Pacific Tertiary Students in New Zealand's South: Towards a More Nuanced Framework For Understanding

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ABSTRACT

The experiences of students from Pacific backgrounds at the University of Otago, marked in part by problems of achievement and retention, are similar to those faced by Pacific students elsewhere in New Zealand's tertiary sector and also in the education sector generally. However, there are some differences in both the study and wider social context of Otago and its location in the south of New Zealand's South Island, and, according to results from a small student experience study, a difference in the cohort of students itself that may call for a different means of addressing student needs. This article examines the context of tertiary study for Pacific students in New Zealand's south and some of the popular culturalist frameworks put forward for understanding and addressing Pacific student need in the education sector generally. The southern study context as well as student self-reported study experiences demonstrate the need for a set of frameworks that are more sensitive to the diversity of Pacific students' experiences at Otago. The metaphor of the beach from Pacific history, with its emphasis on crossing and meeting difference, is tentatively put forward as a means for better understanding and facilitating Pacific students' pathways in New Zealand's south.

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO'S WIDER SOCIAL CONTEXT

The University of Otago and the city of Dunedin are physically and socially very close. The city, with a population of approximately 100,000, envelops with no clear boundary the University with its population of approximately 20,000 students. Students from Pacific backgrounds who study at Otago join for the period of their study a wider Dunedin and Otago community that has never had the Pacific social and cultural orientation of New Zealand's northern centres. The Dunedin community which has surrounded the University for over 130 years has strong Presbyterian roots still evident in its architecture and its own social life while the wider Otago regional social context, occasionally referred to as the *deep south*, is marked in part by the rural, Eurocentric masculinist mythology of the *southern man* (Law, 1997). The most recent census data indicate a very small resident Pacific population compared

to elsewhere. Only 1.8 percent of the greater Otago regional *resident population* identifies as Pacific compared to 14 percent of municipal Auckland's resident population (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). In terms of *region of birth*, only 0.6 percent of Otago's population identify as Pacific compared to 7.6 percent of Auckland's population (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). The bulk of the University of Otago's Pacific enrolment therefore comes from elsewhere in New Zealand as well as the Pacific region itself. The University of Otago's Pacific enrolment is also small in comparison to universities elsewhere. In 2009 there were 644 students, or 3 percent of the overall enrolment, who identify in some way as Pacific (University of Otago, 2010). By comparison, the University of Auckland's Pacific enrolment in 2009 was 3102 or 7.8 percent of its overall enrolment (University of Auckland, 2011).

Small numbers mean unique Pacific community demographics. Many Pacific ethnicities can barely support the numbers for formal association. Students from Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and others, both long-term New Zealand residents and recent arrivals consist of only a handful of students. Polynesian student communities are larger and thus formalised association, both on campus and in wider Dunedin, exist. Nevertheless, these larger communities are still small by northern standards. With these smaller southern numbers there has possibly emerged a greater sense of a pan-Pacific identity via such groups as the *Otago Pacific Trust*, the *Dunedin Multi-Ethnic Council* and on campus the *Pacific Islands Centre*. Study at Otago, perhaps more than elsewhere provides a social setting that potentially enables Pacific students a very diverse study experience, inclusive of the non-Pacific population of both the university, wider city and province. From an academic perspective the University of Otago also has either small or non-existent communities of designated Pacific research and teaching practice across its Departments, unlike the University of Auckland and others who have in some disciplines Pacific studies programmes and research emphases. Therefore, Pacific students at Otago are more likely to study, and in the case of postgraduate students' research, outside of Pacific discourses. However, a number of cultural affirmative action programmes in the social, pedagogical and degree structures of the University do exist, including: the recent appointment of Associate Dean for Pacific students in the Health Science division; the support work of the *Pacific Islands Centre*; some early interventions for struggling first year students; and, quota entry into some competitive programmes of study.

