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A large, stylized yellow graphic on a purple background. It consists of a thick, wavy yellow line that starts on the left, curves down, then up, then down again. A black railing with white vertical bars follows the path of the yellow line, appearing to be on top of it.

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Reading Bourdieu: Changing practice

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Bethlehem Tertiary Institute

Abstract

Amongst the complexities of Bourdieu's writing, the author found a challenging gem related to interviewing as a researcher. Here Bourdieu's focus on the underprivileged, the voiceless, was uncovered, leading to the author's questioning of past practice and a desire to emulate some of the tenets and approaches suggested by Bourdieu. This article charts personal growth, through intentional, informed reflection, from objective interviewer to one who co-constructs data with those being interviewed. This process led to extending Bourdieu's ideas about interviewing, to the use of talanoa as a research method when investigating the lived experience of several Tongan tertiary students studying at a small tertiary provider in New Zealand. The challenges of this more intimate, active and compassionate approach are outlined.

Keywords

Bourdieu, interviews, talanoa, practice, relationship.

Introduction

This article charts my personal growth as a researcher, ignited when reading about Bourdieu's approach to interviewing. As one who has long believed that true learning takes place in relationship I was challenged to apply this maxim beyond my teaching practice into my interviewing style, thereby adopting a more intimate, relational and holistic approach than previously. This allowed me to co-construct knowledge with research participants within a less formal conversation. To represent the nature of this change I have also adopted a less formal writing style in this article. I invite you to converse with me as I take you through my journey towards new (for me) ways of researching.

Reading Bourdieu

Bourdieu! I came across this name several times as I worked on my first two assignments for a paper about culture in education, recently completed as part of a Post Graduate Diploma in Education (Adult Education). His was a new name to me, but when I mentioned it to several colleagues their response



was “Ahhh! Bourdieu!” as though they knew some precious insights, both about him and his material (or maybe it was just that they liked the way his name tripped off their tongue!). This whetted my appetite and, as I embarked on my self-chosen topic for the third assignment in the same paper, I set out to uncover the thinking of this man.

A basic biographical search soon revealed the prestigious output of Bourdieu. The renown and reverence extended to him made me feel slightly daunted, but he was a rugby player so it couldn't be all bad! I began to read. Now I *was* daunted. I was greeted with very long sentences, some as long as seventeen lines (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 91)! I was greeted with Bourdieu's invented terminology, which though explained, was often impenetrable to me. I was greeted with references and examples mainly related to the French education system, of which I knew little. Finally, I was greeted with philosophical and sociological tenets and principles. Since I am neither an academic philosopher nor a qualified sociologist, I felt out of my depth. But I decided to persevere because I had seen glimpses of thought-provoking material. I knew the challenge would enrich my knowledge and my practice as an educator.

Over a period of several months I became faintly acquainted with such concepts as habitus, field, capital in all its various forms, classes, power struggles, agents, misrecognition, symbolic power, symbolic violence, learned ignorance, cultural arbitrary, self-abnegation and intrusion effect. I began to realise that I had used some of these terms without understanding their full implication, or conversely, understood the concepts without knowing Bourdieu's terminology. I saw how he used his ideas to explain events and relationships within society. I found myself agreeing with some of what he said, even at times experiencing an emotional response to his interpretation of how society functions, of the relations and spaces within a community or group. I saw that his ideas gave voice to some of my own earlier struggles as a member of a less-advantaged social class. His ideas also provided possible explanations for the inequity I still perceive in the opportunities afforded to various groups within New Zealand society.

However, it was the area of education that caused me the deepest pain as I read. As a former primary teacher and now a teacher educator, I was saddened to think that I might have been part of a system that disempowers people. Even though I might be endeavouring to welcome diversity, the very system I am a part of could well counteract those attempts (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Cicoual, 1993). I am blessed to be working as a senior teacher educator in a small private tertiary provider of teaching, counselling and social work degrees. This institution regularly examines its practices in these matters, but I am still aware, through observation and conversation, that we do not serve all students well. We have some way to go before we can be cleared of the accusation that we want students to change to fit our preconceived methods and standards rather than being willing to change our systems, methods and expectations in order to celebrate diversity of expression, learning style and interaction. In particular I think we could do more for Maori and Pasifika students, as well as those who are first in their family to enter tertiary study (Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, & McCune, 2008).

