *Gahua* refers to work and or work commitments

²⁴ *Hulaaga fono* – is a community *Vagahau Niue fono* where educators and community leaders come together and discuss ideas on how to involve our *tagata Niue* community, for the maintenance and retention of the *Vagahau Niue*.

²⁵ *Vaka* – this serves as a metaphor that compares the struggles of *Vagahau Niue* today to the challenges of our sea faring Polynesian ancestors.

In 2000, I was teaching at Aorere College. Motivated by my previous experiences, the drive to establish a *Vagahau Niue* class at Aorere College became a personal battle. There was little interest from the learners and their parent communities so a class in the mainstream school programme was not practical. Instead, I shifted my focus to adults. There was an opportunity for a *Vagahau Niue* class within the community education programme. While most of the courses offered to the community were for re-skilling and vocational pathways, or pre-requisites for further education development, the support from the Director of Community Education was a small step forward. That week, *Vagahau Niue* was listed alongside the other adult community programmes on offer in the Manukau Courier. The response from the community was wonderful 25 registered participants on opening night. By the end of the third year the class had dwindled to ten adult learners on the roll with a consistent number of 4 attendees a week made up of the tutor's grandchildren. With funding scarce, it was too difficult to sustain a more meaningful course, and sadly it was not considered viable to continue the class.

Pasifika Literacy PLD

In 2005 the Pasifika Adult Literacy project was thrust upon me by an enthusiastic colleague. Determined not to be overwhelmed, I diverted my energies to facilitate this school- wide professional development programme for teachers, despite being up against the criticism of attuned literacy academics and the English Department. Because English is my second language, criticisms and objections felt like a thousand-edged grater against my professional and cultural knowledge. Unsure when the microaggression bombs would explode at my feet, every Wednesday morning when professional development sessions were held, it felt like a walk in a mine field.

The easiest part of this project was a scoping exercise on the literacy requirements for each learning area. The tricky part was the ensuing review of literacy gaps in learning areas by Heads of Departments. Due to the wide range of views held and discussed at length, prioritising significant language content and their implications, eventually led to a consensus on what was needed. With a team of four enthusiastic volunteers from across the learning curriculum areas, targets for a 'literacy strategy' was locked into the school professional development calendar. Teachers were required to opt into a four weekly rotation plan to work on their implementation programmes. This professional learning development project was

designed to run for two years, followed by a year to further embed literacy strategies in curriculum learning areas.

At the end of each year, student learning outcomes were tracked with the education Assessment Tool for Teaching and Learning (asTTle) in the year 9 and 10 programmes and the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) outcomes for Years 11-13. By the end of the second year, improved results were evident and teachers in general had become less resistant. Although specifically aimed at Pasifika learners, the project had served all students across curriculum learning areas. It was encouraging for all involved despite the initial resistance. Teachers, in turn, were more readily accepting of school-wide literacy project. By the third year, a teacher appraisal tool was implemented to support on-going literacy development in all curriculum areas.

The 'Home and School Partnership' (HSP) programme and the 'Pasifika Island School Community Parent Liaison' (PISCPL) project

In 2003, I started bridging the links between school and community with the 5 representatives from each Pasifika ethnic community; a *tagata Niue*, a Tongan, a Samoan, a Cook Islander and a *Kai Viti*²⁶, to start the HSP programme. By 2006 it had evolved into the PISCPL project. The HSP was a specific Aorere College programme that targeted parents of enrolled learners, whereas the newly revamped PISCPL project involved making connections with the two primary schools and one intermediate school to form the Aorere cluster group. As both were Ministry of Education initiatives, funding was a critical factor. Both programmes for the Aorere cluster were time intensive and energy draining.

Although I found reconnecting and re-establishing links with the community relatively easy, the test of my ability to lead, came in dealing with push back from colleagues who had either failed to see the big picture or were determined to undermine the equity issues. An example of this push back came from a deficit view of, 'This is segregation', and 'Why are Māori and Pasifika getting special treatment?'. I was clear in communicating the over-arching outcome for the two initiatives and I stood by it. While the initiatives target Pasifika learners, all strategies in place serve to create an inclusive culture for the school and the strategies performed to help raise achievement for all learners.

The approach for this *gahua* was to develop a coherent alignment between the

²⁶ Kai Viti – a person of Fijian ethnicity

four schools, and the core values that bind the schools and communities, with a common goal of raising Pasifika achievement. Working with Principals from the three neighbouring schools brought different dynamics and interesting developments. I felt like a coconut shaving sandwiched between the powerhouses of schools in the Aorere cluster and the funders. We initially met to establish goals, with the major focus on transitional phases between primary, intermediate and secondary school. This role was different from my previous experiences, as working from a management position opened new avenues of communications with stakeholders. A big picture view of how the system worked made me re-evaluate my own position with learners, colleagues, community and the Ministry of Education.

During a session on pastoral care feedback on Pasifika learners, mountains of issues were collated. One of the most prominent in the echoing voices was the tendency of Pasifika learners to wear hoodies. Further investigation of this issue brought me to the understanding that this was deeper than mere uniform defiance. For our young, hoodies were a camouflage of 'invisibility', and that being invisible was deeply rooted in shame. Dealing with shame thus became my number one focus in the pastoral care list. I was doubtful whether I had the ability to approach this issue in a manner that would generate positive outcomes for all, because at that time I was dealing with my own visibility in the school and the community.

The PISCPL project was a step in the right direction. It allowed us to make meaningful connections between schools and the communities these schools serve. Funding was limited and evidence-based milestone reports were demanding. It felt unfair. Despite feeling this way, I was determined to make it work. We hired a liaison project manager to facilitate the project who continued to strengthen the links between the four schools long after I left Aorere College.

The Petition

On a cold spring morning on the 4th August 2011, I was standing on the steps outside the parliament building armed with 6688 signatures and waving a Niue flag in a petition for the government to reinstate the publishing of resources in Pasifika languages. It was one of the biggest actions that came out of the energy and convictions I had for the *Vagahau*. I had joined forces with Bilingual Aotearoa executives in response to a public outcry when the Ministry of Education ceased the production and printing of Pasifika languages resources. It had taken a lot of effort to convince the rest of

our Pasifika communities to support the petition, but it gathered momentum towards the end. I had stepped out of my comfort zone to champion a cause for my language, my Niue people and the learners of *Vagahau Niue*. The work of activism had put me in an unsafe position in the face of racism, inequity and dismissive comments by many people I encountered along the way.

