The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives Vol. 22, No 2, 2023
http://iejcomparative.org

Su'esu'e manogi: Conceptualising the fragrances of equity in higher education: A case study from Oceania

Tim Baice
The University of Auckland, New Zealand: t.baice@auckland.ac.nz

Equity policies in higher education are focused on dismantling barriers and redressing inequalities that restrict the participation and success of students from historically excluded groups. In some universities across Oceania, 'underrepresented' includes students of Pacific heritage alongside students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, rural areas, students with disabilities and LGBTIQA+ students. Despite good intentions, equity policies can often contribute to the problems they seek to address with an overt focus on equity groups and identities. Little attention is directed towards reviewing the education ecosystems that create barriers to higher education. My research adopts an Indigenous Pacific (Sāmoan) framework, 'Su'esu'e manogi*, in search of fragrances' as a conceptual tool to critically analyse and understand historical and contemporary* manogi *(fragrances) that frame and inform current equity policies and discourses in Oceania.* Manogi *is used as a metaphor to represent the worldviews, theories and ideologies that underpin equity policies and discourses. Using a case study, I present the findings of research that reviewed equity policies and discourses at the University of Auckland and their implications for Pacific learners. I found a series of tensions and disharmonies in* manogi *based on the interpretation of equity subscribed to by the institution. Equity policy discourses that are disparaging produce disharmony and unpleasant pungent* manogi *when they are based on deficit framing and are relegated to the periphery of higher education priorities. Equity policy discourses that are harmonious and produce sweet aromatic* manogi *for Pacific students are framed by commitments to social justice and sustainable development, recognise the principle of difference and the impact of structural factors on achievement. Drawing on the inspiration of the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative for Pacific Peoples) and 'Revisioning education in Oceania: Walking backwards into the future together', my research presents timely considerations for collective rethinking and revisioning of equity in Oceania.*

Keywords: Pacific education; higher education; equity policy.

INTRODUCTION

The individual and societal benefits of higher education are considerable, including increased earning potential, improved health outcomes and greater life satisfaction. Higher education is fundamental to global sustainable development, as enshrined in Goal 4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. However, despite the universal recognition of its importance, higher education for some communities remains elusive. Students from historically excluded backgrounds face various obstacles that prevent access or undermine successful outcomes, such as the financial costs of higher education, discrimination and bias. Other inequities stem from the 'historical, cultural and epistemological foundations of modern higher education systems, which are essentially shaped by their colonial origin and Eurocentric biases' (Ramphele, 2023, p. 13). Equity policies in higher education are developed to address the obstacles that prevent access and successful outcomes for historically excluded groups. While most

conceptualisations of equity incorporate principles of inclusion, social justice and equal opportunities, there is no universal definition. Moreover, some understandings of equity can be underpinned by problematic educational ideologies that often undermine equity aspirations (Baice, 2021).

Although a sizeable body of international research critically explores equity policies in higher education, there is limited research that problematises equity from Indigenous Pacific perspectives. Drawing on the philosophy of Sāmoan scholar, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Tupuola Tufuga Efi, my research adopted a Sāmoan framework, '*Su'esu'e manogi*, in search of fragrances' as a conceptual tool to critically analyse ideologies and worldviews that shape equity policies and discourses at the University of Auckland. *Manogi* (fragrance) serves as a metaphor to represent the worldviews, theories and ideologies that underpin equity policies and discourses. A study of fragrances is an alternative approach to the design of qualitative research, one that uses a cultural metaphor to engage in educational discourse and reclaim Pacific cultures and ways of thinking and knowing (Sanga, 2013). I am interested in revealing sweet-smelling fragrant scents representing positive outcomes for Pacific learners and deciphering these from pungent and foul scents that are disparaging. A Sāmoan poststructuralist discourse analysis (Galuvao, 2016) was used to uncover thematic manogi from global, national, and institutional equity policies and discourses that perfume higher education to understand their implications for Pacific learners. Achieving equity in the educational attainment of Pacific tertiary students is outlined as a key objective in the mission statements or charters of universities in Aotearoa (Nakhid, 2011). Although the number of Pacific students accessing higher education has improved, parity of achievement has not been realised (Matapo & Baice, 2020).

A growing body of Pacific education research that problematises educational challenges in Aotearoa and the Pacific has evolved alongside an expanding body of Pacific research that integrates Pacific worldviews, values and methodologies. The recent proliferation of Pacific research is rooted in seminal works by Pacific scholars advocating for 'Indigenous knowledges against a backdrop of broader discourses concerning postcolonialism and self--determination' (Tualalelei & McCaffery, 2019, p. 190). In Pacific education, Pacific scholars developed the Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative for Pacific Peoples by Pacific Peoples (RPEIPP) in 2001. Central to RPEIPP is the Indigenisation of education in the Pacific, the privileging and honouring of Pacific knowledge systems and ways of being alongside global education values (Nabobo-Baba, 2013). Grounding my research in the legacy of RPEIPP resonates with the theme of this special issue: *Revisioning education in Oceania: Walking backwards into the future together.* By using a Sāmoan conceptual framework to make sense of equity in higher education, my research anticipates an educational future where conceptual understandings of equity in Oceania can be improved by drawing on Pacific knowledge. The following section considers the *manogi* of equity—the different fragrances that perfume definitions of equity in higher education literature.