ASPECTS OF OTAGO UNIVERSITY'S PACIFIC ENROLMENT

Historically, the experiences of Pacific students at Otago have been similar to Pacific students elsewhere in NZ. They have been informed by two main discourses, the latter an understandable response to the former. Borrowing from Luce Irigaray (1985), it could be said that Pacific students have always been *an enrolment that is not one*. In other words, if Pacific students have not been either erased or silenced in terms of a presence in tertiary education, something that participants in this study have confirmed in being the first in their families to be at University, then they have been homogenised in terms such as *Pacific* students or the Polynesian-centric term *Pasifika*. Perhaps *erasure* is being addressed, evidenced in overall increasing enrolments, but the education sector collectively has not addressed well intra-Pacific diversity, blending those

from Melanesian and Micronesian backgrounds with Polynesian backgrounds, or as often is the case, excluding the former altogether. Indo-Fijians in particular struggle to find legitimacy in Pacific identity debates so too the many from mixed Pacific and non-Pacific heritages. Reductive and essentialist perspectives on Pacific culture and identity persist also in Otago's often times well meaning attempts to address what is perceived as Pacific difference. The programmes and interventions designed to support struggling Pacific students exist uneasily alongside a Pacific enrolment that is almost unmanageably diverse.

Elements of Otago's intra-Pacific diversity are not hard to locate. Of all the participants in this study, for example, there are those who are several generation New Zealand born and others newly arrived on short-term study visas. Some students possess a Pacific vernacular as first language while others speak English only. Most come from Polynesian backgrounds but Melanesian and Micronesian students are also present. Individual Pacific ethnicities are also diverse and imply a huge range of cultural practices, values and linguistic differences. In addition, of the total participants in this study, 50 percent self-identified with more than one Pacific or non-Pacific ethnicity,[1] for example, Samoan-Tongan, Pakeha-Samoan, Samoan-Maori. The very language to describe that diversity, let alone a direction to take for support, is hard to find and so by default most supports are directed at an over-generalised *Pacific*. Enrolment processes and databases that record student identity do not help. Students are allowed to name their Polynesian affiliation but non-Polynesian affiliations are assigned as *Other*. A Pacific identity and cultural politics is also present, where essentialised identities, degrees of community affiliation and Pacific vernacular competence among other markers contribute to perceptions of cultural in/authenticity. Such an identity politics creates yet another layer of difficulty to negotiate in supporting students who identify in some way as Pacific. One student in this study, for example, confessed to asserting a Pacific identity to access academic and other supports, while another student confessed to sometimes denying a Pacific identity to avoid the negative stereotyping of others. It is this very fluidity of self-identification that also confounds the rigid culturalist frameworks and metaphors often used to explain Pacific sociality.

THE EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES FOR PACIFIC STUDENTS AT OTAGO

While Pacific enrolment rates in New Zealand's tertiary sector are growing (Benseman et al.*,* 2006, p. 148), retention and achievement rates remain lower in comparison to other groups. The most recent Ministry of Education Monitoring Report (2011) indicates that between 2001 and 2009, Pacific tertiary participation *and* first year retention rates were consistently lower than the non-Pacific average. Pacific students studying in New Zealand from the wider Pacific region are not often differentiated in studies investigating the experiences of international students in New Zealand. However, there is evidence that Pacific regional students also struggle in New Zealand's tertiary sector in comparison to other groups from Middle East, Asia and Europe as well as in comparison to domestic New Zealand students (Zepke & Leach, 2007). Pacific student study experiences at Otago partially reflect these trends. Otago's Pacific enrolment is steadily growing with a 9.3 percent increase from

2008 to 2009 (University of Otago, 2010, p. 17), however, at the same time levels of achievement have been historically lower than other student cohorts. Recent indicators report a first year attrition rate for Pacific degree and graduate diploma students at 26 percent with an overall completion rate at only 65 percent (University of Otago, 2007, p. 27). At the policy level the University has long sought to address these differential outcomes as evidenced in key goals regarding increased recruitment, retention and achievement of Pacific students enrolled at the University (e.g., see University of Otago, 2009, p. 49; 2008, p. 16, 41; 2006, p. 4; 2005, p. 8). This article claims, however, that the complex nature of the Pacific enrolment requires much more nuanced frameworks to address the problems of retention and achievement where they exist.

