

# CHAPTER 13

## PERSPECTIVES ON COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN OCEANIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Through the ideas of and within Oceania that we outline, and within which we locate architecture and institutions for CIE regionally, we illustrate the identified turning points through analysis of dynamic and intersecting trajectories of the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society (OCIES), formerly the Australia and New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society (ANZCIES), and the Vaka Pasifiki, formerly the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative for and by Pacific Peoples (RPEIPP) project. We offer initial responses to an over-arching theme in posing the question: how, and through what processes, have these groups influenced understandings of 'regionalism' for CIE within Oceania? This involves examining the conferences, financing, membership, the Society journal/publications and aspects of CIE education of the two bodies.*

**Keywords:** Oceania; OCIES; Vaka Pasifiki; decolonisation; institutionalisation; 'regionalism'

### INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS

In this chapter, we share reflections on some recent regionally focused turning points in comparative and international education (CIE) research, education

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and relationships in this part of the world known to many as “Oceania,” through which we hope to offer a view of possible futures for CIE regionally. We do this through a lens of debates about “regionalism,” discussions that have been ongoing for some time within and beyond the field of CIE in education and international development arenas. In parts of Oceania, these debates have been identified as sitting within deliberate, regionally focused processes of decolonization (Coxon & McLaughlin, 2017; Fua, 2016; McCormick, 2017; Nabobo-Baba, 2006; Thaman, 2002, 2009). The ideas of and within Oceania that we outline, and within which we locate architecture and institutions for CIE regionally, have not been immune to projects of defining or setting boundaries for CIE. While such a line of investigation has its place, it will not be the focus of this chapter (Coxon & McLaughlin, 2017; Fox, 2007; Manzon, 2011; On Lee, Napier, & Manzon, 2014). We illustrate these turning points through analysis of the dynamic and intersecting trajectories of the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society (OCIES), formerly the Australia and New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society (ANZCIES), and the Vaka Pasifiki, formerly the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative for and by Pacific Peoples (RPEIPP) project.

It was clear that a chapter such as this, considering contexts as diverse as the eighteen nations comprising the Pacific Islands Forum,<sup>1</sup> including Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, or the 16 nations that together form the representation of Oceania for this volume, should involve some degree of collaboration, and that pertinent questions of place and voice would need to be broached. We started, therefore, by locating ourselves and, in order to not take space away from the themes of the chapter, refer you to our biographic statements, while acknowledging the (perhaps usual) constraints on the extent of collaboration, in the form of space and time. We cannot and do not, therefore, claim to represent the full range of perspectives that sit across such varied terrain as extends from the distinctive states, provinces, cities, towns, villages, roads, rivers, halls and schools and people in each national and sub-national context. We offer the following insights that our committed, varied and – we hope – maturing engagement in education in distinct Oceanic contexts has given us the opportunity to learn, contribute to, and continue exploring.

In conceptualizing how we might broach the infinite set of possible narratives that could be offered, it was clear from the outset that we should begin with questions of how our “region” has been understood, particularly in relation to ideas of Oceania. These are not new questions, nor redundant ones; rich prior and current work (Coxon, 2011, 2016; Fua, 2016; McCormick, 2016a, b, 2017b; McLaughlin, 2017; Sanga, 2011, 2016; Sanga, Chu, Hall, & Crawl, 2005; Shah, McCormick, & Thomas, 2017; Thaman, 2008, 2009) addresses precisely how various understandings of this region speak to themes that intersect at the core of CIE: borders, context, cooperation, governance, histories, participation, policy, power, process, voice, and we could go on (Manzon, 2011).

We aim to contribute, including through a chapter such as this, to maintaining what appear to be a deepening and a growth in the reach and substance of CIE,



supported through dialectical relationships between OCIES and the Vaka. In this sense, we take up the idea expressed by On Lee et al. (2014), that:

Seeing comparative education as a dialectic process enhances the openness of comparative education to challenge the status quo perception of issues, and provides a compare-and-contrast perspective to identify polemic interpretations, such as empirical epistemology which can be viewed as a subjectivity that rejects the transcendental sources of knowledge .... The dialectics of comparative education opens up a new role for comparative education to accommodate polemic perspectives to co-exist and to recognize the equal importance of universality and particularity.

## **OCEANIA: CONCEPTS AND HISTORIES SHAPING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIE REGIONALLY**

Like most other regions in our world, time and history continue to define regional boundaries, spaces (or waters) people and culture. The history of Oceania spans millennia and, throughout history, boundaries, and cultures have continued to change. The Pacific that we know today has been defined only in the last 200 years with new drawings on the map to “define” Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia (McCormick, 2011). For most of us who live in these waters, these definitions are problematic as they are not always consistent with language, culture, and history. Our histories tell of epic voyages, warfare, trade, and resettlement across these waters (Hau’ofa, 1994; Hughes, 2003; Kirch, 2000; Matsuda, 2007). Evidence of these “regional” trade and relationships are still seen in our monuments, our dances and our genealogy. It is important to recognize that among these Pacific states there were and remain regional relationships that have survived for centuries and continue to present day.