Western education is not the sole arbiter of knowledge, and western culture(s) are not the sole plumb line for acceptable behaviour. However as a palangi teacher I sometimes tend to fall back to the idea that I must remediate or compensate those who come from other worldviews or experiences. Singh (2010) cites examples of Chinese students (as a general group) studying in New Zealand, being criticised as lacking the capacity for critical thinking. Here 'learned ignorance' is at play, a behaviour which blocks knowledge that threatens one's worldview (p. 33). Bourdieu critiques such ethnocentric prejudices (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and notes that alleged incompetence can become an excuse for failing to teach appropriately.

Therefore, simply opening up more places to students from diverse backgrounds is not the answer to bringing equity of opportunity to all classes. Bourdieu claims this may in fact be counterproductive. Being destined by lack of cultural capital to almost certain failure, but still being placed in positions likely to raise their aspirations, only leads to disappointment. Then “the inexorably repeated

experience of failure prevents, or at least discourages, any reasonable hope for the future” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 185). Thus many classes are excluded from success through lack of cultural, economic and social capital. At every level they become “outcasts on the inside” (p. 425) because “curriculum, methods and ethics are derived, not from the general culture of the society, but from the culture of the dominant group in that society” (Harker & McConnochie, 1985, p. 141).

Bourdieu’s ideas fed discontent with my own practice. I am not sure that theories based on the French system can be totally uplifted to our New Zealand context, but following Bourdieu I agree that educational institutions are difficult to describe and think about because of the complex layers of perspectives. I can also see that, although the education system believes it has relative autonomy, there are beliefs, norms, practices and principles that dominant groups (such as government departments, business, economic groups and social classes) delegate to pedagogic authorities (such as universities and training institutions) within New Zealand.

Bourdieu calls these beliefs and values the cultural arbitrary. I found it difficult to locate a precise definition for this term, but I understand that “the inculcation of the favoured arbitrary incrementally replaces, or at least masks, the arbitrariness of that culture being promoted” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 37). The dominant culture projects its values and beliefs, using social structures and drawing on possession of, for example, economic, cultural, linguistic, symbolic and social capital. Power and privilege are conferred by the possession of such capital (Bourdieu, 1991), and thus it gives agents (individuals) a higher status in society.

The merit of this ‘capital’ is self-proclaimed and self-perpetuated. For example, the education system carries cultural power, which in turn influences the reproduction of the whole social system. The system contains principle institutions, which control allocation of status and privilege, and these institutions are often used to perpetrate social values (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 45). The values imposed by these institutions are often different to those inculcated by, say, family or ethnic group. This can result in a mismatch between the two and the consequent encouragement to abandon the original cultural arbitrary with its dispositions and values, so as to be included (and successful) in culturally recognised institutions.

Bourdieu goes further to claim that tertiary institutions guarantee social stability by controlled selection of a limited number of individuals as students. An educational institution is an “agency of selection, elimination ... concealment of elimination under selection” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 154). He argues pedagogies that tacitly select the privileged and exclude the underprepared are not regrettable lapses; they are systematic aspects of education systems serving class-divided societies. Bourdieu has repeatedly analysed how schooling reproduces class position despite ideologies of equal opportunity (Bourdieu, 1991, 1999; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, 1990).

Changing practice

I could expand further on the issues mentioned above but for now I want instead to explore with you a practical outworking of my exposure to these concepts. Over the past ten years the institution where I work has been developing partnership relationships with several mission school systems in Tonga. Members of the institution’s staff regularly visit Tonga to assist teachers’ professional development. Occasionally, people connected with the mission education systems have enrolled for courses of study at our institute here in New Zealand. For some time I have wanted to talk with Tongan on-site students about the nature of their lived experience at our institution. I recognise the importance of an environment that systematically and creatively provides students with the opportunity to engage with genuine learning experiences (Entwistle, 2010). I certainly want an environment that increases student agency, an environment in which learners may safely deal with cognitive dissonance, cultural challenge or anxiety (Cranton, 1992). However, reading Bourdieu made me aware that without careful

