

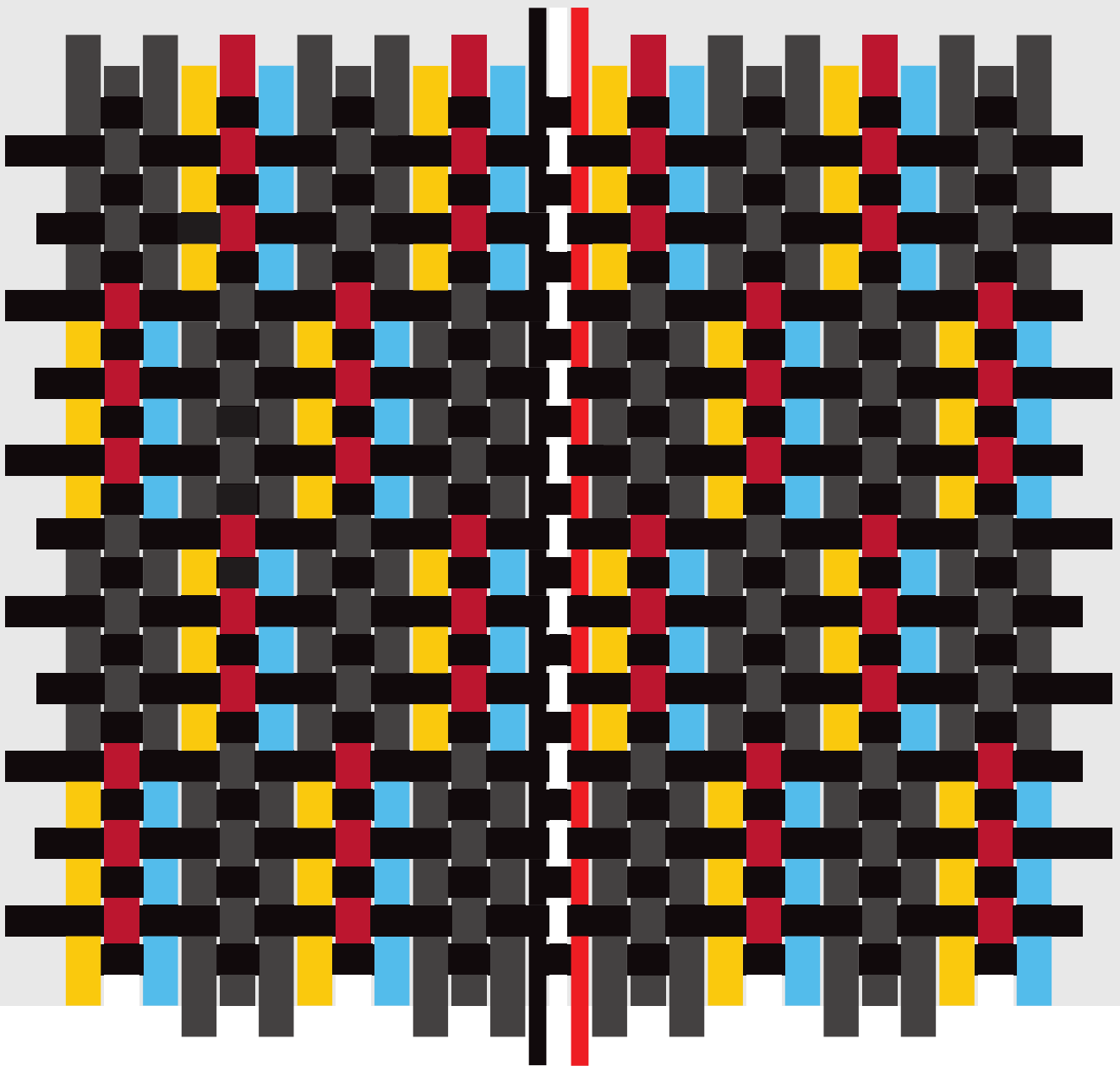
# Kaiparahuarahi

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 3 DECEMBER 2024

## Kotahitanga: Understanding identities through intersectionality

PART 2 OF 6

Tagata o le Moana perspectives



# Kaiparahuarahi

**Kotahitanga: Understanding identities through intersectionality.**  
Tagata o le Moana perspectives

**Edited by Chillion Sanerivi, Rod Baxter and Kahukura Ritchie**

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## Dedication

We dedicate the 'Tagata o le Moana' edition in honour of the many pioneering wayfinders, voyagers and navigators in our youth development sector. Many of these pioneers are pillars/pou in our communities around the motu - we honour and salute you. Special acknowledgement to those who are no longer with us and have become guiding stars in our continuous voyage.

These champions have carved out the way for over 30+ years weaving te ao Pasifika into the fabric of our sector. Many of them are known respectfully in their local settings and wouldn't be known nationally, yet we reap what have you sown. "O le ala i le pule o le tautua"  
The pathway to leadership is through service.

Faafetai, Faafetai tele lava

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# Editorial

## Tagata o le Moana Locating diversity and intersectionality in a Pasifika context

This is the second of six intended 'mini-editions' of *Kaiparahuarahi* that will be eventually collected in two issues, all exploring intersectionality and *kotahitanga* in a broad and inclusive way. In the first mini-edition, we heard a handful of *iwi* voices, and our next journey sails in and around the Pacific Ocean.