Since the nineteenth century, the introduction of new religion, Western education and eventually for most, including Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, colonization has redefined the old boundaries of Oceania. The new religion and Western education introduced new values and beliefs that were institutionalized through education, churches, and government. Since the mid twentieth century, most Pacific Island states have regained their independence from colonial powers, including Australia. The independent states of the Pacific Island states include; Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Tokelau is a non-self-governing territory of New Zealand but is part of the key regional agencies in the Pacific.

The establishment of the University of the South Pacific (USP) in 1968 was the first collective effort of the independent Pacific Island states to re-establish “regionalism.” The USP is one of two regional universities in the world, with 14 campuses spread across 12 member countries, including Tokelau (University of the South Pacific (USP), 2018). In 1971, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) was established as an agency for political and economic policy development. The PIFS has 18 members, including Australia, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and New Zealand (Pacific Islands Forum, 2018). The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) was founded in 1947 by Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, United Kingdom

and Netherlands, although it was not until 1983 that 22 independent Pacific Island States became full members of the organization. The SPC is the region's principal scientific and technical organization with 26 country members and territories (SPC, 2018). Currently, the USP, PIFS, and the SPC are the three Pacific owned regional organizations that operate in [Oceania?] the Pacific. To a large extent the beliefs and practice of Pacific "regionalism" are influenced – either by design or by default – by these regional organizations. Similarly, beliefs and practices in the "development" space often are influenced by the interactions of these Pacific agencies with numerous international development agencies that are active in the Pacific region.

In terms of educational development in the region, the USP and the SPC are the two regional agencies that assist member countries through training, research, policy, and technical assistance. The governments of Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia are the two major funding agencies that support Pacific Island states and their educational development. Increasingly felt, however, are the presence of more international development agencies and universities that are also active in the Pacific Island states. Recent funders in the education sector now include China, Cuba, and India. At a regional level, with the multiplicity of development agencies, the issues of co-ordination and collaboration continue to be hard work (UNESCO, 2015).

A recent review of the published comparative education research between 2014 and 2015 (Wiseman, Davidson, & Stevens-Taylor, 2016) showed that much of the attention of the comparative and international field continues to be focused on India, China, South Africa, Turkey, and England. A key question asked in this review is the "professional identity" of the field. The review suggests that professional scholars of the field, tend to work alone, are likely to be residing in a country outside of the research focus and have a preference for qualitative research approaches. The review critiques this, claiming that it

suggests a static or perhaps stagnant model of comparative and international education scholarship, which may need to change at some point in order to move the field forward as a legitimate professional field and academic discipline. (p. 20)

The review further drew attention to the predominant use of qualitative research approaches and the importance of the insider view to the research.

The critique of aid development in Pacific education has been slowly increasing its presence in the field of CIE. Much of the critique, interestingly enough, comes from academics based in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, with UK-based scholar Michael Crossley continuing to contribute through his work on Small Island States. From Aotearoa New Zealand the dedicated work of Eve Coxon (2002, 2009, 2011, amongst others) and Kabini Sanga (2003), and their collaborations with other regional scholars, have contributed to the literature on educational development in the Pacific region. In the past decade, Australian scholars contributing to these critiques have included Julie McLaughlin (2011, 2017), Elizabeth Cassity (2010), Alexandra McCormick (2011, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b), and Hilary Tolley (Tolley and Coxon 2005, 2015). Contributions from within Pacific countries have mainly been the works of Konai Thaman (2000, 2002, 2008, 2009, 2013), Unaisi Nabobo-Baba (2002, 2006), and the seminal work of Epeli Hau'ofa on Sea of Islands (1994). However, the impact of Pacific scholars' work in the global field of CIE remains minimal (Fua, 2016; McLaughlin, 2017).



## RE-/CONSTRUCTING CIE REGIONALLY FOR AND IN CONTEMPORARY OCEANIA

Before surveying some of the approaches and topics in CIE that we recognize as being currently active in our region, in this section we outline important ways in which cooperation and institutionalized aspects of CIE have changed and grown in recent years within shifting regional governance, institutional and political dynamics. The pace of institutional change for a truly regionally active CIE has accelerated in the past half-decade, to move beyond advocacy, articles, and debate, and to manifest changes and shifts in institutional naming, format, funding arrangements, governance, leadership, and reach (Coxon, 2016; Coxon & McLaughlin, 2017; Shah et al., 2017). Our analysis considers how two regional professional societies in education, one that originated as a national society,<sup>2</sup> the ANZIES, and one as an education project, the RPEIPP, have been gradually constructed and reconstructed to grow into regional bodies and identities, as the OCIES and the Vaka Pasifiki, respectively. These changes have included intersecting relationships with each other, and with additional existing regional societies and institutions.

In this chapter we engage with Bray and Manzon's (2014) idea of a "complex interplay between macro- and meso-structural conditions and micro-political interests on the part of its [CIE] practitioners" (p. 5), yet are somewhat ambivalent as to the extent to which participation does represent an "attempt to preserve and increase the field's visibility and their positions within it" (p. 5), particularly given the very changes and diverse affiliations discussed in this chapter. Some active scholars have defined CIE as one of multiple fields in which they locate themselves or, indeed, are (al-)located by departments or institutions (Manzon, 2011; Shah et al., 2017), and in many cases prioritize area-based and/or specific educational areas or concerns.

We offer initial responses to an over-arching theme in posing the question: how, and through what processes, have these groups influenced understandings of "regionalism" for CIE within Oceania? This involves examining, in section two, the membership, conferences, the Society journal/publications and aspects of CIE education of the two bodies. In a section three, we discuss changes in research approaches and methodologies, and some of the substantive education issues that have emerged in the region.