thought, the experience of studying in New Zealand could become an insurmountable challenge. Bourdieu suggests that, at the risk of feeling themselves out of place, “individuals who move into a new space must fulfil the conditions that that space tacitly requires of its occupants eg possession of certain cultural capital, economic capital, even social capital and symbolic capital” (1999, p. 128). If the students’ own cultural capital is not valued and if no attempt is made to acquaint them with the capital required within the institution, the individual will feel excluded from the field.

Literature related to Pasifika students within New Zealand tertiary institutions recognises this situation. While there is an expectation that institutions have a moral responsibility to ensure the quality of their learning environment (Benseman, Coxon, Anderson, & Anae, 2006), since “teaching practices are cultural relays of the distribution of power in society” (Fanene, 2007, p. 10), and since school organisation, curriculum and pedagogies are “culturally generate” (Nakkid, 2006, p. 300), there is often a marked cultural gap between “the expectations of the curriculum and those of the cultures in which students are socialised” (Thaman, 2002, cited in Kalavite, 2010, p. 7). Thus for Pasifika (and in this case Tongan) students, places of education can become *sites of struggle* (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 14). There is evidence within the literature of the documented low completion rates of Pasifika students. Their seeming inability to perform well at tertiary level in New Zealand (Bakelevu, 2011; Kaitani & McMurray, 2006; Kalavite, 2010) could be partially attributed to inadequate preparation at secondary school, but more so to cultural practices and traditional values (Fanene, 2007). Bourdieu highlights that each student’s actions or response to being in tertiary study is often not “the outcome of conscious calculation” but that “by virtue of the habitus, individuals are already predisposed to act in certain ways, pursue certain goals, avow certain tastes and so on” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 16). Their habitus informs their behaviour. Writers such as Jones (1999) suggest we may have to be comfortable with never really knowing and understanding another’s culture, and also accept that the Pasifika students may not really want to be known. I am not content to leave it there. I want to at least try to find out how much Tongan students quieten their own voice; firstly because of cultural protocols and secondly because of being in an unfamiliar academic environment. As an institution we need to use this privilege (having Tongan students) as an opportunity to celebrate and learn about cultural differences, to value and respect these differences, and to allow for the differences to contribute to the overall programme and the specifics within it (Rio & Stephenson, 2010).

I was eager to learn the perspective Tongan students have of the efforts for inclusion and support, and whether the systems our institution has instigated are indeed fulfilling what students would deem as helpful. I want to learn about the experience, but obviously cannot actually experience it myself. I am interested in what is the case, but also how the Tongan students perceive our practice (Brew, 2006) so that we can “transform the teaching and enhance the learning” (p. 114). I am willing to have my practice challenged, to examine my own and the institutional habitus, our ways of thinking, which can be “deeply enshrined in what we consider to be normal or natural in tertiary education” (p. 135).

I am aware of the need to capitalise on students’ cultural backgrounds, dispositions, strengths and values, rather than forcing a dominant culture onto them. I am aware of the need to change our institutional approaches rather than always expecting students to change to suit the institution. However, this type of change needs interchange between the various parties if it is not to be constrained by a Eurocentric interpretation of success or otherwise.

To this end, I embarked on a small research project, which involved interviewing three Tongan students, who had given informed consent to participating in the study. One student was from the counselling programme, one from early childhood and the third from the secondary teaching programme. Two of these students had come directly from Tonga to enter tertiary study. The third student experienced secondary schooling and an initial early childhood teaching qualification in New Zealand, had returned to Tonga to teach and raise a family, and was now back in New Zealand studying to upgrade her initial qualification. These students were approached to participate in the study, since they were the only Tongan students on campus who were not currently involved in any of

the courses allocated to me. The research question was ‘What is your lived experience as you study at tertiary level in New Zealand?’ and the chosen method of data gathering was the interview. It was here that Bourdieu’s work began to influence my decision-making.

