

**Paper Session 1E:**  
**Lived Experiences, Student Journeys, and**  
**(11.45am - 12.05pm BST) Promoting Inclusion Across Systems**

Presenter: Lamauta Dr Vaoiva Natapu-Ponton

**Navigating Whiteness in Education:**  
**A Pasifika Perspective**



**Access & Geopolitics:**  
**Next Steps in Tackling the Equity Crisis**  
**in Global Higher Education**

A WAHEN, CGHE & SKOPE Research Conference

Tuesday 3 June 2025 10am - 5pm (BST)

Queensland Australia

Make it matter



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Griffith University acknowledges the people who are the Traditional Custodians of the land. We pay respect to the Elders, past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



Together, Sid Domic



# Overview

Topics I will be covering include:

- Pasifika identity in Australia
- Educational structures and colonial influences
- Pasifika learners' preferred learning methods
  - Use of Pacific methodologies (e.g., Talanoa, Teu le Va, Fonofale)
- Challenges in mainstream Western curricula
- Empowerment pathways for Pasifika learners



# Navigating unfamiliar spaces and ideologies

**“Education systems in settler-colonial societies like Australia often reflect dominant white norms. But what happens when Pasifika students step into these spaces?”**

- **Purpose of the presentation:**  
Explore how Pasifika learners navigate predominantly white educational systems, and how Pacific methodologies can empower them.





# How Pasifika are usually depicted ...

## 2. Context: Pasifika in Australia

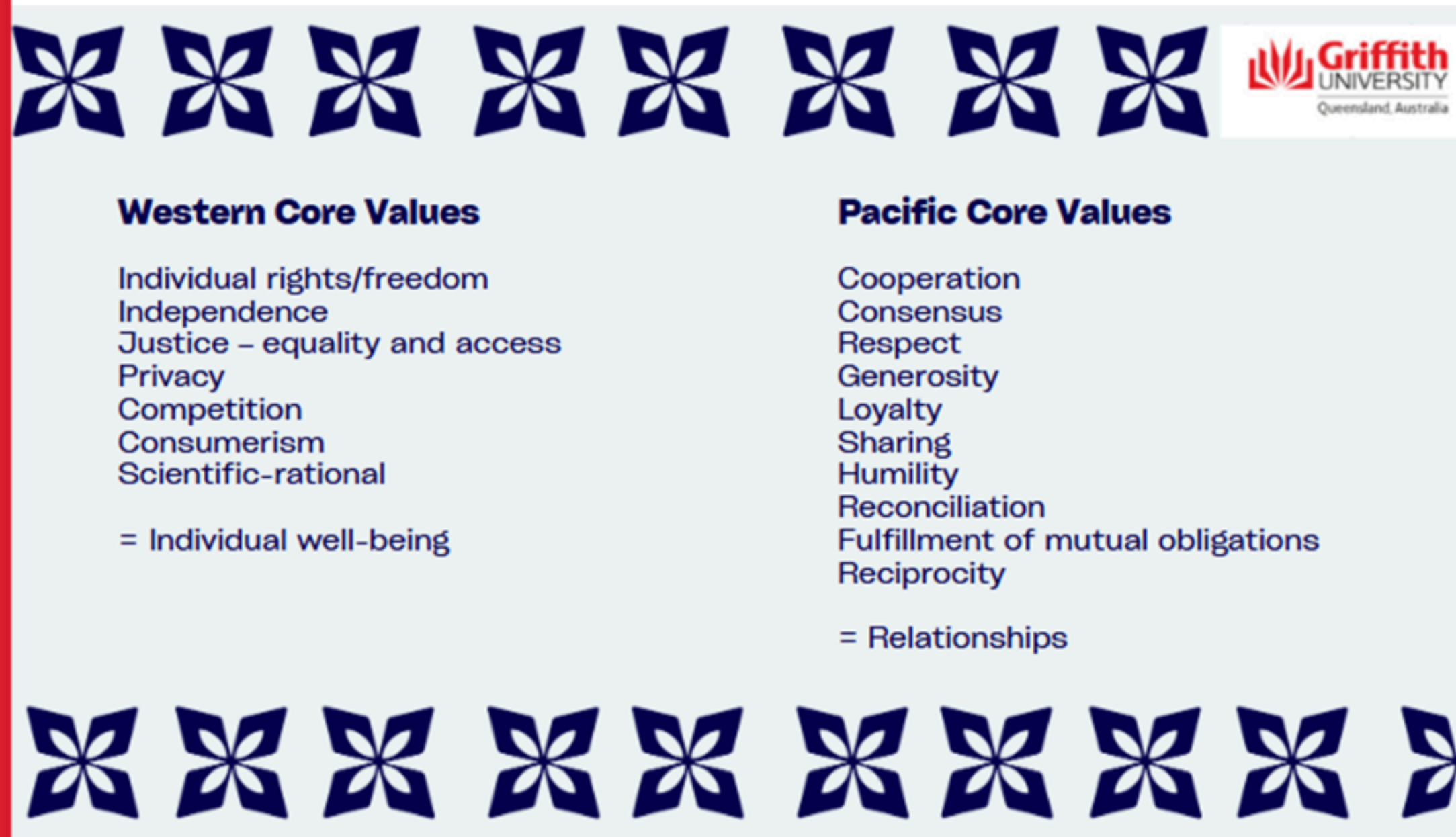
- Increasing Pasifika population in Australia.
- Often positioned as outsiders in mainstream education.
- Stereotypes, systemic underachievement, and cultural marginalization.

## 3. Challenges in Education Systems

- Curricula rooted in Western epistemologies.
- Expectations of “whiteness” as the standard of knowledge.
- Lack of cultural safety and representation.



