INTRODUCTION

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This book presents Pacific viewpoints on critical aspects of Special and Inclusive Education, and Human Development. Formal schooling on western models has become so established, with such apparently meek acceptance, throughout the Pacific that constructive and radical ways of 'contextualising' and/or 'localising' these educational ideas and practices, across the whole spectrum of education, have been pursued passionately only in the last few decades. One of those educational models being pursued is the recognition of the education of individuals with exceptionalities in the Pacific region through Special and Inclusive Education practices. This educational model is an attempt to recognise, accept and include individuals with special needs in the mainstream education system, a practice that was once neglected, on the basis of the prevailing medical discourse, prejudice and stigma. This book is part of that thrust to promote inclusive practices in the Pacific region.

While western notions of special and inclusive education are quite new concepts to many Pacific educators and parents alike, people with special needs have been part and parcel of Pacific societies for centuries, though not necessarily receiving a lot of attention in public social policy and formal education systems. But sensibilities are changing and the Education Ministers of the Pacific Islands Forum made an urgent call in Tonga in 2014 to ensure that educational transformation in the Pacific Islands Countries (PICs) take immediate effect, with the recognition and inclusion of people with special needs in different spheres of life such as education, sports, job opportunities, and social participation. This was resolved in support of the '*Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability 2010–2015*' that the Pacific Islands Forum leaders agreed in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 21–23 October 2009. The policy direction has been driven by international and national laws and policy initiatives (e.g.,

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Declaration on Education for All, the Salamanca Statement and the Framework for Action on Special Needs Education) that call for the recognition of people with special needs based on the contextualised principles of equality, equity, and social justice in the Pacific region.

In short, Pacific leaders have advocated that the approach be 'rights-based' as well as 'needs-based', so that *all Pacific people* participate fully in and enjoy the benefits of the social and economic development of their own countries. The recognition and inclusion of people with special needs also resonates strongly with contemporary Pacific people's cultural as well as spiritual background and upbringing, whereby people with special needs are already included in the families, clans, communities and society at large, in the belief that all children with exceptionalities are gifts from God, to be valued, treasured and nurtured. This is the true contemporary 'Pacific way'; an individual is considered to be part of the wider family and societal network and community of people, through sharing of their *mana* (an impersonal force or quality that resides in Pacific people), through genealogical connections, authentic love, compassion, empathy and care. This, however, is not to say that all Pacific people feel and behave in exactly the same way: the region's cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic diversity ensures otherwise.

While the book has placed an emphasis on the special needs spectrum, which includes both individuals 'with disabilities' and those on the other side of the normal curve who are remarkably 'gifted and talented', attention is also drawn to some of the variation in the ways Pacific people understand human development. This should prove useful, because while western countries tend to view human development in terms of an ontogenetic process of individual development and unfolding lifespan discourses, Pacific people tend more to understand human individuals in terms of cultural values, which are ingrained and connected to the people, their families and the support systems that are inbuilt within their own different cultures. The formative influence of macro-variables of the Pacific cultural contexts on human development is such that human development is considered as a byproduct of the interaction existing between the biological makeup of an individual and the cultural context in

which the individual functions (Seidl-de-Moura, 2012). This has also led to unravelling the facts surrounding how an individual with special needs is viewed, valued and supported by immediate family members as well as the general community of people whom they call *wantoks* (a Melanesian Pidgin word to mean people who speak the same language, and thus share considerable commonality).

A child with special needs in the Pacific region is unconditionally loved, valued and cared for, especially within the earliest years. That means a 'Pacific Child' tends still to be specially connected to his/her own culture (which is very much alive to this day), their families and the wider Pacific society. The Pacific values and ideologies play a pivotal role in upholding and maintaining family connections and togetherness. Thus the notion of inclusion has always been recognised as an inherent Pacific sub-conscious phenomenon, which has been the sinnet that binds a given family or clan's survival through the ages.

Though special and inclusive education principles and practices are, at last, being promoted in the Pacific Islands Countries, it is proving to be a challenging endeavour. Many PICs are still practising dual education systems wherein special schools for individuals with disabilities and regular schools for individuals who are considered to be 'normal' (and perhaps also for the largely unacknowledged gifted and talented) operate separately and concurrently (Miller, 2009). In many Pacific countries, though, the introduction of appropriate legislative and policy frameworks is now shifting the goal posts towards fostering inclusive education. For instance, the current *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji* [undated], Chapter 2 – Bill of Rights, Section 42, Sub-section 1 stipulates that:

1. A person with any disability has the right —

  (a) to reasonable access to all places, public transport and information;

  (b) to use sign language, Braille and other appropriate means of communication; and

  (c) to reasonable access to necessary materials, substances and devices

relating to the person's disability.