Interviews

Interviews are “focused conversations” (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002, p. 72), a tool supposedly used to explore “what a person is thinking and feeling” (Bell & Nutt, 2002, p. 76). However, it seems to me that how well this aim is achieved depends on the skill and the stance of the interviewer. Interviews, as I had experienced them thus far, were embedded in the paradigmatic stance of objectivity and could be either structured or semi-structured. The first approach sees the interviewer entering into the conversation with predetermined questions related to the topic under investigation. Semi-structured interviews are similar; with a starting list of possible questions, but an openness to pursue points of interest should they arise. Both approaches require the interviewer to be a good listener. In fact, the interviewer is usually expected to “remain uninvolved in the discussion, to hold back opinions” (Bell & Nutt, 2002, p. 77). Both approaches seek to uncover the experience of the individual (or group in the case of a focus group) with the interviewer eliciting information through questions. Often the interviewees are unknown to the interviewer, at least outside of the research arena. My previous experience of research, in both my masters and doctoral theses, involved structured and semi-structured interviews as a data-gathering tool. The more objective approach of formal interviews allowed me to exercise a strong guiding hand in the content of the collected data. But in approaching this new project I was significantly informed by Bourdieu’s comments about interviewing. I located most of these ideas in his book *The Weight of the World* (1999), which I found to be the most accessible of his writings. Perhaps this was because it was the last book I read before beginning my essay and I had become accustomed to his writing style and his terminology. However I actually think it was because Bourdieu showed more of his heart in this volume, as I will explain further below.

I had previously been aware of the tensions within the interview scenario, but Bourdieu (1999) uses his notion of capital to explain the inequalities in interview settings. He seeks to reduce symbolic violence by employing active and methodical listening, thus presenting total availability to the person being interviewed. Bourdieu says that without extreme care, interviews become an act of intrusion, instead of a social relationship in which the interviewer honestly tries to grasp the mechanisms that affect the entire category to which the individual belongs. All kinds of distortions are embedded in the very structure of the research relationship (p. 608) and care needs to be taken to counteract or at least limit these distortions. To understand and master this, a researcher needs to be reflective, thoughtful, aware, careful, and not stuck in one method.

I knew much of this already, but reading Bourdieu added depth to my thinking. If seeking an answer to the specific research question is paramount in the interviewer’s mind, it is possible to attend only to those responses that appear to directly contribute to the research, thus maybe failing to uncover information which could be crucial. I knew that I had not always listened intently to participants’ experiences; rather I had sometimes been more focused on listening for responses affirming my study. Bourdieu’s reference to capital also highlights for me the need to understand the background circumstances and experiences of interviewees if I am truly to gain from the insights they share. A researcher needs both technique and compassion/understanding; in fact a researcher needs “intellectual love” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 614). This term captured my thinking and indeed my heart. I wanted to ponder, to explore this notion further.

Intellectual love

Bourdieu (1999) strongly advocates “active and methodical listening” (p. 609) which involves total availability to the person being questioned, and submission to their unique story. He claims that interviewing is a social relationship and that the attempt to make private worlds public involves “revealing confidential statements made in the context of a relationship built on trust” (p. 1). As I pondered these statements I realised the relative shallowness of my interview listening skills. I needed to develop attentiveness to others, to engage in ‘self-abnegation’. As Bourdieu explains, “the interview should be ... a sort of spiritual exercise that through forgetfulness of self, aims at a true conversion of the way we look at other people in the ordinary circumstances of life” (p. 614). I needed to let go of my own presumptions of where the interview might take us. I needed to more freely cross the boundary between the interviewee and myself and to immerse myself “in the world of another so as to learn and understand from the insider’s perspective” (Tolich & Davidson, 1999, p. 16).

These ideas are supported by Doucet and Mauthner (2002), who state that “building responsible knowledge involves maintaining relationships with research subjects” (p. 85). Bourdieu (1999) makes a point of seeking to match interviewers with interviewees known to them, or at least pairing people who had similar experiences, contexts, cultural beliefs etc., since he believes that social proximity and familiarity provide two of the conditions of non-violent communication. Familiarity also aids interpretation of nuances, body language etc., which in turn, helps interpret meaning (p. 610). Bourdieu drew my attention to the need to have a balance in these matters. While he alerted me to the notion of the “intrusion effect” (p. 610), where egocentric or inattentive questions misdirect the conversation, he also identified the danger of “assuming things and overlooking possible avenues of exploration if I know the interviewee too closely” (p. 612).