**The moana provides a natural symbol for intersectionality because it is the very thing that surrounds and connects us all. Identities are situated both in the ocean itself, as well as from the numerous islands, many of which have national states, monarchies, chiefly and tribal structures, countries and cultures. 'The Pacific [is] vast, where peoples and cultures move and mingle [...], a strong, resourceful and interdependent Pacific/Oceania' (Mafale'o & Su'a-Hawkins, 2005).**

We recognise this vast diversity has suffered centuries of colonisation, as empires sought to claim and possess islands, and assert global dominance. Cartographers have clustered and labelled regions within the Pacific, such as Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia. An excellent example is found in the 'Cook Islands', with whom *iwi* in Aotearoa have a close ancestral tie. There are 15 islands across the 'Cooks', and whilst there might be efficiencies for trade routes and resource sharing, especially for islands that have comparatively fewer inhabitants, it is problematic to ignore or blend the unique historical and cultural stories of Aitutaki, Pukapuka and Mitiaro, for example.

The 2023 Census reported 94,176 responses from people identifying with a Cook Island Māori ethnicity ([www.stats.govt.nz](http://www.stats.govt.nz)). This is more than six times the total population inhabiting the islands which was enumerated at 15,040 in the 2021 Census (CISO, 2021). When communities in Aotearoa, such as Tokoroa, are jokingly referred to as the '16th Cook Island', youth workers need to critically examine the impacts on young people and their cultures.

*Therefore, within the kaupapa of intersectionality and kotahitanga, we reject any implied homogeneity of 'Pasifika' as one group. Furthermore, we are uncomfortable with any imperial, political and colonial notions that have inappropriately forced diverse cultures to co-exist as one identity.*

Certainly, this has created tensions for generations of young people, who migrated to Aotearoa during post-war labour shortages, who built families here in this new place, who suffered the Dawn Raids, who are the descendants of those original migrants, and who may have never been back to their country of origin due to forces of poverty and disconnection. Mike Tuala builds upon these familiar facets in fresh ways within this issue. Similarly, MahMah Timoteo reminds us that we've all heard of young people labelled as 'coconuts' (brown on the outside, white on the inside), and consequently heard Pasifika artists in Aotearoa reclaiming racist stereotypes. This is but one of countless intersectional challenges for young people: belonging to a place they've never been to, and perhaps their great grandparents are no longer around to answer questions and help them understand their history. They stand upon multiple lands, surrounded by a vast ocean that dichotomously creates great distance and immense connectivity. Like Simulata Pope says, 'potential as vast as the seas'.

Given the depth of this sociological and anthropological complexity, what can youth workers do to help? Firstly, we can locate Aotearoa within a diverse Pacific context: this reinforces an equitable focus on Māori 'and/or' Pasifika, whilst appreciating and celebrating the inherent diversity of many iwi and many nations within one macro-context. Secondly, we must stop 'othering' each other, and be comfortable knowing we are simultaneously different from each other and connected to similar places and stories.

Undeniably, there are unique issues facing people living on and descended from this corner of our planet. The looming threats of the climate crisis have created eco-anxiety for young people, as we've witnessed through years of global protests, and are most acutely felt by those in many island nations in the Pacific, including young people living here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

A quarter century ago, Mary Autagavaia offered a multidimensional framework for supervision with Tagata Pasifika, and an adaptation of her model might be helpful when embracing an intersectional view of young people in and from the Pacific. Autagavaia (2000) encourages us to think about ripples in the ocean, starting with a central drop and expanding outwards. Imagine the intersectionality of one young person as concentric circles, starting in the centre, perhaps with their God and faith, rippling out to their immediate āiga/family, including their extended family, friends, church community, school, work, sports, and all the various identities that overlap from that single drop.

This mini-edition is a mere drop. And even though, by design, this issue is short, we invite you to consider this a whistlestop tour, and the beginning of a more comprehensive journey we all might take to chart the inherent intersectionality found within Tagata o le Moana.

Special thanks must go to the inimitable Chillion Sanerivi who's stepped up as a guest co-editor. We are very proud for the first ever Pasifika edition of *Kaiparahuarahi*. Aupito William Sio describes this generation as the 6Bs - Brown, Beautiful, Brainy, Bilingual, Bi-cultural and Bold. What an opportunity to share through this edition who we are and who we've always been. Pacific Scholar, Epeli Hau'ofa says

*"We should not be defined by the smallness of our islands, but by the greatness of our oceans. We are the sea, we are the ocean. Oceania is us. It is time to create things for ourselves, to create established standards of excellence that match those of our ancestors"*

These three individuals share the depth, the mass experience and the richness of who we are, and are an example of the greatness we have as Pasifika.

Dr MahMah Tohoa Lita Tetini Timoteo was auspiciously and enthusiastically recommended by Green MP Kahurangi Carter outside the Beehive after a recent hui with Jane Zintl and Rod Baxter, and honouring this suggestion has paid dividends! MahMah shares stories that will make you laugh, then cry, then deeply reflect (you didn't expect this issue to feature a gay cat café, did you?). Mike Tuala presents a familiar story in a fresh way, and recognises that our professional journeys often take us to unexpected places for good reasons. Finally, Simulata Pope is simultaneously philosophical and practical, offering a map for relationships at multiple levels, including the often-overlooked managerial and supervisory spaces.

