

Foreword

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In July 2018 I had the privilege and pleasure of attending the 4th Vaka Pasifiki Conference that was held at the University of the South Pacific. It was already a very important year for USP as we celebrated our 50th Anniversary as a regional university serving 12 Pacific island countries. These countries are both separated and united by the vastness of the Ocean. As such, the Ocean embodies so much meaning and identity for the diverse peoples and cultures of our region. The coming together of over 500 educators from every part of the region and beyond to share experiences, reflections and knowledge through their stories and the story-telling methodologies that characterise and unite people across distance, was a truly memorable experience.

The Vaka conferences had started from much smaller beginnings here in Fiji in 2011, but have grown in numbers of participants as well as in influence and importance over the years. I had my first and unforgettable experience of the Vaka Pasifiki community of educators when I attended the conference in the Solomon Islands in 2016. In the Solomons, as in Fiji in 2018, the passion for education that was shared between practitioners and academics committed to the role of education in the future of the Pacific was truly inspiring.

The challenges that go into organising a conference like this are quite remarkable and not always obvious to those who like myself had the pleasure of unencumbered participation. We owe a great debt to those gifted and resilient educators who have committed so much to founding, building and sustaining this movement which has allowed us all to benefit so much. The richness and diversity of the conference was inspiring and this was reflected through the celebration of oral story-telling approaches to learning together and the sharing of knowledge. I have no doubt that every participant in the conference has taken away things from the experience that have been life-changing.

This publication, for which I am honoured to write the Foreword, not only presents a selection of papers from the Conference but does so much more by capturing the spirit of that event. It allows those who participated in the Vaka to recapture and to further reflect on some of the important work that was presented and discussed. It also allows a wider

and perhaps new audience to become participants in the journey that is the Vaka Pasifiki. Education is the key to continuity of culture and to its continuous exploration and growth. In the Pacific context, the Vaka Pasifiki interwove across the cultures of the region, bringing us together, ever stronger, ever more sure of our identities and our unity of purpose, and ever more conscious of the contribution of education to the well-being and success of our region and its people. This important volume, and the larger Vaka Pasifiki conference that it represents, is testimony to all that shines brightly for the future of Pacific education and is a beacon to guide educators as they continue, or freshly embark upon, their journey.

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