"Their thing", I heard him say. It was a throw-away comment referring to my formality after I introduced myself in *Vagahau Niue*. On reflection, I remember my 18 year-old self watching television in 1981 and seeing the activism for equality in response to the Springbok rugby tour. The many debates around racist sport and politics preoccupied Aotearoa for some time to follow. I believe that being in the thick of it in the late 1970s and early 1980s built a strong foundation that strengthened my resolve to act on behalf of *Vagahau Niue*. Many people I encountered along the way were dismissive in attitude, giving the impression that we were small and irrelevant.

'I do exist, and while I may be a small part of Aotearoa's national community, I must be visible' was a message that I, among other giants, delivered to politicians in Wellington that day. Accompanied by my daughter and her best friend (who is of Māori and Cook Island descent), We went to Wellington and delivered powerful messages in parliament about the need to resource the *Vagahau Niue* curriculum. The Papatoetoe High School students who accompanied me to parliament were learning *Vagahau Niue* at the time. They were fortunate to have experienced the momentum of empowerment. The best we could get out of this petition was a review into the Pasifika Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector and as little as it was, it brought a sense achievement all the same. The outcome of the action brought about a small step in the right direction. It felt like someone was listening.

Analysis

Drawing strength from the Pacific Vision conference in 1999, my involvement and commitment to social and political activities reflected a determination for further development in education. The conference, entitled 'Navigating the Currents of the New Millenium', was a coming together of a cross section of Pasifika leaders, with presentations ranging from education issues to workforce developments. Robust discussions on identity

signaled a change in my environment. It was a time of debates on identity, Pasifika migrants, the realm nations of New Zealand, and the shift in education for Pasifika youth.

Pasifika communities in Aotearoa have histories imbedded in cultures that are complex (Agar, 2006) and varied when dealing with the lucidity of cultural capital. In the case of Niue, a realm nation of New Zealand faces the real threat of losing its language through no fault of its own. Unlike other migrant learners, and the educational experiences of those learning languages of economics, the stigma of being Pasifika reverberates in the Pasifika communities, and is synonymous with being brown and underachievement. The stigma of being Polynesian had kept our learners of *Vagahau Niue* on the periphery, cowering with shame. This outlook on languages as an ongoing education failure for Pasifika learners is articulated by McCaffery & McFall-McCaffery (2005) as a phenomenon of the societal deficit construct. This deficit construct attached to speaking *Vagahau Niue* is deeply destructive to a learner's social form (Scheff, 2000), especially in areas where languages of economics like Japanese and French are highly regarded as preferred choices on offer in schools.

The HSP and PISCPL projects both aimed to provide a more culturally responsive approach to teaching and learning that target the needs of Pasifika students for additional support. They also aimed to establish a school culture that is inclusive for our learners while making connections between cultural pedagogical knowledge and their subject content knowledge. An example drawn from the Māori Education report suggested that this approach would enable teachers to develop student knowledge, understanding and social inquiry skills (MOE, 2005), but I question if it would have worked as well without a Pasifika person working beyond their call of duty?

The constant drumming of the negative statistics is a reminder of this shame in schools. The manner in which Pasifika peoples were being talked at, and about, in regard to the deficit figures, was shameful, especially in reference to the high numbers being represented in the criminal justice system and education failure. It was a shame that I also had to carry and a shame that our young carry under their hoodies. This shame keeps our hoodie wearing generation invisible and hidden from being identified as brown and Pasifika. I grew to understand that the chief barrier to learning and teaching *Vagahau Niue* and making it available in schools is psychological, a struggle compounded by the reactions of others in schools. A study by Holodynski & Kronast (2008) on invisible emotions in classrooms suggest that schools are institutions that generate a large variety of opportunities for learners to

experience shame while performing tasks for qualification and socialisation. Schools therefore are generating the kind of pressure in a learning environment that is detriment to the learner's progress and only serves to further disadvantage learners.

In recognising our own awareness of relationships between community, school achievement and social development is a sphere the Ministry of Education sees as complex (Biddulph, Biddulph & Biddulph, 2003). I can only deduce from the Aorere experience that it can be a success with everyone on board sharing the same vision. The complexities encountered with such projects help us appreciate the reasons for the demise of the Pasifika Education Plans. These had failed to recognise agency and the cultural influence of Pasifika learner. The outcomes these documents promised remained in the deficit position despite the heart-work that went into these Pasifika schooling improvement initiatives. Real funding was needed for them to work. While the plans were well intentioned, they were powerless to accomplish the aspirations of my generation. The confidence that education is a contributing power that could lead change and make the desired shifts is not an assurance without the backing of serious funding and consideration for learner cultures and identity.

Other than recognising the inequities and the joys of overcoming some barriers for Pasifika learning in education, my journey leading up to the language petition in 2011 was intersected by many incidences of blatant racism and micro antagonisms. Some hostilities towards minority groups that simmer below the surface had greeted me in a more open and public manner than it had in the past, due to ethnocentric and neo-liberal influences (Bishop, 2008; May, 2002; McCaffery, 2010; Youngs 2007). I believe this to reflect the instinctive bias that lies at the subconscious heart of New Zealand. This was understood at the time to be influenced by entrenched social credit, but the ongoing encounter with such dismissive attitude was contemptuous enough to disempower. I was coasting very closely towards becoming a permanent resident in victimhood. Some were antagonistic towards content to do with Pasifika affirmations that recognises mana *whenua*²⁷, or ideas which threaten to disengage from the social construct of neo-liberalism. One example of the disempowering effect came from a position of fear. such as 'When in Rome', alluding to the old adage of, 'when in Rome, do what the Romans do'. To parallel that to the New Zealand situation, English is the only accepted language. That reaction was a protest that projected an element of fear from the monolingual sector.

²⁷ Mana whenua - refers to the power (mana) or authority (mana) that recognises the importance, beliefs, and a sense of belonging to the land (whenua).