PACIFIC VOICES AT OTAGO

The self-reported experiences of Otago Pacific students are as diverse as the backgrounds students come from and depict a cohort that refuses to stay within popularly perceived cultural frames (Chow, 1993). A representative sample of 20 male/female, regional/NZ born, English/Pacific vernacular as L1, undergraduate/postgraduate, degree programme diversity, on-campus/distance mode and age diversity were engaged in *talanoa* (Otsuka, 2005) using nine discussion topics as follows: enjoyment and sense of well being; Pacific cultural difference and learning; University learning perceptions; successful study and the self; spare time; social network; learning and teaching relationships; time management; family and community relationships; and, the approaches to seeking help when needed. The *talanoa* was designed to give voice to the students concerning their study experiences and to identify strategies they employed to negotiate their study pathway. The results also serve to indicate, in a poststructural sense, the discourses or ways in which the students themselves frame their participation in study. Those interviewed were moderately to highly successful students and so their responses must be read as such. Apart from some expressing a low level of dissatisfaction with progress most articulate a confident, self-determined study pathway.

There is a danger that Pacific students are constituted by, as well as constitute themselves, using *only* those discourses made available to them, these being the erasure and silencing that results in a denial of Pacific-ness and the over-determined *Pacific* and *Pasifika* that results in sameness for all. The diversity of Otago students' self-reported experience offers the possibility of going beyond the constitutive effects of these two major frames by adding to the repertoire of discourses available to students and all institutional stakeholders involved in teaching, administering and academic support (Laws & Davies, 2000). The Otago study experience, marked by the unique characteristics of relative cultural isolation, pan-Pacificism and higher degrees of openness to difference mentioned earlier, along with some unique dispositions and attitudes to study possessed by the students who step out of cultural frames to study at Otago, have facilitated new ways of viewing the student experience. These discourses identified in the *talanoa* and discussed below concern: the strategic moderation of study pressure; resistance to deficit views of Pacific students; negotiated pedagogical relationships; metacognitive awareness; cultural mobility; and, postculturalism.

APPROPRIATE PRESSURE – 'THEY'RE NOT, LIKE, TOO CLOSE'

Students must carefully negotiate a set of three-way tensions between themselves, family far away and the local Pacific community. The more astute and sensitive in each case are aware of the potential problems of too much involvement and seek an appropriate distance from each other. In some cases families caution against community involvement; for example, Student 27 whose mother cautioned her that 'they're there if you need help but don't get too involved or caught up in these things that you don't need to get caught up in' (27). Similarly students keep a strategic distance with families by revealing selected details about their study such as the student who 'doesn't really talk to [mum] about my studies [laughs]. It just feels as though you are disappointing them' (51). In terms of community attitudes there are on occasion similar sensitivities where at least one student's church fellowship in Dunedin 'tries not to get the students to do too much because they know that we are busy' (5).

Many students commented on family and community pressure to be successful and the sense of being beholden in some way to a larger social group, either church, family or a cultural community. Not all students felt this pressure but all were at least aware that it exists, if not for them for their friends. This pressure comes as no surprise but Otago students' responses and in some cases families and communities perhaps are. There is both independence and strategy in choosing Otago as a study destination in the light of family pressure to both succeed and comply with family and community obligations at the same time. In many cases it was the potential for this pressure that led students to choose Otago in the first place 'cause I knew that there'd be a smaller community, whereas up in Auckland I have a huge family and it would be constantly like you have to come to this, you should come and support your cousins in this' (5). In a similar way many students explained the enjoyment in being at Otago in terms of their 'freedom', 'independence' or 'being your own boss' with one suggesting that 'pretty sure if my parents lived down here, it would be different' (16). For others the pressure has been reduced to manageable proportions by the distance between Otago and home 'cause like they're still close but they're not like too close to see … they always ask me what I'm doing, at least on the phone. I can go "oh yeah, I'm fine" and they won't check up on me' (5). The family pressure felt is sometimes dialogic, that is, the student feels pressure from the family to succeed but there is some pressure also flowing back into families in terms of the example set for others to follow. This is the case for several mature-aged students whose own children could potentially take up tertiary study. Being the first family member in university throws out a challenge to other extended family members: 'It's for my older children to see that if you commit to your studies and give it all you have then you can achieve things. It's for my children to see that' (59).