### EDUCATION SOCIETIES IN OCEANIA: AIMS, PRINCIPLES AND THEMES

#### *Widening Participation: From ANZCIES to OCIES*

In their survey of recognized CIE societies in the wider Asia Pacific region, Bray and Manzon (2014, p. 8) observed that, "ANZCIES, which is here described as a regional body, is constitutionally defined as serving just two countries but desires to reach out to neighbours in the South Pacific." Since that was written, just over four years ago, members have undertaken significant changes to aspects of the Society's governance and practice, including a name change to become the Oceania CIES (OCIES), in order do more than merely "reach out to neighbors." The motion to change the name was a result of building discussions and

member submissions prior to the 2014 conference in Queensland, Australia, at which a debate and vote on the name change were held. A key point arising within that debate was the distinction between Pacific members being welcome and being recognized as sharing ownership within a Society, and echoes an ongoing principle in post-colonial debates relating to aid to education in the region. The government of Australia has, through aid relationships with Pacific Island countries, retained aspects of uneven economic and political power in geo-political dynamics, with Aotearoa New Zealand playing a similar role. The Society name change and subsequent associated changes in conference locations, fee, and governance structures have been recognized by members as significant, if small, steps in a wider range of regional – indeed, global – decolonizing processes that have continued now, over generations, through local, national, and shared regional independence challenges, movements, successes, and consolidation (Coxon & McLaughlin, 2017; Shah et al., 2017).

While ANZIES had long included members from Pacific island states, increasing and widening participation had been an ongoing aim (Fox, 2008), with Bray and Manzon (2014, p. 14) observing of ANZCIES conferences between 2007 and 2013 that,

Some themes also reflected underlying (multi-)cultural and social dynamics in the society's membership and wider context. For example, ANZCIES exhibited some continuity in discourse with such terms as unity, bordering, and belonging.

It is, however, only since 2014 that a range of strategies, discussed in more detail below, were introduced by the executive committees, supported through member votes, to formalize and realize those aims, as captured here:

The conference's theme and subthemes were developed with the intention of guiding the reinvigoration of CIE in Oceania. They reflected the convening committee's broad objectives:

- to revitalize our society by encompassing the diversity of issues, interests, perspectives, and contexts represented in Oceania; and
- to widen participation in and add depth to debates and dialogue about how CIE can contribute to education in the post-2015 era at global, regional and national levels (Coxon & Spratt, 2016).

In addition, the 2015 introduction of the OCIES Fellowships and Networking grant served a twofold purpose of supporting members' work that contributed to OCIES principles of supporting collaborative and equitable approaches to education, and to strengthening ties between members (see <https://ocies.org/fellowships-and-networks-program/>).

#### *Widening Participation: From RPEIPP to the Vaka Pasifiki*

The Vaka Pasifiki Education Conference, known locally as the Vaka, evolved out of the RPEIPP movement. The history of the RPEIPP has been covered elsewhere (Sanga, Niroa, Matai, & Crowl, 2004, 2005). The term "Vaka" was first introduced at a RPEIPP symposium in 2008, where members of the RPEIPP began to recognize that their concerns with education and Pacific societies was more widespread and that others were wanting to be part of this "journey." By 2012, the "first" Vaka Pacific Education Conference was held in Suva, Fiji. The first



Vaka marked 10 years of the RPEIPP movement and the transition of the name from RPEIPP symposium to Vaka Pacific Education Conference, showed the maturity of the RPEIPP philosophy guided by Pacific ownership. The transition from the RPEIPP symposium to the Vaka also signaled a determination to sustain the RPEIPP movement beyond the New Zealand funding that supported the activities of the RPEIPP. Further to this, the setup of the Vaka was also to signal that Pacific people will take responsibility for their own scholarship.

The aim of the Vaka Pasifiki is to provide an opportunity for the sharing of ideas, presentation of research and best/good practice, and discussion of issues relevant to teacher education, educational policy and practice, and teaching and learning in Oceania. The purpose of the Vaka is to allow the people who live in the context of the Pacific to speak for themselves.

Vaka Pasifiki has both literal and richly metaphorical meanings. In a number of Pacific languages “vaka” or “waka” is literally understood as a means of transport, and most commonly refers to ocean-going sailboats and canoes. Pasifiki is a transliteration of the English word Pacific in a distinctly Pacific form, and refers collectively to the island dwelling Oceanic peoples. Vaka Pasifiki is inclusive of the many and diverse cultures of those who carry an educational vision forward; the means by which they carry it and are carried by it; and the reason it is done.

As such, the themes of the last three Vaka have centered around inclusivity and practicality, and privilege the voices that have traditionally been silenced in the “development” space. The themes of the last three Vaka have been based on the philosophy of the RPEIPP, with the intention not only to re-question “accepted” approaches to education and development, but also to re-imagine and re-design more relevant approaches for our region (Otunuku, Nabobo-Baba, & Fua, 2014; Toumu’a & Otunuku, 2016; Toumu’a, Sanga, & Fua, 2016).