Active and methodical listening then requires that I have a welcoming disposition, where I am willing to make the participants’ problems my own; where I can rejoice when they rejoice and weep when they weep; where I seek to understand them just as they are. In doing this I am offering them a unique opportunity to bring their thoughts to the surface of their cognition, to speak out those thoughts, to articulate their dreams and their disappointments. I am offering a chance to be heard in a setting without interruption or unnecessary time constraints. The tone I adopt and the questions I ask can give the interviewees a sense that even though I am not in their situation, I am capable of understanding their situation. I am capable of “mentally putting myself in their place” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 613). I am listening to understand their individual experience. Such intellectual love is the result of “practice [that is] reflective and methodical without being the application of a method or the implementation of a theory” (p. 608). The end goal is to see and understand, not only material suffering, but also positional suffering, (or ordinary suffering), which can be just as debilitating, yet something we often fail to notice within our field or microcosm. Bourdieu notes “how painfully the social world may be experienced by people who ... occupy an inferior obscure position in a prestigious and privileged universe” (1999, p. 4). He feels that often those in power operate and make decisions based on phantasms as opposed to reality. I, like Bourdieu, see value in focusing on the ordinary circumstances of life.

Talanoa as active listening

How could these principles be practised in my interviews with the Tongan students? Research within Pasifika contexts is often accompanied by the general claim that such analysis is Eurocentric, with little racial or ethnic awareness, operating from negative assumptions, based on a deficit model and providing little opportunity to be heard and validated (Vaiotei, 2006). In addition, interview data is often presented devoid of the individual’s context, personhood, and connections, all of which hold

significance within Pasifika communities (McDowell, 2004). Obviously the outcomes of such research have not been owned by those being researched. In fact many Pasifika people are now very wary of formal western research (Burnett, 2012).

Oratory and verbal negotiation have deep traditional roots, so talanoa is the preferred means of communication across the Pacific (Otsuka, 2005; Prescott, 2008). Talanoa involves face-to-face verbal encounters where people “story their issues, their realities and aspirations” (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 21). The purpose of talanoa is to convey knowledge, stories, views and feelings in both a personal and formal sense and, through discussion, to come to common understandings and to enhance relationships (Prescott, 2008). Many research methods do not require a personal relationship between researcher and participant, but in talanoa the relationship thread is central, in keeping with Bourdieu’s views. There is no separation between researcher and participant. Such trust and co-operation facilitates a free flow of information (Vidovich, 2003). Both contribute to the discussion and the researcher cannot take a distant or neutral position. Instead talanoa is a vehicle that allows for the concept of ‘va’, that is, a space of respect in relationships between people, and where participants consider the wider community view not just their own opinion (Prescott, 2008, p. 135). The unspoken expectation of talanoa is that new knowledge gained will be used for the betterment of the community, not the individual. Again this is a concept that resonates with Bourdieu.

When considering together the need for rapport as the researcher, and knowledge of culture, I wondered if a palangi such as myself could participate in talanoa, and further, use talanoa as a research method. I was heartened to read comments that suggested it could indeed be a relevant and accessible strategy for me to use (Taufe’ulungaki, 2001), as I sought to both understand the experience of Tongans in my professional context and inquire into my own abilities to employ Bourdieu’s instructions to truly listen to participants in the research. The researcher needs context and cultural understanding to be sure of the meaning of what is shared in talanoa. Over the years of my visits to Tonga I have developed a growing understanding of foundational concepts and customs. In addition we have shared our home with Tongan visitors, one for a year. Knowing the culture provides some common ground between me as researcher and the students I invite to talanoa with me (Prescott, 2008). Furthermore, in any talanoa situation there is a range of knowledge represented, from expert to novice, even uninitiated, so my presence is not inappropriate (Liuaki Fusitia, personal communication, 27 April 2012).