RESISTING THE DEFICITS – 'IT MAKES ME WANT TO WORK HARDER'

There is among some students a keen sense of Pacific student lack and deficit. Sometimes this lack is seen within Otago social and pedagogical life such as in the exchange described between Student 5 and her non-Pacific classmates when her Pacific identity is revealed: 'They kind of look at you funny and stop asking you things. Shut up you guys it doesn't mean I'm less smart

than you'. In this student's case, it 'makes me want to work harder and to prove myself to other people'. At other times the deficit views are wider in scope and emerge in class discussion, for example, where poorer health outcomes for Pacific people are explored in health science papers: 'We are told that Pacific Islanders have the highest rates of heart disease and things like that and it makes you think about those things but no I don't feel it' (29). Sometimes the University and wider New Zealand social life creates this sense of lack in its liberal desire to provide study support based on over-determined categories of identity. There are often degrees of internalisation and normalisation of these deficit discourses. Deficit discourses in relation to learners across many axes of difference, not just Pacific difference, are common. In the case of some Otago students the response varies from a motivation to do better to just shrugging it off, however, this may not be the case for all students. The challenge is to configure ways of support that don't unintentionally further marginalise Pacific students.

PEDAGOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS – 'THEY'RE NEVER GOING TO BE PARTICULARLY PERSONAL'

There is a growing understanding that pedagogic relationships are critical to student success – consider the concept of *teu le va* (Anae, 2007) and the prioritisation of the sacred relational space between all those involved in education and research. There is a sense among many Otago students that their relationship with lecturers could be much better. Student 9 answered with a blunt 'non-existent' in describing the relationship she had with her lecturers. Student 4, who is a distance student, tended to see distance learning as a barrier to relationship building in saying that: 'They're [lecturers] never going to be particularly personal. I don't even know what they look like'. Often University structures such as very large classes or online delivery of programmes hinder developing the sorts of teacher/learner relationships many had at secondary school both in New Zealand and the Pacific region. Many students, however, compensate for the relational distance by utilising a range of classmates, family, tutors, and other learning supports such as the *Pacific Islands Centre*, *Pacific Island Health Professional Students Association* and others. There is in several students' responses almost an element of neoliberal individualism evidenced in a refusal to lay blame for unsatisfactory pedagogical relationships and, by extension achievement, with the University. The feeling is that Pacific students themselves must embrace the existing structures and supports, many of which are directed at the general student population. Student 16 said when asked about ways the University could better facilitate her learning, that 'the way they teach us is suitable. It's up to every student whether they want to learn or not. I need to put in extra effort'.

METACOGNITIVE AWARENESS – 'I'M A MIND MAP PERSON'

Many students are very metacognitively aware and can articulate what works and doesn't work for them pedagogically. Student 6, for example, describes herself as 'a mind map person'. Student 9 does not enjoy group learning because 'I need to know the stuff before I can talk to other people about it'. Student 50 states that 'unless you do it you won't know it. Practical

exercises, I think, are more effective for me'. Some students prefer to think through issues alone, others prefer group work as a strategy towards coming to understanding. Many students also made comparisons between the sorts of learning experience they had at high school and those at university commenting that university required learners to carry much more responsibility for new understandings compared to high school learning where teachers just gave what was required.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL MOBILITY – 'YOU ARE NOT GOING TO UNDERSTAND WHERE OTHERS ARE COMING FROM'