We acknowledge the editors for this mini-edition include the perspectives of Pasifika peoples, Tāngata Whenua and Tāngata Tiriti. Whether our whakapapa be indigenous or migrant, our ancestors all navigated the Pacific Ocean to arrive at this place and support subsequent generations. At the entrance of Te Kōngahu Museum of Waitangi, you'll see the words NAVIGATORS | NGĀ KAIWHAKATERE followed by this text:

*All who come to this country have to cross a vast stretch of water to get here.*

*Boldness and great navigational skill brought Māori to these shores, then Europeans, hundreds of years later. Now two peoples had to navigate the unknown waters of a relationship.*

*Each had to come to terms with the other to get what they wanted. They tested boundaries, they negotiated, sometimes they clashed. The conversation began.*

As the conversation continues and expands, we hope the contributions within help you navigate your journey with young people from, in and around the Pacific.

With warm Pacific greetings,

**Chillion Sanerivi, Rod Baxter and Kahu Ritchie**  
December 2024

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# Three Simple Ways You Can Show Up for Pasifika Practitioners

Simulata Pope

Working with and alongside Pasifika is vibrant and joyful, but it is also a privilege—one that many underestimate, undervalue, and tokenise. Throughout my career, both professionally and in love work (volunteer work), many practitioners have loved to showcase their experience working with Tāngata Moana (people of the Pacific). But here is the giggle moment—do they actually know what it's really like? Do managers truly understand what it takes?

**I have completed countless leadership, management, supervision, and professional development trainings. However, throughout all this learning, especially when it intersects with Pasifika, I have learned that the best way to lead Tāngata Moana is by seeing their potential to be as vast as the seas. Your role as their counterpart is to journey alongside them through the waves, while helping to chart the course. This is how you can most effectively support the work you both aim to achieve and ultimately provide the best ways for young people to thrive under your watch.**

As confronting as this may be, we Pasifika—along with many other groups—are tired of constantly waving our flag to prove why we are the champions of our own seas. So instead of calling people out, here are three simple and effective ways you can strengthen your youth development practice when working with Pasifika practitioners.

*Note: I am a storyteller, and I get philosophical at times, so please read with an open mind.*

## 1. Cheerlead—Do not Just Cheer Achievements, Cheer Mistakes Too

In a world focused on 'managing' people, behaviours, and dynamics, we often overlook cheerleading as one of the most effective ways to transform individuals. I cannot count the times I have cheered others through meals, care packages, hugs and jokes. Learn about the values of the Pacific, apply them, and understand the importance of cultural humility. Cheer, but do not overstep. Make noise when it comes to the wins - praise the learnings when it doesn't work out.

As Pasifika practitioners, we navigate spaces where very few at the top look like us, yet all our clients do. We are often the ones assigned to do the icebreakers, say the shared lunch prayer or MC the events. So, how can you continue to cheer us on in these spaces? How can you show support for our strengths?

**'My name is Simulata Pope. I am proud to be Simulata Pope. It is cool to be Simulata Pope.'** These three lines, which my father Rev. Iki used to close his lectures to me, still serve as a reminder of how my biggest cheerleaders see me in this world.

Cheerleading is embedded in many Pacific ideologies that we, as Tāngata Moana, often use in our Youth Work practice. The coolest part? **Anyone can cheer someone on**, and the Pacific does this extraordinarily well. Just look at the fans of MMT (Mate Ma'a Tonga) Rugby League.

When we cheer people on, we experience mafanā (Tongan: feeling of warmth). We get creative, empathetic, connected and most importantly, we journey with the person. From a Pasifika perspective, cheerleading celebrates how far someone has come, the shoulders they stand on, and the obstacles they have overcome.

*In a world filled with opinions, political marginalisation, and so much blah blah blah, how can you—yes, YOU—stay mindful of the cheerleaders around you? How can you hear their encouragement, even when they are not physically present? Once you master this, do it for every Pasifika practitioner who crosses your path.*

## 2. Expect High Standards and Speak to Their Worth

Be brave enough to set the bar high for Pasifika. Our standards are immaculate, but the environments we are placed in often limit our potential. By showing that you expect the best from us, you commit to helping us become the best versions of ourselves.

For too long, especially in a sector with limited resources and a desperation for processes, we have been quick to critique practitioners based on what they need to develop, rather than positioning them in spaces that align with their strengths.

How can you speak life into practitioners? How can you find ways to complement their work instead of focusing on what did not go right? I learned this through practising empathetic leadership. Sometimes, we must demonstrate our own worth so that our Pasifika people can recognise theirs. If you can, study the chiefly systems of the Pacific. That is how you set high standards for the greater good of harmony and community.

I once managed a Pacific youth worker who was excellent at talking but less so in action. Leading someone so charismatic was challenging. However, when I noticed that his outputs did not align with what he said in our team meetings, I raised my concerns during our next supervision session. I pushed him to understand my concerns, and years later, he introduced me to his new team, saying, 'if it wasn't for her getting my act together, I wouldn't have realised how great my practice could be.'

Sometimes, challenging a practitioner to be better, do better carries incredible weight in their professional development.

## 3. 'And if you back them when they're 15? They will have your back for life.'

As my high school English teacher turned lifelong mentor, Dr Michelle Johansson once told me: 'if you have their back at 15, they will have yours for life.' ('Ten pieces of advice for the teachers of young brown scholars', by Dr Michelle Johansson, [youthmentoring.org.nz/news](http://youthmentoring.org.nz/news)). I challenge you readers, if you bat for your Pasifika practitioners, the connections made are **then life-long**.

Throughout my managerial experience, I have heard strong opinions from other managers, senior leadership teams, and CEOs about how Pasifika youth workers are 'masters of winging it, super funny, and bring joy to the office.' In management terms, this often means being underprepared, goofing around and not taking the work seriously.