EQUITY *MANOGI* IN THE LITERATURE

My search for conceptual clarity about equity found an array of definitions that scent and mark the concept in different ways. Although equity is a cherished goal, evidenced by its centrality in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Four, equity in higher education is a contested term in its meaning, understanding and practice (Barrow & Grant, 2019). Across the literature are varied conceptualisations of equity based on competing educational ideologies, resulting in a 'terminological vagueness' (Papastephanou, 2018, p. 210). Equity in higher

education is commonly defined as a means to achieve social justice, ensuring individuals are given equal opportunities to participate and succeed irrespective of their socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, religion or ability (Salmi & Bassett, 2014). Equity policies are positioned as solutions to address inequities, such as financial barriers and discrimination.

Further semantic ambiguity occurs when equity is conflated and used interchangeably with other educational ideals. For example, equality and equity are often used interchangeably even though they are not synonymous (Baice, 2021). Vavrus (2017) conveniently deciphers equality as 'sameness and uniformity', whereas equity recognises the need for differential allocation of resources and different types of support to different degrees (pp. 6-7).

While there is no universal definition of equity groups, Salmi and D'Addio (2021), drawing on a global sample of equity policies in higher education institutions, outlined a diversity of target equity groups where the most common examples include 'individuals in the bottom income/wealth range, women, minorities (ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural) and people with disabilities' (p. 49). Papastephanou (2018) distils two versions of equity: i) horizontal equity, which refers to the equal treatment of unequals and ii) vertical equity, the unequal treatment of unequals. Horizontal equity inaccurately assumes the ideal of political equality as an accomplished reality. Further, it assumes that individuals are equally placed to seize the benefits of equity irrespective of various existential conditions (Papastephanou, 2018). Vertical equity, likewise, promotes an overt focus on the natural ability of individuals, where academic success (and failure) is attributed to individual ability, bypassing sociocultural and political explications (Papastephanou, 2018). Vertical or affirmative equity promotes social justice but does little to critique and reform the educational and societal ecosystems that produce inequities. However, transformative conceptualisations of equity call out structures that produce inequities in higher education (Papastephanou, 2018). The terminological vagueness across higher education literature makes it unclear what version of 'equity' equity policies in higher education subscribe to.

POLICIES AS TOOLS OF GOVERNANCE

Policies permeate all aspects of life, shaping and influencing how we act and what we do. A poststructuralist understanding of policy draws on the Foucauldian theory of discourse to describe policy as a form of discourse, drawing attention to how 'policies exercise power through a production of truth and knowledge' (Ball, 1993, p. 14). Understanding policy as discourse reveals the 'constitutive' nature of policies, where rules and regulations are underpinned by a range of specific types of knowledge (professional, expert, cultural) that determine how we produce the kinds of subject identities we are encouraged to become (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Policies (and the institutions that develop them) determine institutional order and further shape how order is maintained through the active categorisation of people, places and things into governable subjects, places and objects (Shore & Wright, 2003). A core focus of policies is addressing specific problems, problematisations that 'produce problems as particular types of problems' (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 6). Policies cannot work unless they problematise their territories, creating and identifying problems, which policies then work towards fixing (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). A growing focus in the study of policy treats policy as a cultural phenomenon, which allows for greater reflection on the way policy has become an 'increasingly central concept and instrument in the organization of contemporary societies' (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 7). As social and cultural constructs, policies require careful and critical scrutiny to ascertain their stated and unstated meanings. In this way, policies are infused

with a range of diverse and sometimes competing *manogi,* requiring careful consideration by researchers and institutions alike.

EQUITY AND PACIFIC LEARNERS

Pacific peoples[1] are the third largest ethnic minority group in Aotearoa New Zealand, representing 8% of the population (Statistics New Zealand, 2018). Pacific peoples have a long history of connection with Aotearoa, including ancestral *whanauga*[2] ties with Māori through colonialism and featuring a more recent history of large-scale labour migration that has contributed to their status as a priority group in government policy. Socioeconomic concerns for Pacific peoples have remained enduring challenges, including an over-representation among the unemployed, lower-skilled workers and low-income earners (Nakhid, 2011). In education, successive targeted government policies in Aotearoa New Zealand, between 1996 and the present, have been directed towards improving the participation and successful outcomes of Pacific learners as a priority group. Tongati'o (1998) raised concerns about low levels of achievement resulting from 'contextual, systemic, and structural difficulties faced by Pacific communities in schools and within the broader community' (p. 134), which continue to affect educational achievement for Pacific peoples today, despite having the highest of educational aspirations. In higher education, despite growth in the overall participation rate, the achievement levels of Pacific students fall below national benchmarks. In addition to ongoing socioeconomic challenges, the impacts of monocultural curriculum and organisational structures have marginalised Pacific knowledge systems and cultures. Pacific students have also been marginalised by inequitable classroom practices, cross-cultural misunderstandings, deficit theorising and low teacher expectations (Matapo & Baice, 2020).