Interviews indicated a widespread desire to move beyond just same culture/language social networks. For many there is a desire to flat, study, and socialise with other Pacific students but at the same time extend networks beyond this. In the case of some students cultural distinctions are simply not part of their consciousness when it comes to networking with others. Student 6 expressed a principle of networking based on: 'A person is whatever they are, they are just friends'. These diverse networks in themselves illustrate the sort of border crossings many Pacific students negotiate in their social lives. Student 33 spends a lot of time with Dunedin's 'skateboard community'; Student 16 goes shooting for rabbits with her partner and his friends. Others do triathlons (6), socialise regularly with 'rugby mates' (18), or 'work out' (27) or attend an a-cultural church fellowship such as the Salvation Army (46 & 48). These networks do not necessarily represent a rejection of same-culture/language relationships but an addition to social repertoires. As Student 6 maintains:

> *You've got to be able to mix with all sorts of people because you really really limit yourself and if we're ever going to realise that things need to be changed and that the way that New Zealand is set up ... doesn't fit everyone and ... we can do things but if you only ever see other people who fit your, you're not gonna understand where others are necessarily coming from.*

BEYOND CULTURALISM – 'I'M A PACIFIC ISLANDER ... AS IF I SHOULD GIVE A VOICE TO PEOPLE'

Few students spoke of their study experience through a cultural difference frame. They do not appear to be conscious of their Pacific difference, at least in the setting of Otago academic life. This contrasts with the many culturalist elements of Pacific educational research that are framed, often along binary West/Pacific lines. Teaero (2002) and Finau (2007), to name but two commentators, argue for differences in learning styles, education structures and pedagogies along rigid lines of Western and Pacific difference. Certainly responses from students in this study do not support these views on epistemological difference. Where a sense of difference was expressed it is a relatively superficial difference, expressed in terms of 'brown faces' (33), 'shyness' (18 & 59), 'black people' (56) or in the case of Student 5, a hard to pronounce name. There did not appear to be any expressed desire to critically evaluate new understandings through a particular Pacific cultural lens, that is, to

consider with any degree of cultural critique the world views, values, epistemologies, and pedagogies they encounter in day to day University life. Student 9 went so far as to reject culturalist pressures from others who felt that simply because she is a Pacific person she 'should give voice to Pacific people' (9) as a result of her university degree. If any scepticism toward the so-called Western epistemological preferences of the university were expressed it was only a few of the mature-aged students who did so. Only one student offered cultural differences, unspecified ones at that, as a reason for Pacific students having different study experiences: 'There is a difference in the way we learn that in the mainstream University setting can be daunting' (4). Another minor example was the comments of Student 58, who in the 12 months prior to the interview had some family upsets. She felt that she received lower levels of empathy from her non-Pacific lecturers compared to one that was from a Pacific background.

Such a set of responses, albeit from a relatively small cohort of Otago Pacific students, nevertheless reflect an alternative set of discourses that circulate concerning both Pacific university students and study. Responses to family pressure, deficit beliefs from others, relationships with teachers, metacognition, cultural mobility, degrees of individualism, and what might cautiously be termed a Pacific postculturalism warrant a reconsideration of some of the popular metaphors or frameworks offered for understanding Pacific sociality.

METAPHORS AND WAY FINDING

Pacific historian Greg Dening (2004, p. 167) suggests, metaphors or frameworks act as 'the trade winds of [his] mind' and an aid 'in way finding' – they aid in making the unruly coherent. In education, metaphors are frequently used for arriving at personal philosophies of teaching and as frameworks for effective pedagogy (Hagstrom et al., 2000). They are also used to guide broader educational and social practice, institutions and systems. However, all metaphors by nature are reductive in the sense that they represent potentially narrow ways of viewing the world. Their use, therefore, calls for a socially-critical awareness of the ideology that informs them. Common frameworks employed to understand and guide Pacific social institutions, processes and systems include: *kakala* (Thaman, 2003), the process of making a garland of flowers in Tonga*; fonofale* (Ministry of Health, 1995), based on elements of a Samoan fale*; tivaevae* (Maua-Hodges, 2000), the composition of patch work quilting in Cook Islands among others.[2] Some of these frameworks have emerged out of specific fields of practice, such as *kakala* and *tivaevae* from education and *fonofale* from health. However, they have in many cases been taken across disciplinary borders and used in multiple settings (see, for example, Lanumata's (2010) use of *fonofale* in education and Kupa's (2009) use of *tivaevae* in health.