This legislative provision demonstrates one Pacific country's aspiration to promote the rights of the region's individuals with special needs. It must be noted that most Pacific Island Countries have also developed Special and Inclusive Education policies (e.g., Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Samoa and Tonga) at the time of this writing and Palau has a Public Law that is in line with the USA Special Education system. However, while the endeavor to achieve full inclusive education in the PICs may take time and depend on how different Pacific governments allocate resources, different government agencies as well as non-government organisations such as the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), the Pacific Islands Disability Forum (PIDF) and other related line agencies are urging more support and genuine advocacy. Indeed, in this context a major aim of the present book is to inform different stakeholders including policy makers, teachers, parents, academics, and other interested parties about special needs issues and the road to inclusion. The following overview of the individual chapters highlights the range and diversity of such issues; and in the process it will no doubt inadvertently make gaps in coverage apparent. A first-of-its-kind attempt cannot be expected to be comprehensive. Rather, it adumbrates the general area and earnestly hopes to encourage committed next steps.

The issue of inclusive leadership provides the book's opening sally, for effective functioning of any organisation, including schools, depends on what is considered to be an effective leadership culture. Hence, in the opening chapter authors Govinda Ishwar Lingam, John Longo Rombo and Hem Chand Dayal argue that leadership practices that can help in raising the bar or improving the quality of education must take precedence, all the more so in contemporary times when myriad demands of work are expected of schools. To achieve this end, they call for a paradigm shift in leadership to meet the demands of the changing times whilst contributing positively towards qualitative improvement in education. As a consequence, the chapter draws attention to the leadership imperative and in particular to transformational leadership, for continuous success of schools in managing the flurry of educational reforms such as inclusive education. Even though

the presence of transformational leadership may not absolutely guarantee success, its absence could certainly lead to under-achievement in all efforts to reform education. Clearly, more attention can and should be paid to leadership preparation in all educational jurisdictions, not least in developing contexts such as those in the small island states of the Pacific, for inclusive education to be realised, optimised and sustained.

Inclusive education is being promoted in the Pacific region, underpinned by the relevant policy frameworks developed by the different Pacific Islands Countries. Whilst the inclusive education being mooted is largely based on the 'rights discourse', one cannot override the 'lay' and the 'charity' discourses, because much of what is actually happening in the Pacific region is influenced by 'otherness' and the medical discourse. Nonetheless, many Pacific Islands Countries are now embracing inclusive education and all it connotes. Hence, Leaupepe in chapter two argues that in the Cook Islands, challenges existing in the area of the education and care of children, especially those with 'disabilities', relate to the slotting of such children and their families into categories that discredit their basic human right to education. Dominant discourses that take a pathological, charitable or deficit view of children with disabilities continue to prevail within society. This state of affairs warrants closer examination of such assumptions and their impact on how these children learn and are taught. Drawing on *Towards an Inclusive Society*: *The Cook Islands Inclusive Education Policy*, this chapter looks at aspects that relate to teachers' knowledge, perceptions and practices of inclusive education. Re-examination of the assumptions and challenges posed by societal beliefs, alongside children with disabilities and their families' experiences, will, it is hoped, launch a renewed commitment from educational institutions. Consideration must take into account the ways in which educational settings have taken responsibility for upholding policies and engaging in best practices appropriate for the children and families, while maintaining motivation and intentions grounded in a rights-based discourse.

However, for inclusive education to be successfully implemented in Pacific educational contexts, one needs also to look at the school culture and how it promotes inclusive practices. In the third chapter, John Longo Rombo,

Govinda Ishwar Lingam and Hem Chand Dayal describe a research study that was conducted in Papua New Guinea on how the school culture influences inclusive education. The authors argue that Inclusive Education (IE) is about giving equal educational opportunities to 'all children', whether with special needs or not, in the regular schools, always remembering that 'equal educational opportunities' is not the same as 'subjection to identical educational content and practices'.

The school culture, which is generally defined as 'how things are done here', is vital for the promotion of inclusive practices. The study identified four broad school cultural features and practices, staff understanding of which is of crucial significance: special and inclusive education concepts; leadership and organisation; school cultural features/practices and implications for staff; and policies. Limitations of teachers' and school administrators' knowledge and understanding about what constitutes special and inclusive education practices were apparent. Children with special needs were already part of the PNG education system when the policy was implemented. Though the teachers and school administrators supposed this to be inclusive education, its characterisation in the literature would place it as a manifestation of mere 'functional mainstreaming' practices, backed by limited or no support provisions in the schools.