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

My researcher positionality is heavily shaped by my experiences as an equity practitioner and advocate for Pacific peoples at the university. In my time at the university, I encountered a series of tensions between discourses of equity and practices at the coal face. My role as the 'Pasifika Success Coordinator' is not traditional. Roles like mine were created to provide academic and pastoral support to Pacific learners to contribute to university and government goals of lifting Pacific students' academic achievement, retention and completion rates. Despite my role and a plethora of targeted academic support programmes across the university, the parity gap continues. This is one of the enduring tensions I've encountered in my work. The second tension was the discrepancy between the framing of equity in higher education policy and how it was practised at the grassroots level. On the one hand, in the equity policy, I saw how Pacific learners were framed, devoid of any references to Pacific ways of knowing, being and doing. On the other hand, incorporating Pacific ways of knowing, being and doing is fundamental to my outreach and engagement with Pacific students. Roles and programmes like mine are infused with Pacific cultural values and practices to ensure they are culturally relevant and sustaining for Pacific learners, leading to an enhanced sense of belonging and well-being (Si'ilata, 2014). Altogether, such tensions represent disharmony, a dilemma that led to feelings

[1] An umbrella term coined by Government ministries in New Zealand to describe migrants from the Pacific region and their descendants.
[2] Māori: (noun) relative, relation, kin, blood relation.

of guilt and frustration in my inability to reconcile what appeared to be irreconcilable differences.

Drawing inspiration from the 'rethinking' and 'revisioning' espoused by RPEIPP, I dug deeper into the 'Sāmoan Indigenous Reference' articulated by Tui Atua as the body of knowledge that comprises distinctive Sāmoan ways of knowing, being and doing. I was spurred on by Tui Atua's (2009b) provocation to all Sāmoan and Pacific peoples to continually engage in a search for meaning, nuance and metaphor 'to find substance and establish context in our dialogue with our ancestors, with ourselves and with other cultures (Tui Atua, 2009a, p. 91). To make sense of these tensions between discourses and practices, ideals and realities, I drew on Va'ai and Casmira's (2017) theorisation of *itulagi* (literally side of heaven – worldviews) and began thinking about how to reconcile diverse sets of *itulagi* that at first glance appear to be irreconcilable – or at least, did not appear to be in dialogue with one another. My research blends a Sāmoan (Pacific) *itulagi* and conventional (Western) *itulagi* deliberately as part of the RPEIPP movement to lessen the epistemological dominance of Western hegemonic discourses of education and create equal space for Indigenous knowledges and worldviews (Vaai & Casimara, 2017). To make sense of diverse sets of *itulagi*, I used the metaphor of *manogi* (fragrance) to represent discourses, ideals, worldviews and practices and began forming my conceptual framework around a cultural idea of fragrance, thus engaging in a challenge to achieve balance, a harmony of *manogi*.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: *SU'ESU'E MANOGI*

The study of fragrances is an alternative approach to the design of qualitative research, one that draws heavily on Sāmoan (Pacific) indigenous knowledge to frame and guide the research. I do this following a technique used by Sāmoans (and others) who, for generations, have used metaphors as part of proverbial expressions to transmit important social messages that promote critical and reflexive thinking. Metaphors convey complex meanings at many levels, allowing knowledges to be repurposed as a metaphorical vehicle to convey new or alternative meanings (Carter & Pitcher, 2010). Moreover, they can help people to remember a point in a way that a simple statement of fact does not.

I appreciate the way Tui Atua (2009b) articulated the power of allusions, allegory and metaphors in the Sāmoan mind as:

> [L]inguistic tools that have the ability to make meaning, to privilege beauty, relatedness and keep the sacredness of the other, whilst scientific discourse privileges precision and evidence, often to the detriment of beauty, relatedness and intellectual titillation. The challenge. . . . lies in how to bring together the objectives of allusive and allegorical discussion with the best of science. (p. 71)

I used a Sāmoan conceptual framework captured in the proverbial expression *Su'esu'e Manogi* (in search of fragrance). Scent has a powerful cultural resonance for Sāmoans, where people, places and memories are associated with sweet aromas. *Manogi* provides 'powerful tools for evoking feelings, image-filled messages about social behaviour and appropriate conduct' (Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2009, p. 2). Tui Atua (2009b) referred to the prevalence of *manogi* within the Sāmoan indigenous reference as the 'Sāmoan culture of fragrances' illustrating the socio-cultural significance of fragrances by which they serve as metaphors that speak to social and environmental connections and connectedness, denoting a relational *vā* between humans and the environment. With Samoa being traditionally an oral culture, much of the meaning, nuance and metaphor of Samoan culture is captured in the language (Tui Atua, 2009c). His Highness highlights this by sharing:

> [I]n the Sāmoan language, the products of nature offer a wide and colourful repertoire of metaphors for the yearnings of life and expressions of hope. To speak of a Sāmoan fragrance culture is to speak of the fragrances of our natural environment that inform, define, enhance and lift our connections with and between ourselves and our environment. (Tui Atua, 2009d, p. 9)

Su'esu'e implies a purposive search for a deeper understanding of 'meaning, nuance, and metaphor' (Tui Atua, 2009b). In full, the proverb reads: 'Su'esu'e manogi e su'i ai lau 'ula, fatu ai lou titi aua ou faiva malo (Searching for fragrances to fashion a garland and skirt, to gird the pursuit of your political aims)' (Clifford, 1986, as cited in Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2009, p. 1). The expression is:

> Offered by one's supporters to bolster the spirit, a reminder that one never searches for great heights alone; they go with the blessing and prayers of those close to them. (Suaalii-Sauni, 2009, p. 1)

Although the proverbial expression evokes sweet scents that are balanced and in harmony with one another, Tui Atua also warns of the negative potency of fragrances in which there is a lack of balance or disharmony. In his efforts to warn the Government of Samoa of the dangers of becoming a safe haven for money laundering and offshore bank accounts, Tui Atua (2000) drew on the pungent metaphor of pig shit as a tool to criticise the Government's inaction. In response to those who saw such risks as opportunities for further investment in Samoa, Tui Atua responded with an old Samoan expression that, although could be considered crude, offered the familiarity of the image and scent 'E te fiu e uu le tae puaa, e pipilo a,' meaning, 'No matter how often you perfume pig-shit, it will always stink like pig-shit' (Tui Atua, 2000, p. 106).