These frameworks are often specific to individual Pacific ethnicities, which is a limitation in itself when applied across a heterogeneous New Zealand Pacific community. However, more significantly, as their names suggest, many are *rooted* in essentialised cultural practices. The *tree of opportunity* (see Pene et al., 2002) from the 'by Pacific for Pacific' regional education debates is an example of such a framework with roots extending down into the cultural soil

and resulting branches bearing the sorts of fruit, that is, knowledge's, values and dispositions, required for a self-determined Pacific future. The inherent anchoring in place, or the *whenua* and its many variants, does not explain the complexity, fluidity and dynamism of contemporary Pacific life nor a necessary connectedness with an ever-globalising world. The Pacific student experience at Otago in particular, is one marked by mobility from former New Zealand or regional homes, in many cases compounded by prior generational family mobility. This paper makes the tentative suggestion for *route* metaphors and frameworks which incorporate into their symbolism the mobility that Pacific peoples in NZ and globally engage with daily, particularly those students from Pacific backgrounds that choose Otago as a place in which to study. James Clifford's (1997) dissonance between roots and routes, reflected in Pacific sociology (Teaiwa, 1995), Pacific history (Dening, 2004) and in Pacific anthropology (Hau'ofa, 2008; Thomas, 1991) might also usefully be taken up in education to help understand the pedagogical and epistemological complexities faced by Pacific learners at Otago. It also must be noted that many of the *root* metaphors and frameworks used to guide current practice, particularly in education, for example *kakala* and *tivaevae*, are based on practices exclusive to Pacific women and might not necessarily reflect Pacific male learning experiences and life-ways. Related here is the noted lack of engagement (Burnett, 2011) with the more fluid oceanic (as opposed to anchored land based) and scatological metaphors for understanding Pacific sociality suggested by Tongan male academic Epeli Hau'ofa (1983, 1987, 2008).

BEACHES AND ENTANGLEMENTS

This article tentatively suggests that Greg Dening's (2004) *beach* metaphor more usefully reflects complex contemporary Pacific sociality, particularly that of Pacific students at Otago described above. The beach is Dening's metaphor for engagements with difference of all sorts: physical, cultural, linguistic, social and disciplinary. It is an expansive symbol with connotations of necessary openness to the world. The beach is the place where not only sea meets land but historically where Pacific difference has always first met difference and where locals have always first met strangers. For Dening (2004, p. 16), the beach is 'a double-edged space ... where edginess rules'. The beach symbolises the 'edginess' of identity construction and reconstruction whenever Pacific peoples meet strangers and strangeness – often, but not always, European strangers and strangeness. Pacific students at Otago because of its unique characteristics perhaps experience this edginess more acutely than students elsewhere.

The ideas of difference, crossings, routedness, change and growth are inherent in the *beach* in ways not permitted by root frameworks. Nicholas Thomas' (1991) concept of *entanglement* as goods flow between Pacific peoples and non-Pacific others helps illustrate what happens on the beach. Rather than perceiving these goods as symbolic 'footsteps of trespass' (Dening, 2004, p. 259) on the Pacific beach, any degree of appropriation, rejection and modification by Pacific people is done as objects cross it. Objects travel without their purpose inscribed, only to be recontextualised by those who receive those objects (Thomas, 1991, p. 108). We might also include here: values, dispositions, and from an educator's point of view, knowledge, skills,

pedagogies and epistemologies. Certainly education is not a material object in the sense that Thomas would have it but the point is the creative response of Pacific people who engage with it – a response that is not always in the spirit in which it is authored by non-Pacific providers. Martin Nakata (2001), for example, argues that English language is often received by Indigenous peoples for both political purpose and strategic identity work in contrast to the liberal paternalistic spirit in which it is often presented by non-Indigenous governments (McConaghy, 2000). Whether the epistemologies, pedagogies and general systems of learning encountered by Pacific students in NZ's south are shaped by Pacific erasure *or* homogenisation there is no evidence in the responses of students to suggest that they are received in corresponding terms of disempowerment.