The next group of chapters elucidates important aspects of Samoan ideas about inclusive education. Moeimanono Fouvaa draws on how Pacific people promote inclusive education on the basis of their spiritual upbringing and their love and care of neighbours who are also called Pacific family. He reminds us that everyone around us – whether with disabilities or talented, poor or rich, strong or weak – is your/my neighbour. Taking care of our neighbour/s, building collaboration, and respecting each other might become a constructive strategy for achieving inclusive and healthy living. Furthermore, living in a global environment requires inclusive education of individuals in order to take full responsibility for everyone. This should begin from home, parents taking full responsibility in looking after their children's specific needs and general necessities, with full support and equal treatment provided as necessary for parents with a child or children with special needs.

The language of love, care and safety should be heard at home between parents and their children. In the friendly atmosphere created in the home environment, trusting each other through love and care, no one in the family will feel isolated or be left behind.

One of the aspects of the special needs spectrum still neglected in the Pacific region is the identification and proper placement of individuals who are 'gifted and talented' in inclusive schools. The book's next two chapters delve into how some Pacific cultures understand and embrace the notions of 'gifted and talented'. Meripa Toso provides a Pasifika analytical framework to identify emerging discourses that may assist critical pedagogical knowledge and practices for Pasifika learning and teaching. Where western notions of giftedness tend to define it as exceptional talent and performance mastery in at least one field of activity, this chapter contends that Samoan giftedness has a range of characteristics that are based on culture and language. Personal narratives that present indigenous knowledge and express cultural information over time and space are employed to build our understanding of Samoan giftedness and how it is apparent in children's learning. The conceptualisation of Samoan giftedness as having *mana* or an aura (something precious) links it to the spiritual. From a Samoan perspective, spirituality will be presented as a focus that enhances the child's sense of self; and nurturing and fostering this 'giftedness' is critical.

Seiuli Luama Sauni provides another Samoan perspective on giftedness in the sixth chapter, pointing out that western terminology's use of 'gifted' to signify children's potential for highly accomplished performance makes no reference to socio-cultural contextual factors. However, for Pasifika, especially Samoan, children giftedness includes being well versed in the cultural knowledge, values, beliefs, and principles, all of which are underpinned by notions of spirituality. In this perspective, giftedness is understood as implying 'God-given talents', gifts that are to be expressed, appreciated with awe and celebrated with others. These gifts are viewed as blessings of skill, poise and creativity given to the individual, not just for the individual, but to be shared within and for the collective. Parents and educators must first be able to recognise when they have a child who demonstrates exceptional artistic or

creative abilities. Teachers, if aware of the unique gifts that children in their care possess, can use culturally appropriate and meaningful ways to cultivate children's 'giftedness'. Parents and families need to adopt a concerted, closely collaborative approach toward nurturing children's 'giftedness'. Nevertheless, 'giftedness' for Pasifika children is often overlooked within Aotearoa New Zealand Early Childhood Centres and schools. Drawing on three aspects recognised as cultural identifiers of Pasifika 'giftedness' in college students in New Zealand – (1) church affiliation, (2) commitment to excellence, and (3) relationships – this chapter explores ways in which 'giftedness' can be encouraged through teacher–child–family relationships.

A completely different kind of 'specialness' comes under the spotlight in the seventh chapter. The inclusion in this book of the case of comprehension difficulties faced by Pasifika students is invaluable and timely. For them, the second language they are learning is made even more inaccessible by being the language of content exposition and the language of instruction. Mealoa Amituanai–Toloa points out the concurrence of New Zealand and international research findings about the under-achievement of minority group ESL learners, identifying comprehension in text reading as a particularly indicative area. In New Zealand, students of Pasifika descent from low socioeconomic areas who speak a Pasifika first language other than English have been notably 'at risk'. The question that is often asked today is: What is required to improve students', particularly Pasifika students', comprehension of texts they read? To answer this question, two other broad questions – neither of them irrelevant to the English first language learner as well – demand answers: 'What is comprehension and why is it important?' and 'How is it taught, learned and developed?' This chapter examines the literature about what the term means, since without a solid definition, 'comprehension' will remain an elusive and mystifying concept for those who teach it and for those who are supposed to learn it.