The tension in the balance and harmony of fragrances can also be seen in discourses of equity that remain contingent on dominant forms of knowledge, alienating alternative forms of cultural knowledge (Ahmed, 2012). Despite what the positive perfumery discourses of equity profess, the reality of enduring disparities and the tensions I have personally encountered in my line of work highlights a disharmony riddled with tensions and contradictions. In the Sāmoan mind, when disharmony arises, harmony must be restored (Tui Atua, 2009c).

TOFĀ'A'ANOLASI: POSTSTRUCTURALIST POLICY DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

To complement my use of a Sāmoan conceptual framework, I drew on Galuvao's (2016) conceptualisation of *Tofā'a'anolasi*, a Sāmoan method of poststructuralist policy discourse analysis. A poststructuralist policy discourse analysis includes the examination of (i) the process by which policy problems are defined, (ii) the influence of identity differences in the shaping of policy problems and solutions, and (iii) how policy as discourse not only reflects but also contributes to producing subjectivities and socio-political realities (Allan & Tolbert, 2019, p. 141). *Tofa'a'anolasi* is a compound term, each of the components of which has a deep and nuanced meaning:

Tofā means wisdom. The *'a'ano* means *uiga maotua* (deep meaning), and the word *lasi* means *tele* (many). Hence, *Tofā'a'anolasi* is the 'wisdom to identify the many deep meanings of texts'. Deep thinking is, by its nature, critical as it opens the possibility that one may reject assumptions and conventions. It is a Sāmoan framework for investigating educational practices from the perspectives of Sāmoans. (Galuvao, 2018, p. 748).

I use *Tofā'a'anolasi* as a conceptual tool to 'read' and make sense of *manogi*, understand deeper meaning, identify intended and unintended consequences, and decipher between sweet fragrant

manogi from pungent ones and represent tensions and disharmony. Reconceptualising equity from a Sāmoan (Pacific) *itulagi* requires a careful balancing act, a balance of *manogi* to ensure a harmony of scents.

I adapted Galuvao's approach to include a broader focus on Pacific students in a higher education context. The following questions guide the analysis of discourse using the *Tofa'a'anolasi*:

- How are Pacific peoples positioned in equity policy?
- What assumptions are made about Pacific peoples in equity policy?
- What are the implications of these assumptions for Pacific peoples?

I used a comprehensive sampling of documents to explore the equity policy[3] and associated documents from the University of Auckland. I also reviewed policy proposals and other related documents to equity policy to provide a broader macro perspective that acknowledges the multidimensional and complex factors that shape and impact education policy (Galuvao, 2016). The dataset included equity policies and discourses from the New Zealand tertiary sector and the New Zealand Government. Together, the documents represent contemporary *manogi* of equity that frame the way equity is understood and practised in higher education. The University of Auckland is New Zealand's largest public research university and has traditionally had the highest proportion of Pacific tertiary learners. Pacific students constituted 11% of the total student body in 2020, but Pacific pass rates are 8% lower than the overall domestic pass rate (Waipapa Taumata Rau, The University of Auckland, 2022).

UNCOVERING *MANOGI*: PRESENTING HARMONIES AND DISHARMONIES. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.

By interrogating the unquestioned assumptions of policy problems, we start to understand the varied and often conflicting ways equity is understood. We then begin to understand what consequences this understanding has for constructing identities and subjectivities in equity policies. This is primarily a result of divergent interpretations of equity in higher education policies based on particular ideologies and values imposed on education. I found three tensions (disharmonies) in *manogi* across the data: i) Equity for all, ii) Equity and parity, iii) Equity as a challenging priority. The presentation of thematic commonalities across the dataset highlights the interconnections between sectors and how discourses at one level shape and impact equity policy discourses at other levels. Below, each theme represents one of the three key tensions in the understanding and practice of equity in education policies and institutions.

Thematic tensions

Equity for all

A key tension in *manogi* identified in the dataset is the shift from equity as a means to redress specific challenges for targeted groups of students (target equity learners) to an understanding of equity as a corrective measure applied to all who encounter obstacles in their journeys in higher education. The shift evident here is based on the problematic nature of sameness that

[3] The reference to the University of Auckland Equity policy refers to the policy as it was in 2021 at the time of this study. In 2022, the Equity policy was reviewed to reflect *Taumata Teitei*, the University's strategic plan. The 2022 policy was not reviewed as part of this research.

equity policies promote based on vertical understandings of the concept of equity (Papastephanou, 2018).

The following quote is an example of when the distinctive nature of equity is subsumed into discourses of equality and equal opportunities based on the assumption that once equity of access is achieved, all learners have the same opportunities to succeed:

> All members of the University are to support equitable access, participation, engagement and **success for all staff members and students**, **including** Māori as well as those from equity groups. (emphasis added) (University of Auckland, 2017a, p. 2)

While equity policies are developed to support priority populations who have experienced various obstacles in accessing and succeeding in higher education, the clarity and purpose of equity policies can be rendered ambiguous when positioned alongside references to success for all (Baice, 2021).

The positioning of equity in a normative framework—that applies equally to all—undermines the ability of governments and higher education institutions to make strategic improvements in equity outcomes for priority populations (Baice, 2021). This is because discourses of equity that promote sameness conceal stark differences between students, shifting the focus away from a necessary 'unequal treatment of unequals'. Equity policies should promote fairness, but not at the expense of target equity groups (Nakhid, 2011).