### *Widening Participation: Vaka Membership and Conferences*

The Vaka is governed by the Pacific Education Research Foundation (PERF). The membership of the PERF board includes esteem educational leaders in the region with extensive experience in both academia and in educational development. At one time, the board members included two ministers of education; at present, one of the board members is the president of a Pacific country. The secretariat to the PERF is located within the Institute of Education at the USP. The PERF meets at least once a year and always before each Vaka is held. Setting the theme for each Vaka is the responsibility of the conference conveners and the PERF board, in collaboration with the hosting country. Usually a theme is set to reflect key events or an area of concern for the host and for the region.

The Vaka is held every two to three years and it is held around the region to encourage national participation. A country volunteers to host the Vaka and in agreement with the PERF board. The Vaka conference is held over two-day period with side events running before and after the conference. The Leadership Pacific, a sub-group under the RPEIPP often holds their symposium before the Vaka.

The first Vaka in 2012, held in Suva, had a group of about 80 participants who were mainly academics and from national ministries of education. Many

participants of this first Vaka were educators who had been with the RPEIPP through its various activities. It was decided at this point that the Vaka would attempt to “travel” around the region in an effort to widen participation from practitioners. It was also a strategic move at this time to include the Pacific Association of Teacher Educators (PATE) as cohost of the Vaka, again reflecting the PERF’s wish to be inclusive and bridge theory and practice.

In 2014, the Vaka was hosted by Tonga with sponsorship from the Tonga Ministry of Education, private educational authorities, national agencies and private corporate companies. The Vaka in Tonga saw the participation increase to 300, with a strong presence of Tongan teachers and principals. The participation also included regional participation from teacher education institutes of Vanuatu, Samoa, PNG, Fiji, and Solomon Islands. An unexpected outcome of this conference was the presence of international academics from Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Canada. Furthermore, the participants also included development agencies and international non-government agencies active in the region.

In 2016 the Vaka was hosted by Solomon Islands with strong sponsorship from the Solomon Islands Ministry of Education Human Development and Resources (MEHRD), the Solomon Islands National University (SINU), and corporate companies (both regional and national). The Solomon Islands Vaka saw the registration at Vaka reach 500 with actual attendance at 410 people. The two-day conference included 95 papers being presented by academics, researchers, practitioners, and community leaders (Toumu’a & ‘Otunuku, 2016). The participation at the Vaka 2016, as in Tonga, saw a strong presence of Solomon Island teachers and academics, and further increase in the number of international and regional participants. In 2018 the Vaka was hosted by the USP, and a number of regional and national corporate companies. The 2018 Vaka continued to see growth in the participation of Pacific people from around the region and increasingly from the diaspora with just under 300 in attendance (‘Otunuku & Kautoke, 2018).

The registration fee for the Vaka has been deliberately set to be affordable for the national teacher. There is a separate fee for the regional and international participant but still maintains a relatively affordable standard. There is no membership fee. This has meant that to cover the expenses for the Vaka, significant effort has to be made to attract sponsorships from national governments, educational institutions, and corporate companies. In all three Vaka the IOE has managed to run the Vaka independent of foreign donor support, thus there has been no foreign influence on the Vaka themes.

While the 2012 Fiji and the 2014 Tonga Vaka maintained a relatively “traditional” academic conference approach, the 2016 Solomon Islands Vaka saw the emergence of using Pacific based concepts about sharing information. In the Solomon Islands Vaka, we saw the emergence of using Tok Stori and also a very popular session on using Talanoa. The success of these two sessions, using Tok Stori<sup>3</sup> and Talanoa<sup>4</sup> led to dramatic shifts in the format of the conference for the 2018 Fiji Vaka. The format for the 2018 Fiji Vaka used a traditional Tok Stori of the Melanesians, the Ako of the Polynesians, the Maneaba of the I-Kiribati and also the Lan, blue sky thinking of the Marshallese. It is a bold move to continually carve the Vaka closer to the epistemologies of the region not only in themes but also through its format. The Vaka



publishes a conference proceeding at the end of every Vaka and a book is published by the Institute of Education with selected papers from the conference.

### *Widening Participation: OCIES Conferences*

In their survey of CIE societies in Asia and the Pacific, Bray and Manzon (2014) surmise that:

The frequency of the conferences is an indicator of intensity of activity, their locations reflect dimensions of partnership, and their official themes are an indicator of content. Similar remarks about frequency and content apply to the publications. (p. 11)

Bray and Manzon (2014) recognized that, “the dual nature of ANZCIES was evident in its holding of two conferences in New Zealand and five in Australia (which has a much larger population and area)” (p. 12). These observations demonstrate the nature of “regional” institutional reach of ANZCIES at that time as focused on Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, a point which did not extend to the significant range of partnerships engaged in by the members, individuals and groups from around the Pacific Islands, and also the wider Asia Pacific region, as discussed in a later section.