The beach, as metaphor, has a greater power to explain the complexities of people's lives in globalised times and primarily the necessities and desires to engage with difference. The beach as metaphor also has power to explain the lives of the diasporic, such as Otago's Pacific students, who have already crossed numerous beaches, symbolic and material, in travel from a prior home or homes. Above all the beach is a place of nuance that constructs Pacific peoples as active agents entangled in a world of difference. Tertiary study for Pacific students at Otago might be re-imagined as yet another beach, where new differences are encountered, new entanglements negotiated and for many, creative purpose put to the education received. The beach implies agency, fluidity, and change, making and remaking what it means to be a human actor, that is, a Pacific human actor surrounded by difference. Critical anthropologists suggest that Pacific life has always been this way, marked by mobility and change (Hau'ofa, 2008). It is colonial discourse that would otherwise confine people, via a range of cultural essentialisms, to singular places and ways of being (Appadurai, 1988).

CONCLUSION

Students' approaches to study, reflections on their experience and the discourses that they take up to frame their study are diverse. These include: a willingness to place themselves outside of cultural comfort zones to study in New Zealand's south; with reasons for study based on passion and personal growth; and via, for many, an almost neoliberal individualism to ensure their own success. Additional elements of the study experience include: a metacognitive awareness; the need to strategically balance family and community obligation with personal individual autonomy; and, an awareness of the deficit discourses that inform how Pacific students are perceived by others. These are not satisfactorily explained or understood in the light of culturalist frameworks mentioned earlier thus the need for a metaphor that captures the diversity. The culturalist metaphors are metaphors of socialisation mixed with elements of preservation, fear and loss – cultural anxiety as Grillo (2003) calls it. They do not reflect the levels of mobility or engagement with difference, both prerequisites for competence in an interconnected world marked by difference, that are demonstrated in the responses of students discussed above.

Not all Pacific students at Otago are successful. Significant numbers are not thus the need for additional support. The above discourses are identifiable in at least a proportion of the overall cohort at Otago and represent alternative

perspectives, experiences, and dispositions and thus contribute to alternative social constructions of what has also been homogenised as Pacific or Pasifika. They are offered here as the beginnings of an alternative set of discourses, the beginnings of a new way of framing students. The deep south is the Pacific student's 'beach' where difference is met daily in lectures, tutorials, North Dunedin social life, the flat and engagements with the wider Dunedin community; for example, the skateboard community, rabbit shooting, the Salvation Army church and drinking. These encounters are better described as Thomas's 'entanglements', where practices, values and dispositions are appropriated, rejected and altered as they cross the beach. It is a metaphor that incorporates the mobilities – altogether physical, epistemological and social that Pacific students at Otago experience in enrolling and completing a degree, and the necessary engagement with difference, a critical openness to difference – beyond the mere physical to encompass the epistemic and the social. Perhaps not all but certainly many students appear to proactively embrace the entangled life free of the cultural anxiety articulated by many in the Pacific education community such as those who speak of students caught between two worlds (Tiatia, 1998). A starting point for support of these students might be to offer them and those involved in the supports these discourses.

END NOTES

1. This is greater than the national average. Carter et al.'s (2009) analysis of longitudinal *Survey of Family, Income and Employment* data indicates 24 percent of Pacific people in New Zealand self-identify using more than one ethnicity and of this group 63 percent change their stated ethnicity over time.

2. In the field of health culturalist frameworks abound: *Te Vaka Atafaga* (Kupa, 2009), mental health model based on a Tokelauan canoe; *Fa'afaletui* (Tamasese et al., 1997), process model based on a meeting to discuss important issues; *Ta & Va* (see McFall-McCaffery, 2010), model for research based on Tongan views of time and space; *Fonua* (Tu'itahi, 2009), health delivery model based on relationships between land and people; Pandanus mat (Agnew et al., 2004), health service provision based on strands of a pandanus mat; *Te Vaka* (Agnew et al., 2004), mental health model based on a canoe; and, *Ole Pate Kilikiti* (Stowers et al., 2010), health service model based on parts of a Samoan *kilikiti* bat.

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