I remember being challenged by a CEO in a former job, who noticed my team playing cards in the office kitchen. She questioned why I allowed this on the company's time and whether my team saw me as an authority figure. What she did not know was that my team had spent the entire night working overtime, transporting two young people who had been assaulted by their partners to the hospital. They bought them food, organised care packages on their own dime and returned to the office the next morning, emotionally drained. If playing cards for an hour in the kitchen helped bring them back to a safe space, of course I would endorse it! And what happens when we endorse practitioners to be valued in a job? **We retain them in jobs longer and work gets better.**

Backing your people in tough situations is challenging in a professional context. The balance between professional and personal relationships is constantly tested.

*However, I hope the work of Pasifika youth-led initiatives demonstrates that*

*it is not always about what you do, but how you make people feel.*

*That is why I still have monthly catchups with all of my colleagues from my very first job til this day.*



## So what now?

The intersectionality of Pasifika is vast in itself. In the Youth Work sector, and particularly in Pasifika-led youth development, this is not new. Many Pasifika people do Youth Work daily without realising it. We are family managers, supervisors, event coordinators, fundraisers and more. Older cousins are safe spaces for our young ones, elders are our mentors, and community leaders are our managers. The difference? One is a job, and the other is life. One requires a contract and organisational processes, while the other is often a voluntary 'volun-told' task. Understanding this dynamic is a step closer to realising why Pasifika youth workers are some of the best practitioners in the world. **Pasifika don't need to tell you the complexities of their world, but find ways to not assume that it is easy to navigate.**

Pasifika practitioners are as extraordinary as anyone else. Make sure to highlight this at your next team meeting. **The best way you can show up for Pasifika practitioners is simply to do just that—show up.** It is a privilege to know them, even when you want to flick their ears for being late to work.

Tu'a fakau'a ofa atu.

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*Simulata Pope is a young Tongan/Niuean woman raised in South Auckland, now residing in Wellington. A dedicated child-rights advocate, she began her journey as a youth worker and remains deeply passionate about engaging with youth in various spaces. Her commitment to this work is inspired by her parents—her father, a youth worker and pastor, and her mother, a social worker.*

*Simulata's professional expertise is now focused on management, where she has developed a strong knowledge base in leadership and governance within the social sector. She holds several governance roles across various boards and reference groups.*

*Beyond her professional responsibilities, Simulata is deeply involved in serving the Pacific community. She frequently leads grassroots initiatives and mobilises national and international Pacific projects, benefitting Pacific communities both in Aotearoa and in the homelands.*

*In addition to her advocacy and community service, Simulata is a creative force in the performing arts scene, with a passion for stage management and filmmaking as part of her love work (volunteer work) projects.*



# Kotahitanga: Weaving Intersectionality in Youth Work

Dr MahMah Tohoa Lita Tetini Timoteo

Ko MahMah tōku ingoa.  
Ko Timoteo tōku ingoa kōpū tangata.  
Ko Mariie tōku māmā.  
Ko Tetini tōku pāpā.  
Nō 'Autirēria mai tōku māmā.  
Nō Rakahanga mai tōku pāpā.  
Kua 'ānau 'ia au ki Autirēria.  
Ē no'o ana au ki Ōtautahi, Christchurch.

My name is Dr MahMah Tohoa Lita Tetini Timoteo, and I am a proud, fat, queer, Cook Island va'ine. These elements of my identity have informed who I am, where I am and what I do.

I was born in a small town called Tweed Heads, Australia. My father was not a very nice guy, and in an attempt to save our family from a future of abuse, my mother moved my siblings and me to the beautiful Aotearoa. Years of witness protection landed us in the small town of Hari Hari on the West Coast of the South Island—population 300 with more cows than people. The town was Pākehā-dominated and many people called my siblings and I 'the coconut children'. Racism ran deep in this town. Running just as deep was the homophobia. I never had a coming out story: people either had the privilege of knowing or not. But it was difficult to be open about one's queerness in a place that was well known for children being forced out of home when they did end up 'coming out'.

Acknowledging externally imposed limitations on identity is crucial, especially for those with intersectional identities that lack substantial power. It's essential to combat these limitations and help young people navigate this difficult space. Sharing my experiences openly with young people often elicits shocked reactions, as they are unaccustomed to hearing about these struggles. Turning up honestly and demonstrating strength is vital, especially when working with young Māori navigating a blend of evolving cultures. This honesty showcases the resilience and leadership inherent in our culture, regardless of the challenges they might face.

The bullying was pretty rough. Students used to spit on me as I walked down the corridor. My homework would be stolen from my bag and flushed down the toilet, resulting in the teacher not believing I had done the assigned work and giving me a detention. I was forced to get changed in different bathrooms from my other classmates for PE because the senior girls would spurt words of abuse and disgust when they came in. On the bus, I used to wear headphones and turn up the music to full volume to drown out the death threats and words of encouragement to kill myself. Kids can be mean.

*"You have grown into someone who would have protected you as a child. And that is the most powerful move you made". I saw this quote from an unknown source on Instagram the other day, and I thought it spoke beautifully to the person I have become.*

Unlike many of the teachers and other adult figures in my life growing up, I have become somebody who, to the best of their ability, fights for the liberation, protection and care of others. I share my past, as it is in every way a core reason for the aroha and commitment that I put into my mahi and community today.