In the remainder of this section we draw on reports from the three most recent annual conferences between 2015 and 2017, held in Port Vila, Sydney, and Noumea, to demonstrate changes and continuities in attendance, fees, form, location, and themes. The first of these was convened collaboratively by individuals at three institutions in the region, one the regional USP, with the Universities of Auckland and Sydney. The 2015 conference conveners’ report is unequivocal in expressing explicit aims for the conference and society:

The 43rd conference of the regional CIE society, the first under the new name of OCIES, was held at the USP’s Emalus Campus in Vanuatu from 3-6 November, 2015. Given that one of the key motivations for the change of name was the members’ wish for a name more representative of the region within which our society exists, and more inclusive of educationists from the many countries within Oceania, it was seen as important that the first conference under the new name also be the first held in a country other than Australia or New Zealand. (Coxon & Spratt, 2016)

OCIES conference locations moved to include Pacific island institutions in order to encourage wider participation, distribute benefits and costs, and practice the principle of shared ownership. The introduction of reduced conference rates and additional grants for local educators and established scholars, as well as extending the number of scholarships to higher degree research students and early career scholars, have also served this aim of widening participation. There have also been efforts to expand the involvement of higher degree research students to include more presentations from Masters research students, and a range of education stakeholders, educators, and policy-makers, beyond the academics who had traditionally comprised the society’s membership. An additional strategy has been to include three-year society memberships as gifts to invited keynote speakers.

The 2015 conference saw the highest number of attendees in the history of the society, with 11 countries’ institutions and organizations represented, and more than 30% of attendees from Pacific Island or countries identified as “developing,” and a quarter postgraduate students. Pacific Island countries (Vanuatu, Solomon

Islands, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Cook Islands, PNG) constituted the largest number of presenters, and represented campuses of the USP, SINU, Ministries of Education, and a range of regional agencies and non-government organizations. Presenters based in Australia from a range of 11 universities and ACER constituted the next most numerous grouping and, after that, Aotearoa New Zealand presenters came from five universities. Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand presenter groups included diverse ethnicities, and presentations addressing research in diverse locations. The number of presenters that attended from institutions beyond Oceania was small, although around 25% presented research undertaken beyond Oceania, from Indonesia, Maldives, Singapore/Malaysia, Nepal, Canada, Timor Leste, Laos, Thailand, China, and the USA (Coxon & Spratt, 2016).

Keynote presenters included the current OCIES co-President, Associate Professor Kabini Sanga (Victoria University of Wellington), Dr Christine Fox (formerly of University of Wollongong, and former WCCES Secretary General) and Dr Seu'ula Johansson-Fua (Director of the USP's Institute of Education), and the program included an invited panel speaking on issues of language in Vanuatu. Professor Sanga and Dr Fua have been integral to the RPEIPP and Vaka Pasifiki initiatives.

Of the following 2016 conference objectives, the Convenor's report states that,

The core conference aim was to consolidate the revitalization of our regional society, that began with our change of name last year, by continuing to encompass the diversity of issues, interests, perspectives and contexts represented in Oceania, and beyond. (McCormick, 2017)

One keynote speaker, Professor Unaisi Nabobo-Baba (University of Guam, also a key figure in the RPEIPP and Vaka Pasifiki movement), organized a team from the Marianas, Northern Pacific islands, to attend the conference for the first time. Attendance overall was, as in 2015, significantly diversified and extended in contrast to previous conferences:

Attendees represented a range of 17 different countries. Almost 22% of presentations were by higher degree research students. In addition to a small number of independent presenters, a diverse range of presenters represented seven Pacific island nations and institutions, thirteen Australian and five New Zealand institutions. Presenters also came from institutions in China, Korea, Japan, the Netherlands, Thailand, Sri Lanka and multiple locations in the United States. (McCormick, 2017)

In 2017, the 45th annual conference again extended membership and participation, with over 120 researchers, educators, and practitioners from 21 countries. Its theme was "Education and sustainable development in Oceania and beyond," and "promoted critical dialogue about the relationship between education and sustainable development and sought to strengthen research relationships within and beyond our region" (OCIES, 2018). As keynote speakers, Professor Konai Helu Thaman (USP), "considered the implications of sustainable development for Indigenous Pacific communities and Emmanuel Tjibaou reminded us of the importance of respecting and learning from indigenous communities," while Professor Roger Dale "considered the ideation of sustainable development and challenged us to consider who benefits and who loses from the implementation of SDGs" (OCIES, 2018).



The range in the format and styles of conference presentations has also grown in recent years. Recent conferences have included musical presentations, exhibitions, and focused workshops. For example, at the 2015 conference, 10 of 76 attendees presented in more than one format (Coxon & Spratt, 2016). These are new, and remain somewhat sporadic, approaches within the Society, and is another area where OCIES has been learning, and is poised to learn more, through interactions with(in) the Vaka Pasifiki.

Another change that reflects the Society's commitment to improving inclusivity has been the introduction of regular conference surveys and concomitant responsiveness to the issues raised by attendees and members. For example, reducing ticket prices by \$100 for most types of registration, "answered prior AGM discussions and member survey responses that considered conference costs prohibitive" (McCormick, 2017c). Acknowledgment should also be given to individuals who occupy roles on the Society executive committee and convene conferences; that work can be in addition to full time work or study loads, and voluntarily without institutional or official recognition or support for their contributions. While it has not been systematically recorded or analyzed, the international mix of CIE educators and researchers in the OCIES is worth noting; unfortunately, so is the small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars, in part reflecting current levels of Higher Education participation in Australia.

