



Cherie Chu-Fuluifaga

FLOURISHING
MENTORSHIP AS A
JOURNEY OF LEARNING
AND BECOMING

Stories of Connection from the People
and Classrooms of the Pacific Islands

Pacific Islander Studies

Collection Editors

MOEATA KEIL

PATRICK THOMSEN

LIVED PLACES
PUBLISHING



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For every learner who ever stood at the water's edge and wondered if the voyage was meant for them. It was. It always was.

Abstract

There is an old way of knowing the ocean. Not by conquering it, not by charting it into submission, but by reading the colour of the water, the pull of the current before a swell. Pacific navigators crossed thousands of miles of open sea using only their bodies as instruments. They felt the stars. They tasted the wind. They arrived. This book is about that kind of knowing, applied to the work of mentorship.

Vaka – the canoe – is the central metaphor that carries these pages. A vaka does not move through water alone. It requires hands on the paddle, bodies in balance, a shared sense of direction. Mentorship, I have come to believe, works in exactly this way. It is not one person lifting another. It is two people – or many – finding their rhythm together, reading the same horizon.

This book illuminates the beauty, intricacy, and transformative potential of relational learning through compelling Pacific mentorship experiences and stories. It examines how mentoring can foster confidence, resilience, and connections between individuals through anecdotes of achievement and adversity.

Every chapter illustrates how cultural knowledge, empathy, and reciprocity can create meaningful learning interactions by providing both *tauturu* (mentor) and *pīahi* (mentee) with thought-provoking ideas and useful applications. Flourishing mentorship encourages readers to view mentorship as more than just advice; rather, it is a mutual journey of learning, developing, and becoming

in which the *tauturu* and *pīahi* thrive together, whether in educational institutions, professional settings, or public areas.

Key words

Mentorship; mentoring; mentor; mentee; Pacific; identity; education; culture; relationships; *tauturu*; *pīahi*

Foreign words

Tauturu mentor / helper / support

Vaka canoe, vessel

pīahi mentee / learner

Aotearoa New Zealand

Moana ocean

va sacred relational space between people

Mana spiritual power, authority, prestige

Kato hand-woven basket (the “Kato Toolkit”)

Tahiti largest island of French Polynesia

Fanau family, to give birth

Teu le Va to nurture, tend and keep in order the relational space

Fenua land, homeland

Manaaki Pihipihinga to nurture, sustain and uplift

Arofa love, compassion

Tautira coastal town in Tahiti

Tiare Tahitian flower (e.g. tiare Tahiti)²

Te Tiriti o Waitangi The Treaty of Waitangi

Ola life

Teatea to be clear, transparent

Aupuru to treat with kindness

Putuputu to gather, to come together

Tiama freedom

Pasifika Pacific peoples

Ahima'a traditional Polynesian earth oven

kete woven basket

māuruuru thank you

Heipua Tahitian personal/place name



This book is a vessel of stories, relationships, wisdom, and collective journeys. This collective journey is carried across waters by the many mentors, companions, teachers, elders, colleagues, family, and friends who have helped shape my way of seeing, being, and becoming. Each person has offered something to this voyage: A word of wisdom, a steady hand, a challenge, a prayer, a story, a moment of belief, or a quiet act of care. Mentorship, for me, has never been a single relationship or a formal role. It has been a living practice of *tauturu* (mentor) – of guidance, support, encouragement, correction, and love. This book has been shaped by those who walked beside me, held space for me, opened doors, strengthened my confidence, and reminded me of who I am and who I am still becoming.

It is with gratitude, humility, and love that I acknowledge all who have been part of this voyage. Your presence lives in these pages.

To my dearest husband, Elia, you are my anchor and my steady wind. Your firm support, love, and belief in me have carried me

through every challenge and triumph. You have been my partner in every sense of the word, and I am endlessly grateful for the life we have built together.