I am currently a Pacific Student Advisor and Teacher at the University of Canterbury in Ōtautahi, Christchurch. Intersectionality is a core theory that we use in the course I co-coordinate and teach, an important approach that we encourage our students to weave through their university mahi but also beyond the confines of the institution. On a personal level, intersectionality has provided me with tools to understand my own identity, and more so, how multiple aspects of who I am can never truly remain separate from one another. Rather, they intersect and respond to each other in ways that make my whole self. As a very simple and silly way of trying to explain intersectionality to my students, I sometimes use the example of a friend wanting to take me somewhere to hang out. This friend knows I am queer so they ask me if I would be interested in going to a

gay cat café. Gay? Cats? Coffee? Say less. We head along to the café but I notice there is nobody that looks like me. A room full of what appears to be papa'ā people. We go to sit down, and the chairs have arm rests and unfortunately, I am unable to fit into them. In this instance, my friend has considered one aspect of my identity, but has failed to consider how other aspects of my identity impact the complex and multifaceted ways I navigate the world, or in this case, a gay cat café.

The approach of intersectionality serves many students who have never considered the notion of multiple and overlapping aspects of their identity that could, and usually do, influence their life. I find that this significantly impacts our students who belong to marginalised communities with many of them considering and making sense of their own lived experiences. An example of this was a lecture I taught on white supremacy and connecting such ideologies and actions to the 2019 Christchurch Terrorist Attacks. One of our Muslim students spoke to me afterwards and shared their story of being horrifically bullied at school. They explained that what they had learnt in class helped them to understand that they have not only experienced racism but, more specifically, Islamophobia. Furthermore, this student had an even deeper understanding of how such violent and unjust ways of thinking have been fostered and carried out as attacks. This student, along with others, learnt that their identities can play a significant role in how they experience the world.

I work with a diverse range of young people, with varying ages, genders, ethnicities and lived experiences. This is both in my teaching and other project and community mahi that I do. I remember working with young people for the first time. It was terrifying. Perhaps these feelings were a reflection of how mean young people had been to me at school. I thought that maybe my experience of being bullied would follow me into adult-hood and even into my career. I think my biggest fear lay in the fact that I knew how cool young people were, and how confident and real many of them could be. They would let me know if I bored them, or angered them. They would let me know if they thought I dressed well that day or if my 'fit' needed work. They would never pretend to laugh at my jokes, and I think that one hurt the most. But I did feel accomplished when I could get a chuckle out of them every once in a while. Young people are unbelievably powerful...

Something beautiful I am seeing with more of the young people I am working with is a stronger sense of exploration and curiosity of identity, which I did not see as much growing up. Maybe it was just the conservative West Coast environment. Perhaps for some, they have safer spaces and people in their lives that make this easier now. They also may have greater access to resources and materials that aid their identity journey. As a previous co-chair of a rainbow organisation in Ōtautahi, I had the honour of witnessing some of these journeys with our queer young people. All journeys were unique. We had some young people that were openly queer and could express who they were to those around them, both at home and in public. Others would have to lie to their parents and say they were attending a faith-based youth group, then when they would arrive, they would often head to the bathroom that best aligned with their gender and change into an outfit that they felt better expressed who they were. For many of our young people of colour, there were other layers and complexities that they were forced to face.

*Some people are under the assumption that queer spaces are safe spaces for all queer people. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. Dominantly queer spaces often times are not as intersectional as they could or should be, particularly when it comes to internalised racism and explicit racism.*

This is why organisations such as Moana Vā were created and are so important for our Pacific rainbow / MVPFAFF+ communities.

Moana Vā – Navigators of Pacific Pride – was established to identify and address the needs of Pacific Rainbow+ LGBTQIA+ MVPFAFF+ (mahu, vakasalewa, palopa, fa'afafine, akava'ine, fakaleiti (leiti), fakafifine) communities in the Canterbury region. They aim to provide support, advocacy and mentorship for our Pacific Rainbow+ communities and acknowledge the challenges of living in a region that is systemically conservative, enabling unconscious racial bias and stereotypes of our members and their families. Through their social platforms, Moana Vā also offers a safe space for those connecting online from around the globe. Existing as we are in the city of white supremacy is extremely challenging, and finding spaces and people that accept and support the multifaceted individuals that we are has not been easy. But groups like Moana Vā work tirelessly to provide alofa and care to our marginalised Pacific communities in Christchurch. An intersectional approach is imperative when considering and creating spaces that cater to the needs and experiences of peoples and communities with intersecting, layered identities.

These challenges can be seen beyond queer spaces. My thesis explored the lived experiences of Pacific peoples as they navigated climate change spaces. The findings indicated that climate spaces, although some would find them progressive, were also dominated by white people who upheld problematic ways of thinking that actively caused harm to people of colour, and in this case, Pacific peoples within Aotearoa. This bled into government spaces, community spaces, and for a lot of our young people, activism spaces (Timoteo, 2023). Helena Fuluifaga Chan Fong, a Pacific climate change activist, explains that Pacific people are not on people's radar when it comes to climate discussions (Kaho, 2021). In Aotearoa New Zealand, September 2019 saw one of the largest marches in New Zealand history, with over 80,000 marching as part of the School Strike 4 Climate (SS4C) youth movement. However, less than two years later, SS4C Auckland disbanded after criticisms of racism (Miller, 2021). On Facebook, they released a statement that read 'School Strike 4 Climate Auckland has avoided, ignored, and tokenised black, Indigenous and people of colour voices and demands, especially those of Pasifika and Māori individuals in the climate activism space' (Cardwell, 2021, para.4). The group further explained that people of colour were the demographic of people who were worst impacted by climate change and therefore, they should be leading the climate justice movements (Cardwell, 2021).