In 2017 a decision to change the Society Constitution was taken by members, and passed at the AGM, to change the OCIES leadership structure, again in order to support regional ownership and principles of equitable, expanded participation. In place of a President and Vice President, who had previously been resident of either Australia or New Zealand, there are now two co-presidents. While incumbents Professor Zane Ma Rhea and Professor Kabini Sanga do reside in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, respectively, this is no longer stipulated as a requirement. Under this new leadership arrangement, the 2018 conference was held in Victoria, Wellington, in Aotearoa New Zealand.<sup>5</sup>

In another dimension of regional institutional activity and participation, OCIES members and Vaka leaders working in CIE have also been active in attending the Pacific Circle Consortium (PCC) conferences, and engaged in debates regarding the "Pacific Rim" discourse and nomenclature (Coxon, 2011, p. 6). Education represents just one aspect of the work considered within the PCC group, but it is another regional space in which members of both the Vaka and OCIES have been active.

*The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives (IEJ: CP)*

The OCIES journal, the *IEJ: CP* has, likewise, undergone remarkable changes in recent years to consolidate its regionally focused identity, reach, and substance. Writing of the period to 2013, Bray and Manzon (2014, p. 14) note that:

ANZCIES sponsors the *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*. All content is in English. The journal was launched by a private publisher in 1999. It was taken over by ANZCIES in 2007, and the WCES granted some financial support in 2008. Seven issues (all

in English) were produced between 2007 and 2012. Three issues were published in 2007, two in 2008, none in 2009 or 2010, two in 2011 and one in 2012. A Newsletter was also published intermittently: twice in 2007, twice in 2012, and once in 2013. The irregularity reflected flows in the leadership.

Since 2014, four issues have been published regularly each year, with significant changes underway that, again, reflect the principles of inclusion and widening participation. A small but dedicated team of members undertook revival of the journal and moved it from a printed distribution to free, online open access. Its subsequent editorial team has maintained and extended on that significant work, with the inclusion of artwork, and exploration of how to diversify beyond English language publication (for the current issue and archives see <https://open-journals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/IEJ>). Ongoing, systematic analysis of the changes in content, distribution and languages, and a survey of topics would be instructive. An extended OCIES newsletter has also been published regularly three times a year since 2014.

#### *Education for CIE in the Region*

Our approach in this chapter has been to consider the “institutionalisation of CIE through scholarly societies” (Bray & Manzon, 2014) regionally (or sub-regionally) in Oceania. As another facet of that, we recognize relationships between the two professional bodies, the OCIES and the Vaka, and affiliated education institutions. While full discussion of CIE, in particular higher education environments, is beyond the focus and scope of this chapter, we further recognize the institutionalization of CIE through curriculum design and pedagogical approaches within those institutions. We acknowledge extensive work regionally in teaching and supervision by key scholars active in CIE, many of whom have published in the *IEJ: CP* and a range of key CIE journals (as an entry point to these, see conference and other Special Issues: Casinader & Iyer, 2015; Coxon, 2016; Coxon & Cassity, 2011; Thomas & McCormick, 2017).

The PERF board considers the Vaka as an education facility in itself that is dynamic, fluid and exploratory in its approach. As an education facility, the Vaka deliberately sets out to search for Oceanic philosophies, values and knowledge systems. It recognizes the diversity of our region, the multiple levels of engagement and of learning. Further, the Vaka as an educational facility recognizes that knowledge is context specific and continually shifting. As an educational facility the Vaka also recognizes that there are voices that have neither been heard nor included in international and regional dialogue. The publications out of the RPEIPP (*Re-thinking Education Curricula in the Pacific: Challenges and Prospects; Re-thinking Aid Relationships in Pacific Education*) and the Vaka (*Weaving Education Theory and Practice in Oceania, Of Waves Winds and Wonderful Things: A decade of Rethinking Pacific Education*) have been an effort to build the scholarship from a Pacific people perspective.

A key part of considering educational dimensions incorporates the role of the Vaka Pasifiki and the OCIES in fostering participation, knowledge and understanding of CIE, and their interactions with those institutions and students, including



scholarly succession in CIE. For some, affiliation with CIE, whether as a discipline, area, field, or otherwise, emerged from introduction through professional societies, rather than through formal curricula or explicit institution-based instruction.

Recent and established works considering the field of CIE show that CIE has long been researched and taught in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand as a recognized discipline and these accounts cover much historical ground (Coxon & McLaughlin, 2017; Fox, 2008; Manzon, 2011). While some courses continue at larger universities, in recent decades there has been a decline in named CIE courses in those nations that may be seen as part of a wider narrowing of the sociology of education curriculum, including the history and philosophy of education. Likewise, institutional networks may be dependent on funding, staff availability, and workload allocation and therefore depend on individual capacities and will. These exist in a number of institutions in Australia, and demonstrate common interests in exploring themes of equity and power in education. For example the Comparative and International Education Group University of Newcastle (CIEGUN), poses a programmatic research question of, “How do subaltern / subordinate readings of educational policy challenge dominant paradigms, such as neoliberalism, and present alternatives?” <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/research-and-innovation/centre/education-arts/ciegun/about-us>. The CIERN at the University of New England (<https://www.une.edu.au/about-une/faculty-of-humanities-arts-social-sciences-and-education/school-of-education/research/comparative-and-international-education-research-network>), whose members are “working towards an edited book tentatively titled *Doing Southern Theory in/for education*.”

The Comparative and International Education (CoInEd) Network at the University of Sydney professes similar aims and has produced an *IEJ: CP* Special Issue (McCormick, 2016b, and see [http://sydney.edu.au/education\\_social\\_work/research/centres\\_and\\_networks/CIEN/index.shtml](http://sydney.edu.au/education_social_work/research/centres_and_networks/CIEN/index.shtml)).