Considering that the system, the processes, the policies and resources provided thus far had failed to meet the needs of Pasifika peoples in New Zealand, more can be done to put Pasifika on par with the rest in New Zealand. The negative effects of the above mentioned are tools of disempowerment used by the intellectually and culturally superior (Human Rights Commission, 2009) to control the social and political climate in the society we live in. The work I undertook with Pasifika initiatives reinforced the notion that all the benefits in New Zealand are gains that were a direct influence of the racial superiority of the British (McCaffery, 2018). I was seduced to believe that the superior powers are always right.

Failing to sustain the *Vagahau Niue* classes at Aorere is an example of May's (2011) assertion that blames the over optimistic view of minority languages on the ability of the education system to revive minority languages in line with the language shift and maintenance goals outlined in the Pasifika Education Plan. May (2001, 2005, 2009) has consistently argued that there is a strong case for schools to 'nurture and reconstruct' teaching and learning strategies that incorporate 'suitable and appropriate linguistic' and cultural knowledge for different groups. He argues that recognition of appropriate linguistic and cultural understanding would inevitably lead to a widespread cultural and linguistic doctrine. On the other hand, if we are to think about this in terms of the future workforce in New Zealand, we need an education system that will add wealth to a culturally rich economy through languages.

In recognising linguistic and cultural knowledge we need to address issues with the PEP and education system, in order to achieve increased outcomes for Pasifika learners. The vision statement for the 2009 – 2012 PEP states that: *"The education system must work for Pasifika so they gain the knowledge and skills necessary to do well for themselves, their communities, Aotearoa New Zealand, the Pacific region and the world."* (MOE, 2009. P. 2). It is a wide sweeping statement that appears to be a genuine attempt for opportunities to address issues relating to; recognising students' prior knowledge, motivating culturally responsive pedagogy that is inclusive teacher interactions, using the language medium of exchange, and more. In reality, very little became of such well put together statements because implementation of such programme will be a nightmare without serious support in terms of time, fund and expertise in the classroom.

My 11 years at Aorere College further escalated a powerful sense of belonging with links to my Niue an important part in this growth. Establishing strong connections with the communities I served was both demanding and worthwhile. Herein is a renewed view of myself, reaffirmed in an identity of a strong Niuean woman who carry on each shoulder a thousand

people in the communities that I am blessed with. I had worked and walked among giants in education, the titans of Pasifika cultural leaders across New Zealand, the 47 humble ethnic communities at Aorere College, and the extraordinary students who spoke the 56 heritage languages. It was a very rewarding journey.”

CHAPTER 6 – My cultural leadership identity

Two cultures on a collision course

Introduction

2003 was the beginning of another milestone for *Vagahau Niue*. Cultural leaders from Niue and New Zealand speakers of *Vagahau Niue* worked collectively in village styles big groups to commence the writing workshops for *Vagahau Niue*, Niue Arts and Crafts and Niue Performing Arts unit standards. These were first published in the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) framework in 2005. The first review took place in 2013 followed by the review of the Niue Arts and Crafts unit standards, respectively. The most recent review was carried out in 2018, resulting in the re-shaping of standards to align with the current achievement standards in the languages curriculum. This was immediately followed with writing workshops to develop assessment sample materials (ASM) for the newly developed graded unit standards.

Within the 2003 – 2018 time frame, I worked with a team of Niuean educators with knowledgeable community *pulotu*²⁸ and different facilitators with specialised expertise from NZQA. Each of these resource people brought with them different skill sets and provided an interesting view into how NZQA works. There were great times where we celebrated significant moments and progress, and there were times of unease. I also encountered difficulties of a different kind during one of the writing workshops held in 2019. This encounter had somewhat dampened the spirit of hope, acceptance and accomplishment. The difficulty came about in relation to how email communications were received and responded to. How the messages were verbally communicated to the writing panel were not well received.

Developing the *Vagahau Niue* unit standards

The week of the initial writing workshops in 2003 started with traditional welcomes

²⁸ Pulotu – Niuean people with cultural expertise and wisdom

²⁹ Ulu motua – this is a term of respect for the older generation considered to have wisdom and wealth in the *Vagahau Niue* and content.

and introductions. There were three people that represented the Niue Language Commission from Niue, three *ulu motua*²⁹ from the Niue community, our secondary school educators, a project facilitator from NZQA and a cross section of native *Vagahau Niue* speakers. With that much cultural wealth in the room, I was overwhelmed with the energy and ideas that big personalities generated.

At the initial meeting, NCEA levels 1 to 4 guidelines were discussed extensively, as there were questions from the many at the table who were not familiar with NCEA. This was also compounded by my people's ignorance of the New Zealand curriculum. As a Niuean teacher who started the first *Vagahau Niue* classes at Hillary College, I felt the weight of the community on my shoulders to lead the *gahua*³⁰. Participants with expert cultural knowledge, and educationalists familiar with the New Zealand curriculum were called into action, and three groups were formed. Two groups worked on developing resources for NCEA curriculum levels 1-4, and a third group worked on writing and developing the *Vagahau Niue* unit standards. Each group was of mixed ability that included people with knowledge relevant to each group task.

As had happened during the curriculum development phase, our writing was guided by the German and Spanish achievement standards. We did not complain as our *mamatua*³¹ had done that for us earlier during the whole group discussion. The atmosphere in the breakaway spaces was filled with excitement, eagerness and anticipation. There was the fun aspect of tossing around ideas as we sifted through words that were appropriate for each standard. The energy was vibrant, punctuated by singing and laughter as work and banter continued to fill the rooms with vibrations of big energy.

By the end of the first day, stories were pouring in in many different forms. Some written with neat handwriting on refill; some in crude scrawling on newsprint paper with multi-coloured markers; and some were electronically produced and transferred to flash keys. The conference room had come alive with culture as I had never known it, energised by loud, brown and proud Niueans who were (and are) comfortable in their skins.

On 26 August 2005, two years after those vibrant workshops at the Quality Hotel in Parnell, the *Vagahau Niue* unit standards were first registered on the NZQA website. We had

³⁰ *Gahua* – tasks (or *mahi* in *te reo*)

³¹ *Mamatua* – people held in great esteem for their knowledge and wisdom

completed twelve level 1 unit standards, eighteen level 2 unit standards, eighteen level 3 unit standards and six level 4 unit standards.