# Challenges in Education Systems



- Curricula rooted in Western epistemologies.
- Expectations of “whiteness” as the standard of knowledge.
- Lack of cultural safety and representation.



### **Key Point:**

**Pasifika students may feel alienated or forced to adapt to systems that do not reflect their identities or ways of knowing.**

---


## **4. Pasifika Learners & Learning Preferences**


- **Oral traditions, communal values, relational learning.**
- **Prefer dialogic, storytelling, and relational approaches.**
- **Disconnect when placed in rigid, individualistic systems.**



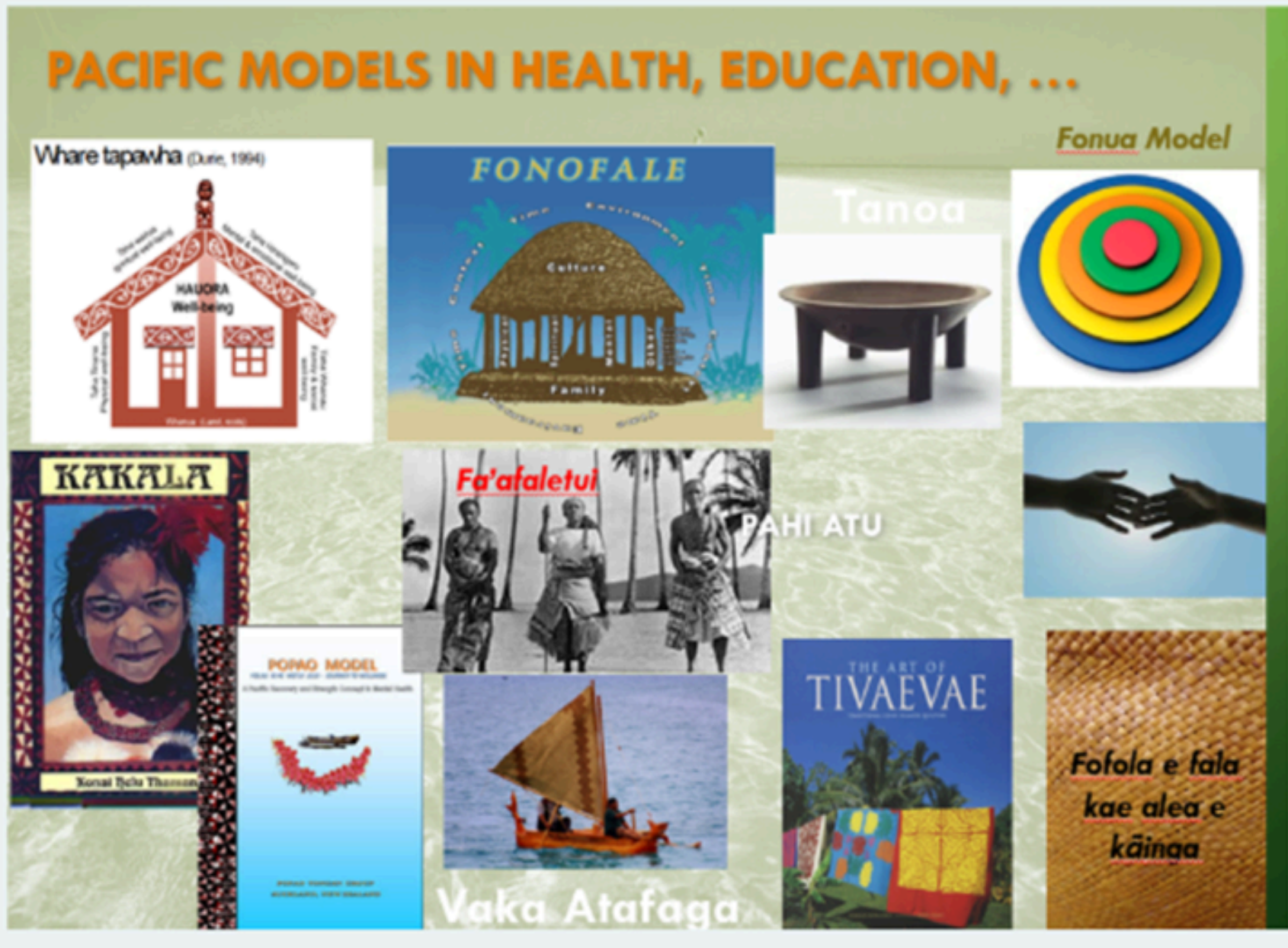
# INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGIES

## 5. Pacific Methodologies: Pathways to Empowerment





**Pacific  
Models and  
Frameworks**



**PACIFIC MODELS IN HEALTH, EDUCATION, ...**

Whare tapawha (Dure, 1994)

**FONOFALE**

Tanoa

**Fonua Model**

**KAKALA**

**Fa'afaletui**

**PAHI ATU**

**POP AO MODEL**

**Vaka Atafaga**

**THE ART OF TIVAEVAE**

**Fofola e fala kae alea e kaininga**

- Talanoa – Open, respectful conversation.
- Teu le Va – Nurturing sacred relationships.
- Fonofale Model – Holistic approach: family, culture, spirituality.

**Impact:**  
These frameworks validate Pasifika identities and enhance engagement.





## IN CONCLUSION:

- Reframe education not as assimilation but as transformation.
  - Institutions must embed indigenous methodologies such as Pacific ways of knowing.
- Culturally responsive pedagogy benefits all learners.

Pathways in Place–GU — Pathways in Place





# Q & A

**“Rather than perpetuating disabling effects on students from diverse backgrounds, education should empower through inclusion and respect.”**

**Contact:**

**[iva.ponton@griffith.edu.au](mailto:iva.ponton@griffith.edu.au)**