In a recent pilot study, partly supported through the OCIES Fellowships and Network Program mentioned previously, comparison of higher education approaches to learning and teaching CIE in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand was undertaken, and included educators’ reflections on teaching in and about region, as part of a broader inquiry into teaching CIE (Shah et al., 2017). The study demonstrated active approaches to interrogating the notion of “region”; post-structural teaching methods that include histories of colonization and regional “black-birding”; inclusion of a range of contexts and material types, poly-vocal lecture series and breaking down the concepts and language of “developed/developing” binaries to explore complexity of contexts within and between nations (Shah et al., 2017).

### OCIES & VAKA PASIFIKI: CONCEPTS, METHODOLOGIES, AND RESEARCH CONCERNS

The concern of the Vaka is the context, the reality of Pacific people’s lives and the role that education plays to sustain these lives. Vaka is concerned with revealing the reality of the Pacific context as experienced and described by Pacific people.

Some may argue that it is a very “in-ward” looking approach. But perhaps it is part of a decolonization process toward greater clarity of identity and search for authenticity. It is also about affirming our knowledge systems, values, and philosophy that do exist in our context. The biggest challenge to the field of CIE at present is how to go beyond recognizing the importance of the context (Bekele, 2017; Crossley, 2009, 2012; Johansson Fua, 2016, etc.).

The use of the term *Vaka Pasifiki* to describe a Pacific owned educational conference was deliberate. The *Vaka* has become a symbol for an emerging indigenous Pacific Research School of Thought. Symbolically, the destination of *Vaka Pasifiki* is, as yet, uncharted. It is dependent on the clarity of the collective visioning of *Pasifiki* people, who alone can define and navigate to a destination which is sustainable, and in which *Pasifiki* flourishing, are assured, and can forge new Oceanic paradigms. *Vaka Pasifiki* must be able to see and utilize the navigational wisdoms of its people. It must “ride low, close to Oceania: so that we feel the currents,” and strive to be ever responsive to the hopes and aspirations of Pacific peoples, serving them with humility, respect and courage (Institute of Education, 2018).

The *Vaka* is deliberately set up to encourage Pacific scholars, practitioners, teachers, and community elders to describe their contexts, their world-views, their realities. The *Vaka* fully recognizes that in our region there are over 1,000 indigenous languages, each with its own knowledge system, world-views, and philosophies. The *Vaka* has also been deliberate in the promotion of Pacific based conceptual frameworks that capture the essence of our knowledge systems and our world views. The search for Pacific based conceptual frameworks is a search for clarity in how we experience and make sense of our context. In this emerging Oceanic paradigm, it is no longer acceptable that we see our world as “outsiders” and pretend that we do not know more. As Hau’ofa argued in the “Sea of Islands”:

We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic ties that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically, in the tiny spaces that we have resisted accepting as our sole appointed places, and from which we have recently liberated ourselves (1993, p. 160).

Through the influence of the RPEIPP several cultural based conceptual frameworks have emerged, for example, the Tongan *Kakala* Research framework (Fua, 2014), the Fijian *Iluvatu* Indigenous Framework (Naisilisili, 2014), and the *Vanua* Framework (Nabobo-Baba, 2008).

Further to this, there has also been the re-articulation of traditional forms of communication applied as research tools. The use of *Talanoa* in the context of the Fijians, Samoans and the Tongans and in the diaspora communities in Aotearoa New Zealand has generated considerable scholarly literature on an ancient form of communication (Fua, 2016; Sanga & Kidman, 2012). Further to that, the use of *Tok Stori* (Sanga, 2014) in the context of the Solomon Islands and other Melanesian countries is also gaining movement in its use.

Further to this, there has also been growing concern with the ethical dimensions of research and development work. Writings by Kabini Sanga, Indigenous Pacific Ethical systems and its implications for research, and by Fua, *The Kakala*



Research Framework, and Talanoa, are two key pieces of work that have come out of the RPEIPP movement (Fua, 2014; Sanga, 2014).

The research concern of the Vaka Pasifiki has largely centered around single country focus (Otunuku et al., 2014; Toumu'a & Otunuku, 2016; Toumu'a et al., 2016). Within country, the focus has been largely on a system level concerning curriculum and assessment (Otunuku et al., 2014), teacher education and educational administration (Toumu'a et al., 2016), and more recently with community voices, classrooms and the re-design of educational processes and structures (Toumu'a et al., 2016). The majority of the participants contributing to these publications were living in the countries in which they conducted research and used largely qualitative approaches with a few quantitative studies.

What can the conceptual frameworks and emerging methodologies inform us about the new "regionalism"? If we are to accept that the concept of "regionalism" like any other concept, shifts over time and events, then perhaps it is possible that we are currently in a time of transition. Post-independence the idea of regionalism was perhaps needed to bind small island states together in their quest for independence and nation building. The establishment of The USP in 1968 was one of the first early regional mechanisms, in this case for education. Fifty years later, the region has matured in terms of post-colonial identity, and in a stronger sense of nation. But we do not seem to have a clearer idea of the purpose of regionalism and what it means today.