The Niue Performing Arts unit standards

Three other sets of unit standards were also completed during the writing process and registered alongside the *Vagahau Niue* unit standards:

- Niue Performing Arts unit standards (levels 2, 3, 4 and 5)
- Niue Music unit standards
- Niue Arts and Crafts unit standards (levels 2, 3, 4 and 5)

The Performing Arts standards were actively used at the Auckland secondary schools Polyfest event from 2010 onwards. These were popular that level 3 unit standards were added to the assessment pool for the 2017 live moderation plan. Unfortunately, the Niue Music unit standards, became redundant and were allowed to expire due to lack of use.

“Let’s do a live moderation,” I suggested to the Polyfest Niue Stage Coordinator, knowing that most of the Niuean group tutors are non-teaching members of the school, and that their support teacher is most likely non-Niuean. This was a valuable support to provide for the performing schools on the Niue stage and our non-Niuean colleagues. Our small team worked tirelessly on writing assessment tasks and ensuring that every performing school was assessed, moderated and videoed at the Polyfest event.

In that first year of implementing live moderation, only three schools reported on their results to NZQA. At the 2018 Polyfest, 17 out of 17 schools that performed on the Niue stage reported on their results. We felt absolved, safe with the knowledge that these unit standards are being used and therefore less likely to drop off from the New Zealand Qualifications Framework.

Reviewing the unit standards

The first review of the unit standards in 2010 brought about a few new changes for Arts and Crafts that resulted in all level 5 unit standards becoming expired. These were not replaced with new standards as they were not being used. Six years later, NZQA requested a review of

the *Vagahau Niue* unit standards to which I replied, “*How exciting! Overjoyed, I humbly accept. Monū tagaloa*³²!”

I contacted several people to garner interest and had sought approval and blessings from my wider communities of *Tagata Niue*. From those who indicated availability, the Manager from the Qualifications Services Assessment Division and I selected four educators for the writing panel, five participating representatives from the different Niuean community groups, a *pulotu*³³, and a Reverend Minister to join us on the Panel of Advisory Group (PAG). This time the review brought a whole lot of new changes to the unit standards. All were renewed and upgraded from unit standards to graded unit standards for consistency in alignment with the 2007 Learning Languages achievement standards.

This second review involved a consultation process in three main centres, Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch where I observed the many differing views towards the *Vagahau Niue*. As expected, many were very supportive of the idea in general, while many understandably, lacked the knowledge of process and discourse for education and delivery. It was great to hear the joyous sounds of parents and children interacting as they waited for the *fono* to start. At these meetings I also acknowledged the wide range of approaches to the *Vagahau Niue*. One that stood out is the, “*Ai maama e tau tama haaku he Vagahau Niue* so I had to ‘speaka the English’³⁴” a parent told me when I asked about her special kind of bilingualism.

Other *fono* were characterised by less than optimistic contributions such as, “*How is the government going to help? Niue people need to sort out our diminishing Vagahau Niue problem.*” It was a strange feeling, but somehow the rhetoric energised the room, although at times it reminded me of a ruckus union meeting with passions rising. There were many questions with equally as many ‘pie in the sky’ suggestions.

The third review had an interesting tone as the facilitator talked about languages, the curriculum levels, effective assessment materials and how we were going to make *Vagahau Niue* an important component of bilingualism. He spoke animatedly about the changes that would gain *Vagahau Niue* the attention of others, and talked at length about

³² *Monū tagaloa* – Praise be to *Tagaloa*. *Tagaloa* is a symbol of blessing for the people of Niue, a phrase often used to express gratitude.

³³ *Pulotu* – an esteemed highly respected matua in the community with a wealth of knowledge on cultural content.

³⁴ “*Ai maama e tau tama haaku he Vagahau Niue* so I had to ‘speaka the English’” – “My children don’t understand *Vagahau Niue* so I have to speak in English.”

the dangerous space *Vagahau Niue* was in. His words were encouraging as he described how we could go about it.

The second day however, introduced a different person who bragged about his Niue knowledge in a way that bordered on walking the landmines of political and social madness. We worked through the day, half ignoring his chatter, but I could not help but hear and feel the undercurrent of undermining that was happening in front of us. Some of it was internal politics, undermining the previous work completed by his predecessor, and at times his communication was demanding and condescending in nature. He had been busy, dropping names as he marveled at himself for knowing so much about Niue. He had not realized that he was walking on revered cultural boundaries, as our writing *matua* pointed out, “*we don’t feel the same way about people and political events that were happening on the island*”. I could see participants holding their breaths and, in typical Niuean humility, we remained focused on the writing tasks, pretending that we did not hear any of the offensive statements being made.

Then something went wrong. Despite his position as Qualifications Development Facilitator from the National Qualifications Services (NQS), he abruptly left the meeting amid a tirade about his supposed deep knowledge of Niue and things Niuean, making references about Niue educators. It had upset him that email correspondence by participants had not gone directly to him. “*So we don’t have to rely on Rosa*”, he said. His condescending tone baffled me, upset the team, reduced the vibrant room to dead silence. The incident had illustrated a dilemma of jagged interlocking beliefs and understanding of two cultures that collided as they journeyed through the process. His Eurocentric understanding of leadership had trodden on our Niue cultural practice of an unspoken endorsement of a leader. It was with utmost respect to me that the panel had preferred for a one response from the whole team to NZQA. Our collectivity and solidarity are important cultural practices that we hold dear in our hearts. His comment brought disharmony and the incident could have effectively created divisions within our working party and community. In its place hung a distrust that made for a difficult working environment.

He had stepped into the stormy politically motivated search for knowledge and it had become a monster that gained social and political attention. I felt a deep murky feeling of inadequacy as to how to deal with the beast of a situation. He complained that people did not respond to him, and in the process, he offended my *matua* with his ignorance of our cultural protocols, something that saddened me greatly. For the rest of the day, we

cruised through the review avoiding anything to do with what just happened.

“Ko e kakā afi a koe ma Losa³⁵” my *matua* said as we parted ways at the end of the day.