Equity and parity

The second key tension in *manogi* is using parity to measure equity learners' achievements against an idealised standard. Parity is premised on promoting a state of sameness that cannot be achieved realistically by students from different backgrounds with varying levels of access to the capital needed to succeed in systems that remain unchanged. The measurement of achievement in higher education institutions globally has been criticised as an unreliable indicator of an institution's performance in educating students, given the measures are rarely adjusted for differences in the makeup of student cohorts (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2017). Published performance data are not adjusted for the diverse characteristics of students that shape and frame their educational experiences and outcomes. In equity policy discourses, Pacific and other equity learners' achievements at the University of Auckland are measured against an idealised student (New Zealand European Pakeha).

The fundamental aims of the parity targets are for Pasifika learners to reach appropriately benchmarked participation rates and obtain (at least) parity of educational achievement with non-Pasifika learners. The achievement parity targets (measured using course/credit and qualification/programme completion rates) are benchmarked to the achievement of non-Pasifika within each provider. (Tertiary Education Commission, 2017, p. 11)

The concept of parity requires further conceptual and theoretical clarification because it fails to consider student differences in structural positionings, obstacles experienced and varying degrees of access to different forms of capital and capabilities (Baice, 2021). M. Reynolds (personal communication, 22 September 2023) suggests that while seeking parity is a useful indicator of inequitable achievement, it is not a useful goal as it limits Pacific ambition to sameness and subtly defines what counts as achievement, leaving little room for alternatives.

Equity a challenging priority

Although equity appears as a key priority, it is often structurally positioned as secondary to the University's business operations: generating income, being fiscally responsible and improving international rankings. The third key tension in *manogi* explored here is the positioning of equity as a domestic challenge contrasted against commitments to improving international student intake and global rankings, framed as positive areas of strength for the University.

To support the pursuit of equitable outcomes for Pacific students in higher education, most universities in New Zealand rely on equity funding from the Tertiary Education Commission, a dedicated pool of government funding to improve participation in and achievement at higher levels of tertiary education. Equity funding is a key feature of the New Zealand education system that attempts to ameliorate inequality (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2017). However, government spending on equity has been insufficient to systematically provide targeted support to equity group learners (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2017). Equally problematic is the reliance of universities on a limited pool of government funds to support the success of their students. The level of institutional resources and investments dedicated to achieving equity goals was unclear in my review of equity policy. The limited nature of equity funding does little to incentivise higher education institutions to deliver better outcomes for equity group learners.

With the same funding per student (regardless of need) and institutions facing major funding pressures overall, universities are forced to limit how much support they can afford to offer individual students – regardless of the potential wider societal benefits of helping these students succeed. (Universities New Zealand, 2018, p. 9)

> Recognising our fiscal challenge: We must also be mindful of our commitment to meeting our aspirations for Māori and for equity groups with their unique challenges while being fiscally responsible. (University of Auckland, 2017b, p. 17)

The substantial reliance on limited funding from the Government to finance the pursuit of equitable outcomes within universities undermines the prominence of equity as a critical priority for universities to achieve. The unintentional discursive consequence here is that the prioritisation of equity, while admirable, is subject to and is conflicted by other priorities and the fiscal limitations of the sector.

The following section outlines the *manogi* that frame the construction of equity learner identities in equity policies and discourses.

EQUITY LEARNER IDENTITIES

Tensions and disharmonies of *manogi* present in defining equity have created further tensions and disharmonies in constructing equity learner identities in equity policy and discourses. Policy efforts to promote equity for Pacific students rely heavily upon discourses reinforcing their portrayal as 'disadvantaged learners'. Two fundamental tensions emerged from the findings: a) the uncritical use of the concept of equity in policy discourses and b) the lack of problematising equity in the context in which it is being used. Both tensions are problematic, given concepts of equity are value-laden political processes informed by the hegemonic normative standards of a given organisation/society (Fowler, 2013). The analysis of documents revealed descriptions of Pacific students as at-risk of poor achievement, having inadequate preparation due to prior schooling and low socioeconomic statuses alongside enduring marginalisation, discrimination and harassment in their academic studies.

> Social inequality: inequality of income in NZ higher than OECD average. Lower incomes are more concentrated amongst Māori and Pacific. (University of Auckland, 2014, p. 1)
>
> Insufficient and inappropriate academic preparation among Pacific students, particularly in STEM subject areas influences low rates of participation and achievement. (University of Auckland, 2017b, p. 12)

The deficit framing of Pacific learners in education has been studied extensively where such framing contributes negatively to efforts devoted to improving academic success for Pacific learners (Chu, Glasgow, et al., 2013; Chu, Abella, et al., 2013; Hunter et al., 2016; Matapo & Baice, 2020). Additionally, extensive research interrogates how success and achievement are defined in narrow and linear ways, which fail to incorporate broader/alternative definitions and measurements (Koloto, 2021; Nakhid, 2011; Si'ilata, 2014). A common assumption of deficit framing is that accountability for issues of poor participation and achievement lies solely with the communities they affect. Often, little attention is directed at critiquing the impact of educational policies, governance and organisational structures.