In Tonga a person is defined by relationships, social status and position. When the researcher is personally known, content is more open and frank (Vaioleti, 2006). I know the Tongan students, relate to them regularly on campus, but I have also met with them in Tonga and know their parents and their educational leaders. In some cases I have been in their homes, worshipped with them in church, celebrated weddings and grieved with them. I believed they understood who I am and would therefore accept my invitation to talanoa (Prescott, 2008). I still needed to keep in mind, however, that negative critique of people in positions of authority is not seen as acceptable in Pasifika culture (Fanene, 2007). In addition I needed to remember that in any setting there will be a hierarchy, with no two people being at the same level (Kalavite, 2010).

Changed practice

Doing research with people is a privilege (Gilling, 2000, p. 15). My desire to demonstrate this level of commitment to the interviewing task led me to consider seriously the instructions offered by Tolich and Davidson. “Reflexive research reflects upon and questions its own assumptions. Researchers must self-consciously reflect upon what they did, why they did it and how they did it. The values of the researcher become an explicit part of the research process” (1999, p. 39). Bourdieu spoke about this process as “an induced and accompanied self analysis” (1999, p. 615). I wanted to improve my interview skills, to be a genuine listener. Therefore I needed to reflect on my experiences within the

talanoa scenario. In order to chart any progress in applying Bourdieu's interviewing principles I decided to keep a reflective journal, making entries after each talanoa, evaluating how effectively I listened, how I participated in the discussion, my ability to guide the discussion towards shared understanding, and my effort to practise intellectual love. This journal then informed the observations of my practice made throughout this article. Since I was concerned about my ability to truly monitor myself, I also sought feedback from the participants after each talanoa.

The first stage of data gathering involved individual talanoa with each participant. I entered the talanoa being aware of the influence Tongan social hierarchy may have on an individual's responses and felt it might be easier for each to be honest with me about their experiences if we first talked individually. I reminded each one of the importance of being frank and open, that in this context it was appropriate and acceptable to critique the performance of the institution and the lecturers. I had often interacted with each participant before the talanoa so conversation was easy. In individual talanoa, I simply posed my research question and left the discussion open. I found it easy to listen fully and to participate in the discussion. With the first participant, I noted that on the whole I allowed wait time, but there were several instances where I did not do so, in fact interrupting the participant's flow of ideas. For example, I interrupted his sharing about what he struggled with by asking him why he struggled. Thus I missed the opportunity in that instance to hear more of his perspective, and hurried the discussion, an example of intrusion effect. At another point in the conversation I interrupted again and completely changed the topic. I was not aware of doing so at the time. It was only as I studied the transcript that I noted this. I had wondered if the participant, in the course of the dialogue, might pose me a question or two, but he did not. This was not a surprise since, as he said, students in Tonga "are not encouraged to ask questions".

In the second individual talanoa, I exercised more restraint during wait times in the conversation. However, I saw that I wanted to teach or mentor as issues arose. For example, the participant spoke of having difficulty putting a paragraph together and I gave a mini lesson to guide her future practice! The student however seemed to accept this as a natural part of the talanoa. Later in the conversation she spoke about how much she has learned while at this institution, and how different it is to what happens in Tonga. "For me to come here and have this knowledge and see the differences, it makes me want to tell them it's no good. But that's not for me to tell them." I responded by saying, "Maybe you can show them, demonstrate". These were both examples of the talanoa as a tool to arrive at joint understanding. The final talanoa was with the senior member of the participant group. The transcript revealed the occasional interruption still occurred, but there was an increasing willingness to let digressions occur, as is fitting in the talanoa. I was more comfortable with letting the discussion moderate the direction of the conversation, rather than keeping a rein on it myself.