The launch of the Assessment Sample Materials (ASM)

It was not until the launch of the Assessment Sample Material (ASM) that the majority of the Niue community who turned up to celebrate realised how important *Vagahau Niue* is for generations to come. A mock-up listening assessment task we designed for the purpose of the launch piqued the interest of the not-so-convinced attendees in the conference room. With assessment papers in front of each of the 100 attendees at the launch, we ran a mock assessment. We had made the listening assessment live, brought to the room by a musically talented second-generation New Zealand born colleague. He repeated the song as we would with a recording in the classroom. We accepted all the verbal responses to the assessment questions as they proudly projected their understanding of the *lologo*³⁶ used in the listening assessment task. Most people in the room that day had some understanding that unit standards can only give either an ‘A’ for Achieved or ‘NA’ for Not Achieved. As these new standards are ‘graded unit standards’, it means learners can also achieve a ‘M’ for Merit or an ‘E’ for Excellence. The results of the mock-up for the graded listening assessment invigorated the room followed by animated discussions. Some nearly achieved all the elements of the graded unit standard, and some gave answers that were worthy of an Achievement with Excellence at the next level up. It was a moment of victory for many reasons; their understanding of the value of these standards in the NZQA framework, the new appreciation for *Vagahau Niue* and an insight into the NCEA assessment process.

Analysis

At the birthing of the *Vagahau* in 2003, there was a shared set of beliefs and a strong sense of community cooperation that brought teachers, leaders, facilitators and communities together. This was followed by 16 years of high quality interactions and community construction of ‘success building collaboration’ (Walters, Marzano & McNulty, 2004). The passionate discussions about *Vagahau Niue* content in the recent collaborative work became unhinged

³⁵ *Ko e kakā afi a koe ma Losa* – This expression is often used when referring to someone with exceeding confidence and knowledge in what they do. This can be loosely translated to “you are a burning fire”

³⁶ *Lologo* – refers to a song

after the NZQA facilitator left the room. The collision of leadership styles and its impact on the cultural structural relationships affected the dynamics that influence change and leadership.

There are two main issues discussed in this chapter. The first relates to the implications of language issues in the curriculum framework for learners and the culture *Vagahau Niue* serves. The second is the acknowledgment of leadership from a cultural point of view. Both issues are important as they are intertwined aspects within the context of the process we followed. The work towards establishing and recognizing the importance of *Vagahau Niue* in the New Zealand education system was critical for the identity and acceptance of self for Niueans.

At the beginning, the consultations for the review were well received, and the realization that we were ahead of our time was significant for all involved. *Vagahau Niue* was not ready for the change nor were schools in New Zealand especially when there was a shortage of *Vagahau Niue* teachers. It was a very ambitious undertaking, but we wanted to ensure that everything was in place for schools. Recent statistics show that the Pasifika population in New Zealand is young, especially those who are New Zealand born (Callister & Didham 2008). Ferguson, Gorinski, Wendt Samu, & Mara (2008) support this finding in their literature review on the experiences of Pasifika learners in the classroom, projecting an increase of Pasifika from one in ten in 2008 to one in five of the total school population by 2051. With these statistics in mind, and the *Vagahau Niue* in dire need of revival, our work in education is crucial.

This chapter is focussed on the issue of the language itself, in the hope that the collaborative effort of Niueans and the Ministry of Education will rise to it. Language content that relies heavily on cultural practices is a difficult area to align with the curriculum. Homes that use informal language overlaid with cultural expressions and metaphors is also a problematic area. The 'Mind Your Language Project' that was previously done by the then Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (MPIA) had ran its course in bringing awareness to *Vagahau Niue*. This leaves a disparity that needs our immediate attention. The documents that inform decision making for MOE had not consider the role of cultural expressions play in Pasifika languages nor was there consideration for the language gaps between native speakers of *Vagahau Niue* and the New Zealand born Niueans. Despite an aim by MOE to empower Pacific peoples to solve the multiple problems associated with their social and economic disadvantage, transitions between traditional practices of Pacific born people and their New Zealand born community groups (MPIA 2010) were not a priority. Sadly, we will continue to bear witness to Pasifika underachievement in education.

More of the young Niue people today are seeking to learn the *Vagahau Niue* and are struggling with it. The struggle can be measured in the way learners of the *Vagahau Niue* respond when spoken to in the *Vagahau Niue*. The responders are often clear and knowledgeable in English but struggle with self-expression in *Vagahau Niue*. This, however, further complicated the process of banking and retaining newly learnt vocabulary. In the thinking process, there are three significant issues that underline this struggle:

Firstly, the influences of traditional expressions in *Vagahau Niue* is an added dimension that deserves further examination. *Vagahau Niue* is a language that uses figures of *speech* to describe a vast array of emotions and experiences. This is not prominent in English as part of a regular conversation. *Vagahau Niue* has a love affair with proverbs that needed a deeper cultural understanding to get the full grasp of meanings and analogies. Speaking in imageries such as metaphors, similes and idioms are often the means of getting the message across and our learners of *Vagahau Niue* who are second and third generation New Zealanders find that difficult. They needed cultural capital to fully grasp the deeper meaning behind the ideas.

Vagahau Niue has a culture of oral tradition that imbeds imagery in every-day engagement. Imagery in a form of cultural expression that is a highly sophisticated system of thinking. An example of this is the phrase '*ko e kakā afi*' as was used by a *matua* at a *fono*. It has an unspoken understanding that can be interpreted in many different ways. In context of the day it was used, it was in reference to me as a person of whom she admired for having confidence in education matters and things Niue. This metaphor is more than simply describing someone as having expertise in their field. It also compares a person's passion to the burning fire. In this case, my passion for all things Niue. Sometimes this metaphor can also serve as a warning. It could mean that only a fool would mess with someone of such passion. Coupled with a spirited nature and passion, her endorsement was undeniable in support of where I place the importance of the *Vagahau Niue*.

Understandably, our *Vagahau Niue* learners' who encounter with such traditional Niuean expressions daily can not actively shape their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. It is a language that places self in the middle as a core relevance to one's identity. Psychologists, though, have only recently begun investigating how metaphors can inform our understanding of what makes us different from each other. Adam, Robinson and Fetterman's (2014) work on metaphorical preferences and biases suggest that using metaphors can inform our understanding of what makes us different and contextualizing perceptions.