The deficit framing of equity learners was further complicated by a sense of dualism in the construction and designation of identities and subjectivities in equity policies that did not problematise the power relations they established (Allan, 2010). The duality reveals the prominence of binary oppositions in policies, 'us' (general students) versus 'them' (equity priority learners), where hierarchies are reflected and reinscribed (Allan, 2010). This tension occurs when one group serves as the modelled ideal in which the 'other' is defined negatively (in this research, Pakeha and Pacific). The structural positional embedding of binary oppositions remains mostly unacknowledged and unquestioned in educational policies (Allan, 2010; Iverson, 2010). The problem with deficit framing and its discursive association with Pacific students is that the frames become fixed and naturalised identities rarely critiqued and examined within the policymaking process. Moreover, deficit framing shapes the staff's deficit treatment and understanding of Pacific students (Matapo & Baice, 2020).

A close examination of discourses in the sector highlights the pervasiveness of deficit framing of Pacific learners in New Zealand.

> Pasifika participation and achievement also being an issue at all levels and dragging down averages. (Universities New Zealand, 2018, p. 1)

The pervasiveness of deficit framing of Pacific learners across the sector is an unintended consequence of equity policies and discourses by Government. Some equity policies and discourses at the government level consistently construct Pacific learners as non-autonomous, non-agentic subjects **(**Baice, 2021**).** Evident in the language across government policy is a sense of Pacific learners and their communities as vulnerable and whose learning is susceptible to a range of external circumstances and threats. Examples include:

> Ensuring these needs are met is a priority so that Pacific learners and families are ready and able to learn (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 22)
>
> We'll know we have been successful when: Pacific learners and families are free from racism and discrimination in education; Pacific learners and their families feel accepted and included; Cultural safety; Caring, collaborative, inclusive learning communities; Learning environments that value cultures, faith and beliefs. (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 12)

The University of Auckland's equity policy references ensuring safe, inclusive and equitable work and study environments. The policy defines inclusion as including everyone and not excluding any part of society. Yet, further on in the policy statement and the guidelines, equity

initiatives are directed only at those with the requisite talent and potential to succeed in a university with a high international standing:

> The University recognises that equity will enhance its national and international reputation. This commitment to equity outcomes will attract, retain and support talented people to achieve their potential. This will benefit the creative and intellectual life of the University, and support engagement with the University's diverse communities and stakeholders. (University of Auckland, 2017, p. 1)

Discourses of institutional excellence evident in aspirations for enhancing talent, success for those with potential, and the emphasis on global positioning (university rankings) contribute to understanding Pacific students as commodities who possess an economic value that can enhance the University's reputation (via the achievement of equity outcomes) and achieve government priorities (ensure that the workforce is broadly representative of society). The tension in *mangoi* evident here is one between higher education as a public good that enables the development of capacities and capabilities of individuals and their communities versus criticisms of a neo-liberalisation business model of higher education. The consumer/ commodity identity overshadows a focus on students' political agency and their role as catalysts for change, which is reoriented from its social justice origins to change achieved through the delivery of greater market choice and competition (Wright & Rapper, 2020). The following section considers the implications for higher education.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN OCEANIA

The findings of this study show there is much work to be done in the conceptual and theoretical clarification, understanding and defining of equity within equity policies and discourses to ensure a shift from affirmative to transformative understandings and practices of equity (Talburt, 2010). This shift is necessary to challenge the discursive framing and dominant view of Pacific students as 'at risk'. One of the ongoing challenges here is how educators and policymakers in Oceania describe genuine challenges for some students while avoiding the continued promulgation of a singular narrative of Pacific students as 'at-risk' with specific needs for safety and support (Talburt, 2010). The challenge, then, is ensuring there are balanced approaches, an active harmonising of *manogi* underpinned by a shift on the focus of equity discourses and policies from diagnosing the deficiencies of individuals to calling out the structures that create barriers. Although, as Nakhid (2011) contends, the challenge within any institution is that such structures are endemic and 'made invisible by institutionalisation, making their practices difficult to disrupt' (p. 546). Using Pacific knowledges and Pacific research methods to identify, unpack and reconceptualise deeply ingrained educational ideals and structures is one way researchers in Oceania engage with transformative rethinking (Sanga, 2013).

Equity policy discourses that are harmonious and produce sweet aromatic *manogi* for Pacific students are those that are clearly framed by commitments to social justice and sustainable development, recognise the principle of difference and the impact of structural factors on achievement, and are strategically funded at the highest levels of government/institutions. Taken together, this set of *manogi* is culturally sustaining for Pacific students because they represent equity discourses that are responsive to context-specific positionality and dynamics and hint towards the transformation of structures (social, economic, political) as part of the achievement of equity. Equity policy discourses that are disparaging and produce disharmony and unpleasant pungent *manogi* are based on deficit models and deficit framing, relegated to the periphery of higher education priorities, partially funded, exclusively reliant on government

funding, discursively framed as government priorities or statutory obligations and reduces students to commodities within a broader economic focus.

CONCLUSION

As an educational concept and ideal, equity in higher education is ambiguous and lacks conceptual and theoretical clarity. In my attempt to make sense of equity in Oceania, I recast equity policies and discourses as *manogi* (fragrances) to make sense of their distinctive scents, to further understand how they perfume higher education and shape discursive realities for Pacific learners in Aotearoa. I found a series of *manogi* that were mainly pungent and disparaging, and further, I draw attention to ways in which harmony (a balance of sweet *Manogi*) can be achieved. A re-conceptualisation of equity in Oceania is required to ensure that it resonates with and draws on Pacific knowledges to improve our conceptual understandings and practices of equity. Reconceptualising equity and restoring harmony in *manogi* must begin with a commitment to discursive equity—to the search for more precision in the defining and understanding of equity in education through an exploration of alternative conceptualisations informed by diverse world views (Papastephanou, 2018).