To my daughter, Celia Heipua, you are my guiding star. Your light, curiosity, and joy remind me every day of the importance of nurturing the next generation. You inspire me to be better, to dream bigger, and to always lead with love.

To my friends, who have been my crew on this journey, thank you for your laughter, encouragement, and wisdom. You have been my safe harbour in times of uncertainty and my cheerleaders in moments of celebration.

To my dearest tauturu (mentors), especially my parents (Wing-Way Jimmy Chu and Germaine Johnston Chu) and Professor Joanna Kidman, your guidance and belief in me have been transformative. You have shown me what it means to lead with integrity, to teach with compassion, and to tauturu with purpose. Your influence is woven into every page of this book, and I am forever grateful for the lessons you have shared.

To those I have had the privilege of mentoring, thank you for trusting me to walk alongside you. You have taught me as much as I have taught you, and our shared journeys have been some of the most meaningful experiences of my life. Your courage, resilience, and brilliance inspire me every day.

To the communities I have been part of, thank you for your collective wisdom and for reminding me of the power of connection. You have shown me that leadership is not about standing alone but about standing together, and that the greatest strength comes from shared purpose and relationality.

Finally, to the ancestors who navigated the moana before us, thank you for the legacy of courage, resilience, and wisdom that guides us still. This book is a tribute to the vaka they built, the stars they followed, and the journeys they made possible.

This work is not mine alone – it is the result of the love, support, and guidance of so many. To all who have been part of this journey, māuruuru roa – thank you from the depths of my heart.

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Learning objectives

1. **Describe the key qualities of effective mentorship practices.**

Provide a detailed explanation of the essential qualities that contribute to successful mentorship. Consider aspects such as communication, empathy, active listening, goal setting, and adaptability. Discuss how these qualities create a supportive and empowering environment for pīahi to thrive.

2. **Analyse the strengths and challenges in mentorship approaches.**

Examine various mentorship approaches, identifying their strengths and potential limitations. Consider factors such as one-on-one mentorship, group mentorship, peer mentorship, or virtual mentorship. Discuss how these approaches can be effective in different contexts and highlight the challenges that may arise in their implementation.

3. **Reflect on the value of relationships within diverse communities.**

Explore the importance of building meaningful relationships in mentorship, particularly within diverse communities. Reflect on how understanding and respecting cultural, social, and individual differences can strengthen the mentorship relationship and contribute to mutual growth and learning.

4. **Critically analyse the perspectives of tauturu and pīahi in the mentorship relationship.**

Delve into the dynamics of the mentorship relationship by examining the viewpoints of both tauturu and pīahi. Consider how their expectations, experiences, and goals may align or differ, and analyse how these perspectives influence the success of the mentoring process.

5. **Reflect on the importance of culturally authentic mentorship strategies and their impact.**

Consider the significance of culturally authentic mentorship strategies that honour and integrate the cultural identities of both tauturu and pīahi. Reflect on how these strategies can foster trust, inclusivity, and a sense of belonging, ultimately enhancing the impact of the mentorship relationship.

On weaving: A note to the reader

This book does not stay in one voice. It moves between story and structure, between the personal and the conceptual, between a moment at a kitchen table and a framework that tries to name what happened there. That movement is not a lapse in discipline. It is the discipline.

Why this note exists

You will notice, early on, that the pages do not settle into a single register. One passage reads like a memoir. The next reads like a manual. The next reads like an essay, or a letter, or a list. If you are expecting a book that knows what kind of book it is, the shifts can feel uneven – even jarring, in places.

This page is here to name what is happening, and why. I would rather you have the explanation once, at the start, than wonder at every turn why the voice keeps changing.

What weaving is, in this book

I weave because what this book is about was never a single kind of thing. The ideas here did not arrive as a clean theory I then applied to my life. They arrived inside relationships, in particular rooms, in particular seasons of my own learning. They came wrapped in memory, in obligation, in the felt texture of being

mentored and being a mentor. To write about them honestly, I must keep that wrapping on.