Secondly, the influence of word order is another complex area in the *Vagahau Niue* that needs to be highlighted. It conflicts with the word order used in English. *Vagahau Niue* uses a verb subject word order while English uses a subject verb word order, and this pattern is followed in the use of description too. As described in William's natural language and linguistic theory (1980), this is rare. *Vagahau Niue* was classified by linguists as a language that sits with the 10% of dialects that has verb/subject/object (VSO) word order. The difficulty here is the translation from one set of word order thinking pattern to another. Learners who think in English and tried to speak in *Vagahau Niue* will use two different thinking systems to process the information.

Thirdly, the practice of code switching. It can be seen as a pathway of bilingual ingenuity, a habit born out of trying to be functional in two languages. Code switching is described by Tuafuti & McCaffery (2005) as the practice of moving back and forth between two languages, or between two dialects at one time. Sometimes code switching is when speakers would selectively speak one language while inhibiting another (Green, 1998). This phenomenon is a common occurrence in the bilingual Niuean community, with adults regularly code switching between English and *Vagahau Niue* when interacting with their children. There was always an element of fun to it, but now my perspective is somewhat different. Children would pick up on code-switching patterns from the language communities they grow up in (Comeau, Genesee, & Mendelson, 2010) and in the Niuean environment, children learnt communication models from parents and follow the speech patterns of what they hear from adults around them.

Our *Vagahau Niue* young bilinguals are limited in their linguistic resources. Code switching occurs far more often in conversation than in writing (Tuafuti & McCaffery 2005). A good example of this is with a parent response of "*Ai maama e tau tama haaku he Vagahau Niue* so I had to 'speak the English'". Lanza (2004) suggested that if a bilingual child cannot quickly retrieve the appropriate word in one language, she might borrow the word from the other language. For most, code switching could be a sign of uncertainty but to the learner community, it is the least challenging pathway of engagement.

For the above mentioned reasons, we on the writing panel felt a heartfelt gratitude for time and money allocated for writing and reviewing the *Vagahau Niue* unit standards. It was a profound moment to realise that our request for these considerations may not go well with funding providers and those in power. Against this backdrop, leading a process to get *Vagahau Niue* recognised and developed for education in New Zealand is a worthy feat

considering that only three Early Childhood Education and only two secondary schools that teach bilingual programmes nationwide. Attention given to *Vagahau Niue* was accepted with appreciation.

Being in a position of influence, I encouraged the team of Niue teachers to take a leap of faith with me hoping that the wings would develop in mid-flight. I had never looked back from those experiences for they were enriching and character affirmed. There was a sense of value and wealth that cannot be measured by dollars. *Vagahau Niue*, as a realm language, has important links to governmental policy on Language Diversity in Auckland (May 1991) and the quality teaching of culturally and linguistically diverse learners is an important direction for *Vagahau Niue* programmes. With links to government policy, the development of *Vagahau Niue* programmes in schools need to have content that is culturally meaningful for learners (Koloto, Katoanga, and Tatila 2006). It is not important, nor will it be meaningful, if the government policy that guide the curriculum development if education programme does not connect with our learners of *Vagahau Niue*.

The depth of understanding of the realm languages policy was the crux of all the work we have been working on for *Vagahau Niue*, so to have a government official from NZQA denounce my value and worth as a leader for the Niue community in education was a point of contention. He said, “*So we don’t have to rely on Rosa.*” I took this statement as a measure of his biased ignorance, creating an atmosphere of distrust between the writing team and him as facilitator. The behaviour and language of expression is intricate and often hints at where one is in terms of social and cultural acceptance. It brought distress to the cultural *tapa* that afforded our varied Niue community with vitality and energy. It felt like we were transported back into that colonial space in which a *palagi* holds the power to manipulate, project an elevate self to reign superior over us. Bush (2011) in his report on the importance of leadership and management for education discusses the idea that leadership with influence can incur change rather than exert authority. With his kind of leadership, ignoring it made it less likely to be the focus of our work. Disregarding it would also diminish the impact of his intent. It was easier for us to follow a tacit understanding that a leader is expected to ‘influence authority and change’ (Grarock & Morrissey, 2013 and Walters & et al 2004).

The NZQA facilitator who was supposed to work with us in a culturally safe environment was an aesthetically tone deaf official. The heart of the matter was the participants direction of responses. From the beginning of my interactions with the government departments, it was easy for my community to see an established history. Their endorsement was a cultural practice that shows support, solidarity, faith, respect and confidence in ones’ ability to care for, lead and look after

the process. By being an example of great discipline, I encouraged those who follow to adopt and adapt in developing elaborate relations (Cardno & Young, 2013) with those we need to help Niue make progress. This intricate relationship with my fellow *tagata Niue* brought an understanding of the Niuean expression of “*mumui tua atu*”, which loosely translates to an understanding of “You lead, we follow”. Sixteen years of ongoing engagement and interaction with my community had brought me to an appreciation that the educators were following the Niue cultural protocol of endorsing a leader - a role that I upheld for the Niuean community.

By neglecting my position in the Niue community as a leader in education, would be to disrespect the mana bestowed upon me by my community. It threatens to weaken the powerful connections that were established through collaboration with external partners. It also has a potential to weaken into neglect our collective common desire to implement and recognise the value the *Vagahau Niue* in the New Zealand curriculum. The neglect may also disregard the wisdom of Jenkins (1950, cited in Santamaria & Santamaria 2015);

“We can ill-afford to squander our intellectual capital by neglecting the development of those highly endowed individuals who are best fitted to assume positions of leadership... To identify exceptional individuals, to stimulate them to their highest achievement, to assure that their potentialities become actualities, are both an obligation ... and an opportunity for teacher.” (Jenkins, p. 322,332 cited in Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012, p1).

Conclusion

Since the loneliness of being the sole *Vagahau Niue* teacher while at Hillary College, I have made sure that my expressions of interest on all matters pertaining to Niue are heard in MoE, ERO, NZQA and MPIA. Over the years, it became clear that my passion and leadership had made a difference, which made my experience in the third review unsettling. An added significance to this process is the idea of trust, where we follow the person, we have faith in, to look after the process and the work. This is critical to understand so as to protect our interest in the evaluative nature of the work that follows, and trust that it will guide future developments for *Vagahau Niue*. Much of the work associated with cultural leadership, pedagogy, identity and development, involved factors that influence positive relationships such as care and trust as these have influence favourable educational outcomes.

With the backing of our *mamatua*³⁷, we felt we had accomplished a dream, or at least

half a dream. *Vagahau Niue* is in the system, validated and ready for use. We were ecstatic. We had finally arrived!