'Revisioning education in Oceania' requires ongoing research grounded in the rethinking and reconceptualising espoused by RPEIPP. The Indigenisation of Pacific education calls for epistemological justice, a re-conceptualisation of educational ideologies that incorporates Pacific-rooted notions of knowledge, learning and wisdom (Thaman, 1997) alongside global educational values (Nabobo-Baba, 2013). Such a task requires ongoing *talanoa* and critical reflection with and between institutions and communities. By drawing on relational ontologies from Pacific cultures (*vā* (Sāmoan) *tauhi vā* (Tongan)) to reframe understandings of equity on relational approaches that centres connections to people in accordance with the context (time and place/land) (Koloto, 2021), validates and legitimises Pacific ways of being and doing (Thaman, 1997).

REFERENCES

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.

Allan, E. J. (2010). Feminist poststructuralism meets policy analysis: An overview. In E. J Allan, S. V. D Iverson, & R. Ropers-Huilman (Eds.), *Reconstructing policy in higher education. Feminist poststructural perspectives* (pp. 11–36). Routledge.

Allan, E. J., & Tolbert, A. R. (2019). Advancing social justice with policy discourse analysis. In K. Strunk, & L. A. Locke (Eds.), *Research methods for social justice and equity in education* (pp. 137–149). Palgrave Macmillan.

Bacchi, C., & Goodwin, S. (2016). *Poststructural policy analysis. A guide to practice.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Baice, T. (2021). Su'esu'e manogi: *Conceptualising equity in higher education policy* (Unpublished master's dissertation), The University of Auckland.

Ball, S. J. (1993). What is policy? Texts, trajectories and toolboxes. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 13*(2), 10–17.

Barrow, M., & Grant, B. (2019). The uneasy place of equity in higher education: Tracing its (in) significance in academic promotions. *Higher Education, 78*(1), 133–147.

Carter, S., & Pitcher, R. (2010). Extended metaphors for pedagogy: Using sameness and difference. *Teaching in Higher Education, 15*(5), 579–589. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2010.491904

Chu, C., Glasgow, A., Rimoni, F., Hodis, M., & Meyer, L. H. (2013). *An analysis of recent Pasifika education research literature to inform improved outcomes for Pasifika learners*. Ministry of Education. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/pasifika_education/an-analysis-of-recent-pasifika-education-research-literature-to-inform-and-improve-outcomes-for-pasifika-learners

Chu, C., Abella, I. S., & Paurini, S. (2013). *Educational practices that benefit Pacific learners in tertiary education*. Ako Aotearoa. https://ako.ac.nz/assets/Knowledge-centre/NPF-10-001A-Pasifika-Learners-and-Success-in-Tertiary-Education/RESEARCH-REPORT-Educational-Practices-that-Benefit-Pacific-Learners-in-Tertiary-Education.pdf

Fowler, F. C. (2013). *Policy studies for educational leaders* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.

Galuvao, A. (2016). *Filimānaia: A Sāmoan critique of standardised reading assessments in New Zealand primary schools* (Unpublished doctoral thesis), Auckland University of Technology. https://openrepository.aut.ac.nz/handle/10292/10635

Galuvao, A. (2018). In search of Sāmoan research approaches to education: *Tofā'a'anolasi* and the Foucauldian toolbox. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *50*(8), 747–757. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2016.1232645

Hunter, J., Hunter, R., Bills, T., Cheung, I., Hannant, B., Kritesh, K., & Lachaiya, R. (2016). Developing equity for Pāsifika learners within a New Zealand context: Attending to culture and values. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, *51*(2), 197–209. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40841-016-0059-7

Iverson, S. V. (2010). Producing diversity: A policy discourse analysis of diversity action plans. In E. J Allan, S. V. D Iverson, & R. Ropers-Huilman (Eds.), *Reconstructing policy in higher education: Feminist poststructural perspectives* (pp. 193–214). Routledge.

Koloto, M. L. (2021). Contextualizing Tonga inclusive special education in a global inclusive education policy. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives, 20*(2), 39–51.

Matapo, J., & Baice, T. (2020). The art of wayfinding Pasifika success. *MAI Journal, 9*(1), 26–37. https://doi.org/10.20507/MAIJournal.2020.9.1.4

Ministry of Education. (2020). *Action plan for Pacific education 2020–2030*. https://www.education.govt.nz/further-education/policies-and-strategies/tertiary-education-strategMinistry/

Nabobo-Baba, U. (2013). Transformations from within: Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative. The development of a movement for social justice and equity. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives, 12*(1), 82–97.

Nakhid, C. (2011). Equity for Māori and Pasifika students: The objectives and characteristics of equity committees in a New Zealand University. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 44*(4), 532–550. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2011.613703

New Zealand Productivity Commission. (2017). *New models of tertiary education*. https://www.productivity.govt.nz/assets/Documents/2d561fce14/Final-report-Tertiary-Education.pdf

Papastephanou, M. (2018). Interrogating equity discourses: Conceptual considerations and overlooked complexities. In S. Carney & M. Schweisfurth (Eds.), *Equity in and through education. Changing contexts. Consequences and contestations* (pp. 209–222). Brill Sense.

Ramphele, M. (2023). Preface. In J. Salmi (Ed.), *Transforming lives at the institutional level. Equity promotion initiatives across the world* (pp. 13–15). The Lumina Foundation.