Many were not impressed by the decision. Helena Fuluifaga Chan Fong expressed her frustration for the group's decision, identifying that SS4C Auckland claimed that this disbandment was a request by the BBPOC community (Tagata Pasifika, 2021). By placing the onus on BBPOC communities, the responsibility no longer belongs to SS4C Auckland. As Helena explains, by pulling themselves out, this also removed the potential and political leverage that they had, which many other communities do not possess (Tagata Pasifika, 2021). This leaves more work for young Pacific activists who are often campaigning across multiple issues for Pacific people and shouldering work, study, family and community responsibilities. Drawing upon the thesis, my participants expressed their frustration with the overlapping scheduling of Polyfest and the School Climate Strike in 2018.

*Aolele emphasises that climate change is the 'biggest intersectional' issue, highlighting the multitude of layers, including racism, that are involved in the climate crisis. She expresses that the lack of intersectional thinking can be seen in the conflicting scheduling of Polyfest and the School Climate Strike in 2018. Aolele said that it 'pissed her off' and 'this is how you know it was white' because they were not aware of the largest Pacific Island event in Aotearoa New Zealand. She stated that the organisers should have been aware of this event and considered the presence of Pacific people, as they are one of the most impacted people within the climate crisis. Aolele further expressed her frustrations as Pacific individuals and communities were forced to make a choice. As people practise their routines for months to perform at Polyfest, many of them chose to attend Polyfest. 'That felt like a big disrespect or act of racism to purposefully exclude us from the space. Even if it isn't their intention, that was the impact, that's what happened'. (Timoteo, 2023, p.163).*

Our young people are going through a lot. My fear sometimes is that we are placing a great deal of pressure on them to become leaders, future problem solvers and inspirations. When in reality, they should be able to just be. Live in their youth. Not feel the weight of the world crushing down on their shoulders. But I know for many of our young people, particularly those within our most marginalised communities, some are not granted the grace to just exist, feel joy, have fun and belong. The young people I work alongside are forever faced with 'impending waves'. This notion of impending waves is explained in my thesis by one of my participants Nanai:

*...life priorities, and this imagery of impending waves that everyone has, like one impending wave just like the ocean, like there's one wave that hits you first and then another wave behind that. For people in the islands, our impending wave is climate change. For people in the diaspora, like in Portland and in Auckland, their impending wave is paying their rent for that week. Climate change is not the wave that's going to shift them first, it's trying to get food on the table, it's trying to afford your kids' school fees, trying to pay off your student loan. So that is your impending wave; that's your main priority.*

Intersectionality allows us to consider these 'impending waves' and the multitude of ways that they impact the young people we engage with. My position as a Pacific Student Advisors has exposed me to varying examples of this through my years in this role. Many of our Pacific students' greatest obstacles are not so much in the classroom but outside of it.

*Commitments to family, friends, community, church, sports, etc influence students significantly. Often-times our students are the main form of transport in the household, the babysitting, the tangi organiser, the top sports-person, whilst also balancing close to full-time work to support themselves and their whānau.*

I understand that. Growing up I used to milk cows in the morning between 4am and 7am. I would then get ready for school, finish school, be one of the school cleaners, finish up and head to the local shop where I worked part-time, and then head to the pub where I was a kitchen-hand and sous chef. All between the ages of 14 and 18. I get it. We did what we had to do to get by and support the people we loved. But it is tough and systemic oppression and unjust socio-economic positioning contributes a great deal to the disparity in how some young people and their loved ones continue to navigate and survive the system.

I have the privilege of working with Pacific rangatahi in the climate education space. When I entered one of the projects, I wanted to emphasise the mahi that I had already done within the community and many of the discussions that were already being had with folks in this similar area of mahi. It was important to communicate that the climate issue was an intersectional issue as Aolele, Nanai and Helena had already spoken to, and that in order to address the climate issue, one must consider the varied and compounding other challenges that exacerbate the environmental emergency which disproportionately impact indigenous peoples. We also know that Pacific and Māori people are highly policed. A very simple example of this was a talanoa workshop we curated for our Pacific students, ranging from ages 10 to 14. This session took place in the library, which was located in the local mall. Little did some of our team know that many students from this school, which had higher numbers of Pacific and Māori students, were banned from the mall. Having no access to their local mall meant that they were not only unable to access the library, which was a wonderful space to engage in educational materials and resources, but they also did not have access to the pharmacy located in the mall.

In one of our sessions, when students were asked to talk about the things they thought needed to be addressed in their communities, many of them spoke about racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. Even in the context of climate change, the students wanted Pacific

cultural hubs and improvements to their sports fields. Some may not think that this is linked to climate change, but it is. An intersectional lens allows us to consider the repercussions of 'intent vs impact'. The intent is to teach our young people about climate change and equip them with the tools necessary to address such issues, potentially building them into community leaders. However, this approach is narrow and does not take into consideration how the very system that is causing a global climate emergency is the same system that is causing significant harm to marginalised people of colour around the world.