So, the book moves between three registers. They are not sections I have chosen to organise the book into. They are the three strands the material is made of, and separating them would be a small violence to the thing itself.

- Narrative – the stories, the people, the moments. The felt sense of how work lives in a body, in a family, in a community.
- Theory – the structure, the names, the commitments. The language that lets the work travel between people and survives the journey.
- Practice – the moves, the questions, the instructions. The part a reader can pick up and try on Monday morning.

All three are doing real work. None of them is filler. If you read only one, you will miss what the other two are for.

Why narrative is not decoration

I have read too many books in this territory that arrive clean and leave no trace. The structure is elegant, the language is precise, the chapters are well-ordered – and six months later I cannot remember what any of it was for. This happens when a book is written in a register that pretends it came from nowhere. The reader is asked to receive a finished thing and has no entry point into their own life with it.

Narrative is the entry point. When I write a line about a moment at a kitchen table, or a teacher who saw me before they tried to shape me, I am not adding flavour. I am handing you a door. You can walk through it into your own memory of being seen,

of being held, of being asked to be smaller than you are – and from there into the question of what it would mean to do this work differently. Theory gives the structure. Practice gives the moves. Narrative gives you a place to stand while you learn the other two.

For readers, from traditions where knowledge has always travelled through story, through genealogy, through the relational telling of how something came to be known, this is not an invented convention. It is the register the work lives in. I am writing in the language the material speaks at home.

Why the other registers still matter

I do not think narrative is enough on its own. A reader cannot run a conversation, or run a programme, or run a meeting, on story alone. At some point they need to know what to do, in what order, with what questions. They need a structure they can teach to someone else. They need language they can use with a colleague when they are trying to describe what they are doing, and why.

Theory and practice give the ideas in this book durability. They let them be taught, repeated, tested, and improved. They let them leave my hands and become useful in someone else's. Narrative gives the ideas their aliveness – the part that makes a reader recognise themselves, keep reading, and remember the book a year after they closed it.

Together, the three registers let the work be both rigorous and warm. That is the only version of it I trust. A book that is only

rigorous will be respected and unused. A book that is only warm will be felt and forgotten. I would rather write a book that is both, and trust the reader to hold the tension.

What I am asking of you

I am asking you to read all three registers as the same book. When the tone shifts from a story to a list to a framework statement, the shift is not a break. It is the weave. If you skim for the practical instructions, you will miss the part that makes them land. If you read only for the personal voice, you will miss the part that lets you act. Read it the way it was written: In motion between.

Theory without life is brittle. Life without theory is shapeless. Weaving is the work.

A final note

If you are writing in this same territory – relational practice, identity-honouring work, frameworks that try to take both the thinking and the feeling seriously – and you find yourself apologising for the personal bits, or apologising for the structural bits, I want to say: Do not. The weave is not a failure of discipline. It is discipline. It is what it sounds like to take both life and the thinking seriously, in the same breath, on the same page.

Welcome to the book. Read it slowly. Read it in pieces. Read it twice. The weaving will hold you if you let it.

1

The voyage

This chapter introduces the traditional canoe, or vaka, as a central metaphor for understanding mentorship, leadership, and learning. More than a vessel, the vaka offers a grounded and meaningful image through which guidance, journey, connection, and shared direction can be understood. It suggests purposeful movement, learning through experience, and progress shaped not by one person alone, but through the relationships among those who travel together. In this way, the vaka provides a strong foundation for exploring mentorship as a dynamic and collective process, one shaped by support, attentiveness, and a shared sense of direction.

Before there were maps, there were voyagers.

They built their canoes from the trees they knew, lashed the hulls with fibre twisted by hand, read the night sky the way others read text. They did not wait for certainty before launching. They understood that the ocean would teach them what the shore could not.

I think about those voyagers often. I think about what it takes to trust that water. I think about the people who stood on the shore and watched, and the people who climbed into the canoe alongside you, and how the difference between those two groups is everything.

This book is about the people who climb in.