Salmi, J., & D'Addio, A. (2021). Policies for achieving inclusion in higher education. *Policy Reviews in Higher Education, 5*(1),47–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/23322969.2020.1835529

Salmi, J., & Bassett, R. M. (2014). The equity imperative in tertiary education: Promoting fairness and efficiency. *International Review of Education, 60*(3), 361–377.

Sanga, K. (2013). Indigenous Pacific emerging educational metaphors. *The International Journal of Diversity in Education, 12*(4), 37–53. https://doi.org/10.1177/002205749804802402

Shore, C., & Wright, S. (2003). *Anthropology of policy: Perspectives on governance and power.* Routledge.

Si'ilata, R. (2014). *Va'a Tele: Pasifika learners riding the success wave on linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogies* (Unpublished doctoral thesis), The University of Auckland. https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/handle/2292/23402

Statistics New Zealand. (2018). *Pacific peoples*. https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/pacific-peoples-not-further-defined.

Suaalii-Sauni, T., Tuagalu, I., Kirifi-Alai, T., & Fuamatu, N. (2009). *Su'esu'e manogi. In search of fragrance. Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Sāmoan indigenous reference*. National University of Sāmoa.

Talburt, S. (2010). Developing students: Becoming someone but not anyone. In E. J Allan, S. V. D Iverson, & R. Ropers-Huilman (Eds.), *Reconstructing policy in higher education. Feminist poststructural perspectives* (pp. 111–128). Routledge.

Tertiary Education Commission. (2017). *Pasifika operational strategy 2017-2020*. https://www.tec.govt.nz/assets/Publications-and-others/7d0971ac24/Pasifika-Operational-Strategy-2017-2020.pdf

Thaman, K. H. (1997). Reclaiming a place: Towards a Pacific concept of education for cultural development. *The Journal of the Polynesian Society, 106*(2), 119–130.

Tongati'o, L. (1998). *Ko e Ako 'a e Kakai Pasifika*: Pacific Islands peoples' education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Towards the 21st century. *New Zealand Review of Education, 7*, 133–150.

Tualaulelei, E., & McFall-McCaffery, J. (2019). The Pacific research paradigm. Opportunities and challenges. *MAI Journal, 8*(2), 188–204. https://doi.org/10.20507/MAIJournal.2019.8.2.7

Tui Atua, T. (2000). *Talanoaga na loma ma Ga'opo'a*. Pacific Printers & Publishers.

Tui Atua. (2009a). In search of meaning, nuance, and metaphor in social policy. In T. Suaalii-Sauni, I. Tuagalu, T. Kirifi Alai, & N. Fuamatu (Eds.), Su'esu'e manogi: *In search of fragrance. Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Sāmoan Indigenous reference* (pp. 79–92). National University of Sāmoa.

Tui Atua. (2009b). More on meaning, nuance and metaphor. in T. Suaalii-Sauni, I. Tuagalu, T. Kirifi Alai, & N. Fuamatu (Eds.), *Su'esu'e manogi. In search of fragrance. Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Sāmoan Indigenous reference* (pp. 70-78). National University of Sāmoa.

Tui Atua. (2009c). In search of harmony: Peace in the Sāmoan Indigenous Religion. in T. Suaalii-Sauni, I. Tuagalu, T. Kirifi Alai, & N. Fuamatu (Eds.), Su'esu'e manogi: *In search of fragrance.* Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi *and the Sāmoan Indigenous reference* (pp. 104–114). National University of Sāmoa.

Tui Atua. (2009d, March 7). '*Tau mai na o le pua ula': Samoan fragrances in Samoan thought* [Keynote]. Pacific Thought Symposium, Waitakere City Council Chambers. http://www.head-of-state-samoa.ws/speeches_pdf/Fragrance%20and%20Samoan%20Thought_7%20March%2009.pdf

University of Auckland. (2014). *The University of Auckland equity cycle*. https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/auckland/about-us/equity-at-theuniversity/Equity%20Cycle%20-%202019.pdf

University of Auckland. (2017a). *Equity policy*. https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/theuniversity/how-university-works/policy-and-administration/equity/equity-policy-andprocedures-html

University of Auckland. (2017b). *Investment plan*. https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/auckland/about-us/the-university/official-publications/otherpublications/investing-plan/university-of-auckland-investment-plan-2017-2019-finalupdated.pdf

Universities New Zealand. (2018). *Achieving parity for Māori and Pasifika - the university sector view.* https://www.universitiesnz.ac.nz/sites/default/files/UNZ%20Parity%20Discussion%20Paper%20One%20%28Aug%202018%29.pdf

Va'ai, U. L., & Casimira, A. (2017). Introduction: A relational renaissance. In U. L. Va'ai & A. Casimira (Eds.), *Relational hermeneutics. Decolonising the mindset and the Pacific Itulagi* (pp. 1–16). The University of the South Pacific and the Pacific Theological College.

Vavrus, F. K. (2017). From gap to debt: Rethinking equity metaphors in education. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives, 16*(3), 5–16.

Waipapa Taumata Rau, (2022). *Academic audit: Self-review portfolio*. The University of Auckland.

Wright, A. & Rapper, R. (2020). Contesting student identities: Making sense of students' positioning in higher education policy. In A. Bagshaw & D. Mcvitty (Eds.), *Influencing higher education policy. A professional guide to making an impact* (pp. 65–77). Routledge.