In order to promote inclusive practices, one needs to understand how human nature and the development of an individual are understood in different cultural contexts. That means it is important to understand the development of an individual person, from the Pacific cultural perspective, to make

meaningful connections with the child and the cultural context and include them in the education system. John Smith Pokana therefore talks about how human development is conceptualised and understood in Pacific countries and cultures. He argues that human development should be conceptualised within both cultural and modern worldviews, as the development of the human person is influenced by human activities and interactions. Pacific nations have their own perceptions about what, who, how, why and when human development originates, with unique conceptual frameworks that are drawn from social, spiritual and medical perspectives and constructed from cultural and modern human activity. In this chapter various examples of 'human development' concepts are defined, explained with examples drawn from research, and applied in the context of teaching and learning in various human settings and interactions. The concepts in human development can be understood from different perspectives in order to provide students and academics with a fundamental knowledge base and understanding applicable in an educational setting. This worldview is also supported by Betty Kamoe-Manuofetoa in chapter nine, who stresses the importance of the roles culture and language play in the development of a Pacific child. Sociocultural approaches emphasise the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge. The role played by culture and language in human development, which is a vital part of the Vygotskian framework, is explained in this chapter.

The tenth chapter by, Patisepa Tuafuti, discusses some sections of a research project with the Samoan community in Auckland, New Zealand and the possibilities and challenges of adopting '*Fa'afaletui*-Phenomenology' as a dual research methodology. The chapter is a brief account of the research participants' lived experiences in relation to the establishment of Samoan immersion preschools (*a'oga amata)* and Samoan bilingual units in primary and intermediate levels of schooling. The chapter includes a personal and professional narrative, which begins with a brief summary of the research topic, followed by an account of the research journey, and its theoretical basis, with all its subsequent twists and turns. Some invaluable samples of the participants' stories are woven into the discussion.

Gender equality is a pressing issue in contemporary Pacific countries in the light of how this particular issue is being addressed at the international level. Since about half the population is female, it is perhaps distressing that this gender should still require explicit discussion as a 'special' category. Nothing daunted, Salanieta Bakalevu in chapter 11 provides an overview of the current status of 'Gender Equality' in the Pacific region. She argues that improving gender equality is essential to reducing poverty and improving overall development effectiveness. In Pacific islands societies, efforts to achieve gender equality are stalled by influential socio-cultural factors, including social stereotypes of female and male roles and responsibilities that are deeply ingrained within the fabric of patriarchal relations. These same structures are embedded within the education systems and national institutions. Classrooms as microcosm of society mirror the socialisation patterns that treat girls and boys differently and work against gender equality. The struggle for gender equality is part of a larger political struggle over education and the inherent pervasive factors can be removed only through wider and deeper social changes such as through inclusive practices underpinned by the rights discourse.

Whilst promotion of inclusive education is currently being mooted in the Pacific region, there is, as noted previously, no absolute guarantee that all students will succeed. Nevertheless, the 'Education for All' initiative does encourage governments to take responsibility in providing alternative but relevant affordable education for all citizens. Hence, alternative education provisions may include educational opportunities for another poorly catered to group, PICs students who have been insufficiently successful in the primary and secondary schools to proceed to tertiary institutions. Thus in the final chapter Hem Chand Dayal, John Longo Rombo and Govinda Ishwar Lingam report a small research project conducted in Fiji Islands. Positing that the provision of alternative education is essential for the diversification of educational opportunities for all, they explore the perceptions of students, teachers and parents about the usefulness of an alternative educational initiative catering for school dropouts. Their qualitative case study approach using in-depth interview and *talanoa* for data collection demonstrates the importance of the establishment of 'the *institute*' in providing 'second chance' educational opportunities, giving ostensible school drop-outs another attempt at gaining

qualifications and skills for their future. Useful for developing an appropriate policy framework for the provision of extended alternative educational opportunities for Fijian youth, findings from this study can be replicated in other contexts in the Pacific region.

The authors of the book chapters, who are all of Pacific descent and practising academics experienced in a variety of institutions, have shed useful light and presented insightful thoughts about Pacific perspectives on special needs, inclusive education, human development and gender inclusion issues. The richness of the book is that most of the authors have done authentic research work and have brought to light what is actually happening on the ground in terms of fostering inclusive education in schools and communities alike. The personal narratives included in the different chapters also provide useful and authentic voices that might otherwise have been neglected or hidden away in the backyards of Pacific societies. In this way, this book makes a significant contribution to the existing literature on special needs and inclusive education issues in the region. Whilst the Pacific region is still grappling with the issues to do with special needs, through this book readers will come to realise that much is already known and practised, as individuals with special needs have always been incorporated in Pacific cultures, and arguably, inclusion has already been implicit in Pacific cultures, based on the *mana* and aura of Pacific people. We wish you happy reading of the different chapters by Pacific authors.

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