Mentorship, in the Pacific tradition I was raised within and have spent my adult life studying, is not a programme or a protocol. It is a vaka, and every person involved in it is both crew and cargo, both navigator and passenger, depending on the moment and the sea. There is no single captain. There is shared attention, shared labour, shared arrival.

This vaka metaphor is deeply personal. It is rooted in my Tahitian ancestry and in my connection to the moana that binds the islands of the Pacific. In Tahiti, the vaka is not an abstract symbol. It is part of everyday life seen in fishing, travel between islands, family outings, paddling, and competition. It is a living reminder that movement, skill, endurance, and cooperation are part of how people relate to one another and to the sea. The vaka carries cultural memory, practical knowledge, and shared responsibility. Because of this, it offers a powerful way of thinking about mentorship, not as an individual act of instruction, but as a shared journey shaped by trust, purpose, and relationship.

I use the Tahitian terms **tauturu** for mentor and **pīahi** for mentee as a deliberate way of disturbing the Eurocentric language often attached to mentoring relationships. Rather than relying only on the terms mentor and mentee, which can imply hierarchy, expertise, and one-directional guidance, tauturu and pīahi allow me to reframe the relationship through Pacific ideas of support, learning, care, reciprocity, and relational responsibility. This language helps centre a more culturally grounded understanding of mentorship as something lived, shared, and nurtured in the va.

I begin with the vaka because it is the truest way I know to describe mentorship. Mentorship is a shared voyage, where we travel together, learn from one another, and are shaped by the journey we undertake side by side. On the open ocean, no one paddles alone. The work moves in rhythm. One stroke answers another. The navigator reads the stars, but the whole crew keeps the canoe afloat. When the wind shifts, everyone leans together. This is how I have come to understand the relationship between a teacher and a learner, an elder and a young one, a guide and the person being guided. We are all in the canoe. We are all, in some way, helping it sail.

This book is an invitation to climb aboard.

Mentorship and relationships

Mentoring and/or mentorship is understood as more than the transfer of skills or the giving of advice. It is a relational practice shaped by trust, reciprocity, shared learning, and mutual responsibility. Knowledge is not simply delivered from one person to another. It is carried, interpreted, tested, and sustained through human connection. Being a mentor or tauturu involves walking alongside someone, listening well, offering guidance with care, and remaining open to learning in return. It is both personal and collective, supporting individual growth while also strengthening the bonds and values that hold communities together.

This understanding of the role of tauturu began for me long before I had language for it. It was present in the quiet guidance of my family elders, in shared stories around the table, and in the unspoken lessons of resilience, care, and responsibility that

shaped family life. Later, as I entered more formal mentoring roles, I came to see how powerful mentorship can be, not only in supporting individuals but also in strengthening communities. It became clear to me that mentorship is not simply a professional strategy. It is a way of being with others. It asks us to see the whole person, to honour their cultural identity, to recognise their strengths, and to support their growth with humility and respect. Through my Tahitian lens, mentorship is lived through relationships. It is shaped by values, obligations, presence, and the quiet work of showing up for others. It grows through sincerity, care, patience, and shared purpose. It is something felt as much as studied. In this sense, mentorship is not distant or abstract.

Reading the moana (Ocean)

As I write, I sit next to the waves against the black sands of Tautira in Tahiti, each one a steady breath against the shore. There, where the green mountains meet the wide turquoise Pacific, the world seems to settle into clarity. The pulse of the tide draws my thoughts outward across the water and back through the many currents that have shaped my understanding of leadership, learning, and connection. In that place, mentorship becomes clear to me. It is not a rigid framework or a fixed set of steps. It is a relational process, living and changing like the ocean itself. Mentorship resembles a voyage across the moana. It often begins with one person offering another a steady hand as they move into unfamiliar waters. Yet it is never only about one person leading and the other following. Like paddlers moving in rhythm across a lagoon, mentoring depends on attention, adjustment, and shared momentum. Each stroke matters. Each