*They literally took the land that Indigenous people had been in interdependent relationships with for generations, and over time, they industrialized that land, and they made that land suitable for the fossil fuel industry. They committed double harm in relation to climate change. They first violently moved Indigenous people out of their land and onto lands that were either smaller or that those Indigenous people were less accustomed to. Then, at the same time, that land became the basis for the fossil fuel industries and the industrial economy we now know is responsible for the rise in global average temperature. Colonialism and imperialism are not the only or the most fundamental forms of oppression that played a huge role in today's climate change problems. For example, anti-Black racism has a long history and, over centuries, was also used in ways that created violence and harm that can be associated with laying the groundwork for today's climate crisis. When thinking across different groups, whether Indigenous people, Black people, but also diverse Latinx groups and others as well, we can focus on the different forms of colonial disempowerment, of racism, of other forms of discrimination that played a huge role in bringing about what we understand today as climate change (Whyte, as cited in Funes, 2020, para. 8-9).*

The intersectional identities and experiences of our young people highlight the intersectional national and global issues at play for them and their communities. One of my biggest pieces of advice that I have when it comes to working with young people in our communities is to truly listen to what they have to say without an agenda dictating the outcomes. Although it is important to help guide our young people, often times it is project and organisation objectives that command the direction of young people. We want to hear what they have to say, but only when it serves the scripted narrative that we have written. This can come down to assuming that we know better and is highly prevalent when working with young Pacific and Māori people, particularly after acknowledging the historical and generational harm and bias that has followed many of our young people, even before they were born. Many young people have never had their voices heard or taken seriously, and when they have been acknowledged, it can be in a tokenistic way. My experience with government consultation work within these communities has shown that the perspectives and experiences shared within the consultation process are often not included or spoken to in the final outcome, and even more disappointingly, the communities are not revisited to touch base and report back these final outcomes. This has resulted in some members of the community no longer wanting to be part of these processes as they do not believe they are being adequately considered as a key stakeholder. Furthermore, their time and energy is not being compensated for with fair koha.

With this in mind, it is imperative that our communities see the value in their experiences and voices. In all honesty, I try my very best to be my young people's biggest hype person. My biggest hype person growing up was my mum. But other than that, I did not have a great deal of people around me who made me feel confident in who I was and who I could become. I hope that in some way, I can do that for some of the young people I work with.

*No matter who they are or who they want to become, I want them to believe in their manifestations and dreams and know that they are enough, always.*

Alongside this, there will be times where you and the young people you work with are not vibing. I found this incredibly difficult in the beginning. Interestingly, a friend who is in a similar field, explained that some young people react in negative ways to you because they do not understand you, and in some cases, are resistant to you because you represent something that either challenges them or confuses them. I see this a lot as somebody who does not neatly fit into categorised boxes. This comes from people understanding identity in very fixed, traditional ways.

My queerness, the way I speak, and even the way I dress often does not align with how people assume 'Pacific' peoples to be – even more so, how 'Academics' or a 'Dr' would be. With that in mind, I hope in the work that I do, I challenge these static stereotypes and rather, celebrate the fluidity of identity and the beauty in dismantling constrictive boxes that work to limit our minds, bodies and souls. As a result, the young people we have the honour of working with may feel empowered to also celebrate this freedom.

Meitaki ma'ata

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*Kia orana! My name is Dr MahMah Timoteo (Tohoa Tetini). I am a Cook Island multidisciplinary teacher and researcher who recently completed a PhD in Anthropology through the University of Canterbury. My thesis explored the lived experiences of Pacific peoples and their navigation of climate change spaces within Aotearoa.*

*Much of my research and mahi interests lie in climate change, Pacific peoples and communities, intersectionality, Indigenous liberation, queer liberation, body liberation, and well-being. Alongside this, I take great pride in advocating in online spaces that work to challenge oppressive systems that continue to harm our most marginalised communities. More so, these spaces emphasise the importance of joy and rest. I am a proud member of Moana Vā, a Pacific rainbow organisation based in Otautahi. As part of Moana Va, I have the privilege to co-host the podcast 'Two Fat 'Fine', celebrating queer, fat, joy.*

*The interweaving of my research background, alongside my social media presence, has granted me the honour to speak in inspiring spaces, with inspiring people, and even more inspiring kaupapa. From lectures, to workshops, to conferences, to panel discussions, to MCing, and events and festivals. I continue to be thankful for the incredible mahi I get to do with so many very special communities. Meitaki ma'ata.*



# Navigating Two Worlds: Mike Tuala on Identity, and Supporting Young People in Aotearoa

Mike Tuala

I follow the trail of the Pacific migration of the 1960s and 1970s when my grandparents made the courageous decision to leave Samoa for better opportunities in Aotearoa. My five siblings and I were raised in West Auckland. Our home in West Auckland is shaped by the journey they made.

**Samoa is a huge part of my identity. It is rooted in a calling to go back to our homeland and to serve our community here. It is beautiful to navigate both worlds, Samoa and Aotearoa.**

I'm the oldest male in my family. The responsibility and leadership that I have in my family led me to take on a similar role in the wider 'village'. I've been in the Youth Work space pretty much since I left high school.

A career as a youth worker felt like a calling from God. I am a real believer in following your gut and your heart. In high school, I was surrounded by organisations and people inspired by a vision of serving young people. I jumped on the waka, and I haven't got off since then.

## How does your identity influence your work with young people?

When I think of identity, I have so many interacting identities: I am Samoan, I'm male, I'm the eldest male, I live in West Auckland, and I am New Zealand-born. Each of these identities carries a story and influences how I view the world.

I am of the Pacific and live here in Aotearoa. I am a New Zealand-born Samoan: this is a very different experience to someone born in the islands. My worldview is slightly different than that of someone who was born in the motherland.