³⁷ Mamatua – plural of *matua*. Matua is a parent but is often used as a term of respect for a parent who is older than the person in the first person point of view. *Mamatua* is therefore more than one older person.

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

This chapter summarises key insights that I gained from examining the experiences I had of my journey as a *tagata Niue* developing *Vagahau Niue* for learning and teaching in New Zealand. It also discusses the significance and relevance of these experiences in education today. The previous chapters explored four initiatives that I was fortunate to be part of. These have highlighted some of the struggles a minority language group face to survive in Aotearoa New Zealand. Analysing the interactions I had with others for the purpose of this dissertation demonstrated that ethnographic influences, cultural perspectives and misunderstandings can seriously impact how we see ourselves (Reed, 1997). As part of the research process I learnt that in examining my work as a Niuean educator, I was also examining my own changing sense of personal and cultural identity. The discussion that follows is framed thematically around the different aspects of my identity that I was grappling with at different times and interactions that brought about change in the historical development for *Vagahau Niue*.

Discussion

The awakening: “*ko e kikila he maama*”³⁸

The Hillary College experience was a lonely journey and given the work was steered by limited data, insufficient literature and inadequate community desire, I felt a sense of achievement for my Niue. It was a giant step that I did not fully understand and appreciate at the time. As a Niuean born New Zealand citizen bound by the realm nation constitution, I was

³⁸ *Ko e kikila he maama* is a Niuean expression that explains the idea of coming out of the dark and moving into the light. It compares the awakening dawn to the awakening of self-awareness. In this case my moving from the confusion of who I was to a person with heightened awareness of identity.

positioned in an awkward space as a Niuean teaching *Vagahau Niue* at Hillary College. I was situated in the learning environment whereby experiences dictate how to respond to situations with very little support.

The awakening moment was when the Hillary College school trip returned from Niue in September 1992. Witnessing students walking tall and comfortable in speaking *Vagahau Niue* and sharing moments of triumphs with them was a confirmation of certainty. I felt a sense of pride in acknowledging my identity as an educator from Niue and know exactly what that meant. It means that my cultural, social, political and historical background are important features to who I am and how I project myself in the communities I walk among. It was encouraging that the students and the Niuean community looked up to me. It came with a lot of responsibilities.

For my fellow Niueans who were earlier migrants, integration and adjusting to a life in a different place was heavily influenced by the colonial thinking of assimilation. This has resulted in the neglect of our language and culture (McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2016) which we experience today. It was a time where English literacy became the language of currency, the language of power and the language of negotiation (May, 2009; May, 2014; McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2017). *Vagahau Niue* had no place at school, it had no place at a work environment, and it had no value to contribute in the environment of economic expansion. This means that schools are a place of anxiety for a significant number of learners. The many who stood astride two or multiple cultures had navigated their way around society with insecurities that is common in transitional spaces where migrants operate from in their adopted civilization. Niueans had had to adjust and learn to use English in order to place themselves in a more favourable position in new work environments. This can be extremely difficult, especially when trying to access understandings in certain ways and behaviour foreign to them in a diverse atmosphere (Kahakalau, 2017).

Struggling with the politics of language and identity

Chapter 4 recounted the experiences I encountered while writing the *Vagahau Niue* curriculum and the struggle to have its political identity recognized as a realm language of New Zealand. The language structure for the curriculum document was a test of patience that

needed to be designed for learning rather than problems and deficits to be remediated using other languages (May, 2014). Although some interactions were awkward, there was much to learn about cultural knowledge and cognition for the language faculty of an at-risk language that belongs to the New Zealand territory.

Vagahau Niue in the New Zealand curriculum documents was written with an optimistic view that it would change mind-sets within the communities of Niue people, society and education in general. Our disengaged second and third generation New Zealanders had me examining the relationship between educational success and bilingual education. There was a mixed perception for the reasons to why there is a disconnection between the second and third generation Niueans and their cultural and/or multi-cultural identities. Some believe that *Vagahau Niue* belongs in the home and learning *Vagahau Niue* in a sanitised environment will not serve students well, while others welcomed the *Vagahau Niue* in education and are enthusiastic about its possibilities.

This chapter highlighted some of my personal challenges as a *tagata Niue* who had continued to grow depth in my cultural and content knowledge through various experiences in initiatives to strengthen Pasifika education outcomes and the *Vagahau Niue* programmes. Despite being a *Vagahau Niue* resource person with expertise in second language acquisition and teaching methodology, my intellectual capital was constantly challenged in the areas of ethnographic content and perceived cultural behaviour. The foundations I had established in growing awareness of my identity through language and culture brought about renewed faith in referencing cultural pedagogy (Bishop, 2008). I am mindful of barriers and concepts of cultural relevance that needed to be adopted for a more robust curriculum document. I was strong enough to argue for programme guidelines and policies that are inclusive of strategic components that support intergenerational transmission of culture and language.

Developing an identity in the community

Chapter 5 is focused on my contributions to English literacy for Pasifika learners while building and strengthening community and school links. On top of these initiatives, I was in search of a place for the learning and teaching of *Vagahau Niue* at Aorere College. After an unsuccessful bid for its inclusion in the timetabled option lines, I found an alternative in the form

of adult education in the Community Education programme.

The many community activities that ensued kept me busy for a period of five years and much of it was dealing with the cultural issues, identity issues and the politics behind these issues. The community work I undertook was driven by passion and a desire to consolidate, synthesise and strengthen *Vagahau Niue* and culture in Aotearoa. An important focus of the many activities I was involved in, had grown from the desire to support bilingual learners to embrace cultural principles through the *Vagahau Niue* to achieve biliteracy. I had envisioned the developmental goal for *Vagahau Niue* in education to be a pedagogical strategy in support of the bilingual values through connections between culture, language and identity (ERO, 2012). I strongly believe that these elements and the principles that structure learning are key factors in improving educational outcomes for *tama Niue*³⁹.