Bourdieu's interviews, as recorded in his book (Bourdieu, 1999), were always one-on-one, but this approach is not in keeping with Tongan culture where the group is more important than individual (Kalavite, 2010). A group talanoa also gave an opportunity to check on which ideas shared in individual talanoa had a consensus. The group talanoa began with a feast prepared by one of the participants, followed by prayer. In both forms of talanoa the discussion was taped since to take notes would interfere with the flow of the discussion and be distracting to the participants. To counteract the hierarchy, the group agreed that within the context of this particular talanoa it was acceptable to critique their experiences honestly, in the interest of future students on campus. One participant extended that influence by suggesting his Tongan education system would benefit from the outcome of the talanoa, as a tool to prepare students before moving to New Zealand for tertiary study purposes.

In the group talanoa, I used small cue cards placed together on the table to guide our discussion but in whatever order the participants followed and always allowing for other topics to be explored. Participating in the group talanoa was an interesting, challenging and fascinating adventure. Interesting because of the new information and insights I gained, challenging because I was trying so earnestly to improve my listening skills and guard against intrusion effect, and fascinating to see how

the talanoa worked and how the participants cooperated to generate shared understanding of the topic being discussed. From time to time we did venture into ‘tangent’ topics, but I found the participants very willing to be guided back onto the main topic.

The way the participants interacted in the group talanoa was great fun. There was so much laughter, and affirmation of each other ... “so true” ... “like what I’m listening to” ... “I absolutely love what you say” ... “very interesting” ... “blown away by all this” ... “totally agree” ... “way to go” ... “well said”. There was also challenge or legitimation of one another’s stories. In addition there was affirmation of my knowledge of Tongan culture and Tongan tertiary students, with such statements as “you are so right” ... “that’s an interesting observation” ... “I really like that question”. When the group talanoa went for two hours I apologised profusely. My palangi-self initially felt constrained by the fact I had said we would speak together for an hour, and was conscious of not wanting to take too much of their time, but their response was a hearty, “That’s okay! We love it”. So we continued to talk together for a further thirty minutes. I gained a fascinating insight into the protocol of talanoa from one student. Even though he had known for two weeks about the topic of our conversation, and had greeted my invitation to participate with the response, “My heart is burning within me to do this thing”, his introductory comment at the group talanoa was “I cannot really straight away ... say, give you in details but I think as we talk things will come up. That’s how I think about it right now”. The literature I read about talanoa had suggested this was the approach since “when to speak and what to say depends on what the other has to say” (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 26), and now I witnessed it first-hand!

Finding the reciprocal balance in the talanoa was a challenge. There had been safety in the more traditional structured interview, entering into the discussion with pre-selected questions and faithfully containing the conversation within the designated timeframe. The freedom of exchange in the talanoa required courage, self-discipline and indeed submission to the participants’ stories, as suggested by Bourdieu (1999). I am very aware that the Tongan protocols surrounding discussion, decision-making, rank and relationships may have influenced the information these people shared with me. However, I feel the nature of our relationship, built up over a number of years, allowed them to share freely and honestly.

As I carefully analysed the transcripts for my role within the discussions, I noted that many times I exercised wait time. There were a number of long pauses as participants gathered their thoughts and usually I was patient. However, there was one instance where I didn’t allow wait time, and in fact changed the subject as mentioned earlier. There are also a few instances where I interrupted the speaker, perhaps to ask a question, or to encourage the speaker. Additionally, there were a few times when I showed a degree of impatience, such as rephrasing the question or giving some examples to get the discussion going. I entered the conversation from time to time, as is appropriate in a talanoa. I noticed that I sometimes tried to put a positive spin on a negative cultural/traditional way of behaving, almost as if I wanted to save them from feeling embarrassed about that particular part of their culture. When one participant talked about the attraction of life in New Zealand and the new values Tongan students gain especially related to materialism, media etc., I quickly responded by saying that I see things in Tonga that I really value.

Each talanoa allowed the participants to be heard, which they said they appreciated. One student declared it was the first time she had ever been asked about her experiences as a Tongan learner in a New Zealand context, even though she has been in New Zealand for quite some time. “This is the first time I’ve actually shared something like this. I am aware of the things you are talking to me about, and how it has affected me as a student and I was never able to share that information with anybody”. I grieved, because of the sense that she had been silenced, but also because the institution where I work had not previously sought this information in a concerted, intentional way. The other two participants also voiced their thanks for this unique opportunity. They appreciated the chance to consider and articulate thoughts and experiences which had not been voiced before. They grew in understanding of themselves and their responses to studying within a New Zealand context. I realise that whatever data

gathering method I used would still have been a unique first-time opportunity for the students to voice their lived experience. However, it seemed fitting that this should occur within a talanoa context and gave me a more authentic setting in which to practise intellectual love.