My upbringing and spirituality are very important to me – they ground me and my work as a youth worker. Being a man of faith is a really important part of the different jobs and different types of Youth Work I do. Even when I'm not talking about my faith explicitly, it influences my approach, the conversations I have with young people, and how I treat people. I always try to respect the dignity of the person I'm talking to, not to bring any judgement into our space.

*Youth Work is about giving yourself to serve the community and to serve young people. In Pacific culture, service is a value. This idea of service really influences my work and how I turn up for people.*

It wasn't until I started Youth Work that I realised that our people are a minority and are seen as vulnerable. This shook me, because I've always seen our people as strong and resilient – and we are! It caught me by surprise to see how people struggle with mental health and addictions. So, the concept of service that I grew up with has enabled me to do what I do today.

I didn't really see myself getting into drug and alcohol mahi. I was more interested in leadership development and mentoring for young people. But God shows us signs, and He puts people in our lives that we didn't feel drawn to or called to, and somehow, I ended up working in the drug and alcohol space. I've been in the space for eight years and love it.



## Tell us about the diversity and the intersectionality of the young people you currently work with?

I'm currently working in the public health addiction space, specifically in addiction prevention, and a lot of the young people we serve have alcohol and other drug addictions. We work with community groups where young people may have some form of addiction.

We see a lot of young people facing mental health challenges as well as addiction. We see quite a lot of young people experiencing depression, anxiety and more serious challenges like psychosis.

There are other layers, such as supporting our takatāpui young people. We know that our Rainbow communities are disproportionately harmed by alcohol and drugs. We've also seen an increase in people with a Māori or Pasifika background seeking support for addiction. But, you know, you don't have to be a certain race or from a certain culture to be impacted by alcohol and drugs.

## What is it like working with your community's young people?

I love it. It is a blessing and a privilege to work with my community and the young people that I serve. What I love most about my current role is the ability to work at a local grassroots level but also to have opportunities to develop policy and advocacy at a national level. It's a real privilege and a blessing to be in both spaces.

*It is really important to have young Pasifika community voices advocating for policies. Our young people are so resilient, so switched on. Sometimes, our role is to work alongside them, elevating their voices into those spaces where their voices aren't really acknowledged or heard, or to translate some of the jargon. It's about how we can translate information so that it's easy and accessible for young people to understand, contributing to their understanding.*

## Have you noticed any changes to the intersectionality you see in Youth Work?

Absolutely, I think our world has become more complex. The systems that young people have to navigate are very broad: the education system, the justice system and the health care system. All of these can be quite intimidating to young people.

I've also noticed the advancement of technology and how fast the pace of life has become. I often hear similar concerns from other youth workers. How do we keep up with the pace of living when things are being digitalised? Are young people savvy online? How do we keep Youth Work practitioners up to speed?

We have to think about future technology systems, as well as current systems. As the world gets more complex, Youth Work has to speed up. Otherwise, we will be left behind!

## What advice do you have for other professions that work with young people?

If we bring it back to basics, working with young people is about empathy and active listening.

I'm more than confident that other people are able to work with our communities. Our nation is becoming more diverse. There's a lot more mixing, a lot more diversity.

I often think of a quote from Peter Drucker:

*'The only skill that will be important in the 21st century is the skill of learning new skills'.*

I feel like we're at the stage where we constantly have to learn new skills and learn new ways of engaging to keep up with young people, and to keep up with society and the expectations.

Our society has become more diverse and more complex. It's important that youth workers consider how we can adapt, to be flexible, to learn new skills and new ideas.

## Are there any resources, theories, frameworks, models or ideas that you use that might be helpful for other people working in the community?

I've been really fortunate to be part of a couple of Pacific leadership programmes here in Aotearoa where there's been a lot of self-reflection on what it means to be Pacific and working in a mainstream working environment.

We can bring ourselves to these spaces. We should be open to engagement and conversation. I've seen quite a lot of Pacific practices adopted into mainstream spaces.

I like to use the Fono Fale model as a way to explore, understand and share a Pasifika view of the world. I think the idea of a house, the pou that holds the roof and the foundations is a beautiful metaphor for keeping us grounded. We use a Kakala framework at Auckland Council as a way to engage with our Pasifika communities. How you communicate a message is very important to Pasifika communities – it is not just about engaging and taking information from them; it is important to present the information back to the community.

The other framework I always come back to is the positive youth development framework when I'm working in a youth-specific context, particularly when I need to have a hard conversation. We should seek to have more positive strengths-based youth engagement.

**Pasifika people have a place here in Aotearoa. It is important that there is space for Pacific youth workers to support each other. I love the idea of continuous support, networking and relationship building, where we focus on the key values that hold us as a collective, so that we can better support our young people.**

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*Mike Tuala (Samoan) is currently working as a CAYAD (Community Action on Youth and Drugs) Advisor within Auckland Council's Community Impact Unit. His primary focus is to help transform the systems and environments that perpetuate alcohol and drug harm, and to support rangatahi using a strengths-based and harm reduction approach.*

*Mike's previous mahi consisted of working with rangatahi through Odyssey House's residential programme and a secondary schools' programme called Stand Up!*

*He is passionate about educational outcomes for Māori and Pasifika, and how we can take more of a holistic approach to wellbeing and mental health.*

*He has also been a board member for a not-for-profit youth development organisation called The Logos Project, and for a secondary girl's college situated in West Auckland. He hopes to bring his experience in public health and education together to further improve the lives of rangatahi and communities. Mike is a proud New Zealand-born Samoan and enjoys getting out into the Waitākere ranges for a hike or a bush walk.*

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