We would like to argue that the emerging conceptual frameworks, research methodologies, as in Talanoa and Tok Stori, and concern with Pacific ethical guidelines, are indications of the maturity of the region and a changing identity. Perhaps this is the transition toward a new level or new form of regionalism. What that may be or how it might shape up, is too early to define.

In addition to the thematic confluences discussed above, intersections between the OCIES and the Vaka have been evident at the level of individuals, in terms of attendance at both conferences, collaborative work, including on publications, and also in the range of research approaches and topics undertaken. A full survey of research approaches within the region, or even just within the OCIES, is beyond the scope of the current chapter, but it is worth noting some recent research approaches and themes taken up by OCIES scholars that relate to the regional reinvigoration of CIE in Oceania.

While there have been developments in approaches to and reflections on ethical research practice in the region evident in the work of members, with recognitions of the changes to the regional ethics frameworks noted above (McCormick, 2017a; Shah et al., 2017; Jesson and Spratt, 2017), these have been recent and relatively sporadic. Individual researchers have grappled with ethical issues arising in the field and in their own research that consider their work nationally and regionally (e.g., McLaughlin, 2017; Shah et al., 2017; Takayama, 2016a; Welch, 2017). Research shared at recent OCIES conferences has taken up questions of identity politics, indigenous approaches, and post-coloniality in education. OCIES scholars have continued to challenge regional configurations of power within and outside of academia including, for example, that which takes up Chen's (2010) construction of "Asia as Method" by Japanese, Australia-based

scholar (Takayama, 2016b). Varied, conceptual, methodological, and theoretical approaches in institutions in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand have seen an increase in decolonizing methodologies and post-structural approaches that have included critical discourse analyses, ethnographic, narrative, and phenomenological perspectives that seek to acknowledge locate researchers' positionalities in relation to ethical research approaches and recognition of voice (Blackman, 2017; Jesson & Spratt, 2017; McCormick, 2017a; Shah et al., 2017).

A tradition that has been maintained through the life of ANZCIES and OCIES has been engagement in wider Asia Pacific research communities and topics. Beyond Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific Island nations have been interactions with East, Southeast and South Asia, and those contexts described above, as well as a wider range of geographical research areas, including in Africa, Europe, and North and South America. Long-standing and more recent members alike have been mindful of retaining and supporting this reach even through the changes discussed (Bagnall, 2015; Di Biase, 2017; Welch et al., 2017; Wettewa & Bagnall, 2017).

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: FUTURES FOR A REGIONAL CIE FOR OCEANIA

Hau'ofa's call for an Oceanic view of the Pacific in his "Sea of Islands" essay (Hau'ofa, 1993) has since encouraged a growing number of Pacific-based scholars (including those living in New Zealand and Australia) to rethink education development in the region. The Vaka Pasifiki and the OCIES are two associations that have taken direction from Hau'ofa's call for an Oceanic perspective. The strengthened voices of the Vaka Pasifiki and the recent move to include wider participation of Pacific scholars in the OCIES signals a shift in the dialogic relationship among Oceanic scholars (including New Zealand and Australian scholars). It is critical to further explore the dialogic relationships between the national, regional and global through the two associations. The increasing participation of not only Pacific people in the Vaka and OCIES is encouraging but it is also encouraging to see wider participation of professionals and practitioners in the Vaka and, to a lesser extent, OCIES. This is a trend that seems to be supported by Wiseman et al. (2016) with suggestions that the field of CIE can benefit from further study of "the ways that professionals in the field outside of scholarly publications and academia do their work. This would provide a theory-to-research-to-practice continuum, which would be genuinely useful" (p. 22). Wiseman et al. (2016) further suggests that the field may benefit from further focus on the critical voices and the theoretical frameworks that are being used by scholars in their field. The emerging frameworks from the Vaka, could perhaps be, although in initial stages, encouraged as the means to explore new possibilities in the field for Oceania.

We have offered, in this chapter, initial responses to an over-arching theme in posing the question of how, and through what processes, have the OCIES and the Vaka influenced understandings of "region" and, to some extent, "regionalism" for CIE within Oceania? This has involved mapping how, in these overlapping arenas, deliberate and sustained efforts have been and continue to be made to



deconstruct and reconstruct individual and institutional approaches to relationships in education regionally. These processes have taken in the reformulation and reinvigoration of the borders, contexts, cooperation, governance, histories, participation, policy, power, process, and voice within the two groups that we noted in our introduction as among the core concerns for CIE the world over.

These efforts represent the beginnings of a more substantively dialectical regional engagement along the lines suggested by On Lee et al. (2014). They will require sustained and sustainable approaches to develop and maintain these emerging points of mutual recognition and understanding in education research and teaching in a region characterized by extreme diversity of beliefs, cultures, epistemological standpoints, geography, language and political systems, and shaped as much by (hu-)man-made and natural histories of inequity as of innovation and resilience.

## NOTES

1. Pacific Island Forum includes the following countries: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Tonga, and Vanuatu.
2. Originally the Australian Comparative Education Society (Fox, 2008).
3. Tok Stori – Solomon Islands pidgin term for sharing stories and ideas.
4. Talanoa – Proto-Polynesian term (Tonga, Samoa, Fiji) for sharing stories and ideas.
5. The conference had not taken place at the time of writing and so is not reported on; planning for the 2019 conference in Samoa is underway.

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