I think that I progressed some way towards the goals I had set (after reading Bourdieu) of active and methodical listening, as I rejoiced and wept with the participants. I sensed they felt that I understood their situation, and I had offered them a unique opportunity to express their lived experience. When I asked directly for comment on my listening skills, one participant said, “Really good, like when you listen it makes me talk”, and another replied, “You asked the questions and then you listened then you kind of got me to reflect, and even if I didn’t actually answer the question directly you would take me back ... I loved it ... you’re a good listener”. They trusted me with their heartfelt experiences (Bourdieu, 1999), even to the point of one participant sharing in the individual talanoa a very personal traumatic event, not even shared with her parents. I felt very honoured. I cried again! The senior participant summed up my leading of the group talanoa by saying, “I see you as a light that shines. You are unique ... almost like you are at a point where you are empathetic but you also know a way around a Tongan heart”. Through the relational support of the talanoa I was able to help the participants interrogate their experience and together we were able to identify what was truly significant (Mason, 2002). Mason warned that “what we notice is what we are prepared to notice” (p. 153), so again the group talanoa was helpful in checking what I noticed in the individual talanoa and my interpretation of the data gained. The talanoa provided a context in which I could draw on, augment and celebrate existing relationships, and continue to build trust. The structure encouraged me to engage in active, intent (and intentional) listening. I was able in the main to immerse myself in the story, forgetting myself and instead making myself available to the participants as they shared their contribution. I was able to more clearly grasp the mechanisms; understand the systems of which they are a part; their background circumstances and experiences. I listened to understand individual experiences and contributed to a shared understanding of the issues. I believe I used both technique and compassion. There was much laughter and some tears shed in the process of reaching mutual understanding of the relevant issues. The new understandings gained will be used for the benefit of other Pasifika students in my learning context, and hopefully beyond.

Conclusion

Talanoa is a phenomenological approach which is ecological, oral and interactive (Vaioliti, 2006, p. 21). Its focus on relationships made it an appropriate research method for my topic and gave me the opportunity to achieve two goals in one exercise. I wanted to make a difference in some way to Tongan students’ experience but also to grow my interviewing skills (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002) informed by Bourdieu’s ideas. I heard the stories of our Tongan students’ educational journey with us, while developing my competence as a thoughtful, immersed, committed and methodical listener/communicator through practising a co-constructed approach. Conducting this research project within the parameters of Bourdieu’s guidance has shown me “the value of simply talking and listening with spirit, to stay present in conversation, and experience the other through empowered and heart-centred relationships” (Lambert, 2011, p. x). I have tried to see the insiders’ perspective (Tolich & Davidson, 1999).

The purpose of this article is to convey my growth in the ability to exercise intellectual love when interviewing. The outcome of the research project is the subject for another presentation in another context, but I am glad I decided to continue to pursue Bourdieu’s contributions, and thus have this opportunity to widen my practice as a researcher. I am still only on the outer fringes of his ideas, but I certainly have a foundation on which to build more interviewing skills and have been given glimpses of thought-provoking concepts. I have built on his interviewing ideas, allowing me to extend into the researching context, a truer representation of the relational person I desire to be. Some aspects of

Bourdieu's work are still an enigma to me. He strongly criticises people who are dogmatic yet states his theories emphatically. He criticises highbrow language as a dominator, yet uses self-initiated jargon, lengthy sentences and complex constructions. However, his heart for humankind, and particularly those oppressed and suffering, pervades his writing and his advice about interviews has enriched my practice. At the end of his career, Bourdieu talked of still tackling the problems he first encountered years previously. This could be discouraging to readers who themselves might hope to influence change in society, but I choose to find it encouraging—that he should persevere with those tenets to which he had committed himself. In this I think he provides an example to follow.

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