Although steps were made with modest gains, the community activities and experiences in the education domain highlighted issues of retention and maintenance for *Vagahau Niue*. The community initiatives I was involved in in the capacity of an unspoken leader were my contributions for the *Vagahau Niue* to be accessible for future engagement. These will provide foundations by which learners can use to further advance *Vagahau Niue* and use expressions that project their cultural distinctiveness without fear. There are many like me who may otherwise neglect their cultural status and dismiss it as not worthy. From the shaky start to a bold brave *fifine Niue*⁴⁰, through these community initiatives, I was well on my way to realise the dream of our *mamatua*. They had braved the move to New Zealand in the fifties and sixties with big dreams of flourishing in the land of opportunities. They are the torch that that illuminate the path for Niue in the culturally integrated citizenship of the world.

Cultural Leadership Identity

Chapter 6 outlined my experiences of a developing community leader working through the *Vagahau Niue* unit standards with a vision that it would bring about linguistic vitality. It is an expectation that the revival and maintenance of the *Vagahau Niue* is to recognize its potential for a wider Niue identity and empowerment (McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2017). The *Vagahau Niue* is in dire need for revival and growth. The downward spiral trend it is heading in will be difficult to retrieve once the fluent speakers pass on. I had perceived the

development of *Vagahau Niue* assessment unit standards and assessment sample materials (ASM) for mainstream education as the breath that can resuscitate its current status as an endangered language (UNESCO, 2008).

There were 2 main issues that surfaced in this *gahua*; one, relating to the cultural and linguistic vitality of *Vagahau Niue* and the second, the two different perspectives of leadership in a working panel. Linguistic vigor can only be a reality when cultural appropriation of the content in assessment sample materials (ASM) is closely examined and a culturally robust review of pedagogical strategies are given time to implement and feedback. These need to happen in order to have assessment tasks with outcomes that are fair to the learners and the culture it holds. The second issue that was highlighted was the misunderstanding of leadership roles between the *implicitly chosen* Niuean leader and the official leadership position held by a representative from a central government agency.

Working through these two issues was challenging, but nothing new to me by this stage. Through these challenges my first loyalty is with my language and my second loyalty is with my community. While these loyalties create barriers sometimes, it was important for me to carefully *leveki*⁴¹ the balance between the support from the government agency and my position as a community person Niueans look up to. My evolving confidence as a *tagata Niue* and my cultural citizenship intact meant I was able to navigate some of these issues knowing that a collision in cultural understandings is likely to happen. Finding a middle ground is my next step.

Recommendations for further research

This study has enabled me to examine my actions, tested by beliefs and grow my cultural identity to the point where I believe I can say that it is crucial that what has been explored can help understanding for future generations of Niueans. There has been no specific research about the unique people of Niue and what they can offer the fabric of citizenship in Aotearoa. Neither has there been any significant research about the need for a sustained language revitalisation strategy for *Vagahau Niue* in New Zealand. Below are some of the recommendations I believe that can help progress the language, culture and identity of *tagata Niue* living in Aotearoa New Zealand.

³⁹ *Tama Niue* – refers to a Niuean learner or a child of and/or from Niue

⁴⁰ *Fifine Niue* refers to a mature female who identifies herself as a person of Niue origins.

First, to help improve the learning outcomes of Pasifika learners in our classrooms the education system must do better with how Pasifika languages curricula are framed. The Pasifika schooling Improvement Research report supported by the Teu Le Va's (2010) suggests that despite the efforts, the strategies in place did not stem the rate the education system failed our Pasifika learners. This approach to knowledge generation and policy development for actions towards Pasifika education success warrants further examination. The persistent long brown tail and a shortfall of positive learning experiences continue to be the source of anxiety. It is this anxiety that was the driving force behind my actions in pushing for the inclusion of *Vagahau Niue* in Aotearoa and the many hours of tirelessly working to ensure that these documents are in place.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have explored some of the experiences and reasons for disempowerment in New Zealand education and society. As part of the research process I have come to understand that the events told in this autoethnography unfolded experiences that are both triumphant and sorrowful. This journey of a Niuean educator in Auckland is a history making *mahi* in education for Niue, starting from stepping into the role of a *Vagahau Niue* teacher in the early 1990s, writing the *Vagahau Niue* curriculum documents for MOE, writing assessment materials for NZQA, and implementing and assessing unit standards from the Niue stage at the ASB Auckland Secondary Schools Polyfest. My work is not done yet. Recently I was invited to join a four-person team to construct a "Culture and Language Strategic Plan" for *Vagahau Niue*. 2019 is the international year for the realm languages. It had prompted us to act. The purpose of this strategic plan is to give direction, promote and support current and future pursuits to strengthen culture and *Vagahau Niue* at three international sites; Niue, New Zealand and Australia.

My own story reinforces how important it is for learners to have cultural capital to access education. The complex relationships between language, culture and educational achievement (May, 2001, 2002, 2009) are ambiguous and would require meaningful connections to navigate this space. The causes of discomfort explored in this study are the result of complex issues embedded in the cultural aspects of learning language, the

⁴¹ *Leveki* means to support and take care of other important factors surrounding the issues and in this case the issue of balancing the divide between two different cultural systems

difficulties of working in the bifocal dichotomy and battling for the retention and maintenance of my own identity. It must be recognized that culture and language can only be accessible when two are not isolated from its components (Bishop, 2008; Franken, May & McComish, 2009; May, 2002; McCaffery, 2010, 2016; Yosso, 2005) of ethnographical interpretation, social connection and capital wealth (Chang, 2008). To be able to grow cultural identity in the context of our own language, culture, values and beliefs, and indigenous knowledge, I had to be prepared to step outside the margins of social, political and historical development to champion a minority community.

My identity journey started when I was in my early 20s and it has taken me back to where I belong. My experiences had taught me that in order to be truly happy I must find who I am. It has been a journey of strength and joy riding the ripples of cultural, social, political, and historical waves with the *Vagahau Niue* for company. My undefined cultural leadership was the unknown strength of an unseen compass that further affirmed my bold and fearless approach to establishing *Vagahau Niue* in both the New Zealand curriculum and the NZQA graded unit standards. I had enjoyed being on the edge of excitement, pushing the boundaries and dancing with the devils who hold the purse strings of emancipation. My main source of inspiration was the work, and my only other avenue for ideas and support was my late father Solomona Kalauni. To be a champion for language, one must pass it on. With this dissertation I am passing it on.

I am Rosa Jackson Matafenoga Kalauni Viliko – I am proud to be Niuean.

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