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Going back and researching in the Pacific community

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Abstract

The move to focus on Pacific indigenous research methodologies and methods is a complex yet ongoing experience for researchers of Pacific heritage. The relational positionalities of Pacific researchers allow a move away from a dual or binary perspective of one's research responsibilities to a more fluid understanding of what it means to do research by, for, with Pacific communities. This paper highlights the diverse experiences of three Pacific researchers taking into consideration heritage connections, socio-cultural backgrounds and research contexts. We utilise talanoa as a method of engagement, reflexivity, and sharing of our experiences with Tongan, Samoan and Fijian communities. We argue that talanoa as a Pacific research method enables the diverse layers of experiences that take into particular consideration our connections to land, people and knowledges in the diaspora.

Keywords

Pacific research methodology; talanoa; diaspora; positionality.

Introduction

The move to focus on Pacific indigenous research methodologies and methods is a complex yet ongoing experience for researchers of Pacific heritage. The complexities for such researchers are related not only to the navigation of research contexts and relational spaces marked by the colonisation era (Fa'avae, 2018) but also to the internal becoming as a 'Pacific' researcher conscious of a decolonial intent (Tecun et al., 2018) in the process of working out their positionality in relation to the research context (Fasavalu & Reynolds, 2019). Engaging with talanoa research as both research methodology and method offers early career researchers the opportunity to find their place within a growing body of research by, for, with Pacific peoples (Sanga, 2016) that is culturally democratic (Thaman, 2014) and takes into particular consideration our connections to land, people and knowledge in the diaspora.

In recognition of the naming debate of research for, by and with Pacific people or the people of the Oceania region (Cobb, et al., 2019; Teaiwa, 2017) as variously 'Pacific' research (Sanga, 2004, 2016), 'Moana' research (Ferris-Leary, 2013), or Pacific indigenous research, we choose to refer to Pacific research as research that is undertaken by, for, or with people of Pacific or Oceania heritage.

The idea of relational positionalities is one that positions and relates the researcher within the research context and communities associated (Fasavalu & Reynolds, 2019). It calls to question our

diverse identities, and connections to land, people, and spaces in the diaspora. In this paper, our collective talanoa brings together the diverse positionalities of three early career researchers. Elisapesi, a Tongan woman born, raised and educated in Tonga, engaged in higher learning and research at the University of Waikato in Aotearoa New Zealand. Tepora is Samoan by birth and heritage and sees herself on a journey of self-discovery and way-finding while immersed in postgraduate research. Alvin identifies himself as a Fijian Indian man who has strong connections to the land in which his forefathers have worked for generations and which he calls home. In this paper, we share our experiences with using talanoa as a research methodology and research method in our research with our Pacific communities. The paper begins with a review of the literature on Pacific research methodology/ies including talanoa and vanua, then outlines each of our methodological approaches before focusing on our findings and reflections on the efficacy of talanoa for our research projects. We then conclude by highlighting the importance of using talanoa as a cultural relevant research method when researching by, for, with the Pacific community.

Literature review

A brief overview of Pacific research

Sanga (2004) theorised that the ontology of indigenous Pacific research is subjective, contextual, experiential, accepting of spiritual and cultural beliefs, spatially and chronologically situated and, above all, changing and accepting of other realities. In the same paper, Sanga (2004) also submitted that indigenous Pacific epistemology is situated in the lived realities of Pacific peoples and that ways of knowing reality includes metaphorical constructs drawn from and relevant to the Pacific peoples' everyday lives. Sanga's (2004) description of indigenous Pacific research as focused on contextual descriptions and insider perspectives suggests that Pacific research theory is predominantly interpretivist (Tualaulelei & McFall-McCaffery, 2019).

A recent summary of documented Pacific research by Tualaulelei and McFall-McCaffery (2019) shows that the body of research literature drawing on Pacific ontology and epistemology has increased in recent years. Research methods and methodological frameworks based on indigenous Pacific ways of knowing range from 'Kakala' (Thaman, 1993b), Kaupapa Māori (Smith, 1999), 'Talanoa' (Vaioleti, 2006, 2011), and 'Vanua' (Nabobo-Baba, 2008) including those with a distinctly Samoan origin such as 'Faafaletui' (Tamasese et al., 2005), 'Tofa'aanolasi' (Galuvao, 2018), 'Teu le Va' (Anae, 2010, 2016), and 'Ula' (Sauni, 2011) among others.

One of the commonalities in the Pacific research literature mentioned above is the use of metaphor to conceptualise the research process and research tools. For instance, 'Faafaletui' research (Tamasese et al., 2005) draws on the metaphors of weaving and house, 'Kakala' (Thaman, 1993b) draws on the metaphor of flower garlands (preparation and giving away), and 'Ola' (Mcdonald & Tufue-Dolgoy, 2013) uses the metaphor of a woven basket. Such metaphors might seem simplistic out of their cultural context, but within the cultural, social and intellectual context in which they were constructed, such metaphors have powerful meanings and applicability beyond their physical depictions.

The importance of relationality and negotiation of the relational space, the va, between researcher and research participants has also been underscored as an integral aspect of Pacific research methodology (Anae, 2010, 2016; Fa'avae, 2018; Muliaina, 2018). Research that involves interaction with Pacific participants must be cognisant of the 'charged' relational space between researcher and research participant, where the researcher has the responsibility "to value, cherish, nurture and take care of the 'va', the relationship" (Anae, 2010, p. 2). The presence of the participant is valued not just for the insight and data contributed to the research, but is also intentionally valued as an individual, as a contributor to the research process.

Education research in Aotearoa

The emergence and expansion of a discrete academic discourse called Indigenous knowledge internationally, and mātauranga Māori in Aotearoa, presents some wonderful and substantive challenges to conceptions of knowing and being, of knowledge creation, knowledge work and the making of meaning (Smith et al., 2016). Mātauranga refers to Māori knowledge, and all that underpins, as well as Māori ways of knowing (Broughton & McBreen, 2015). For Māori, Mātauranga is in their stories, their environments, their kawa and their tikanga (Broughton & McBreen, 2015). According to Waitangi Tribunal (2011, p. 22), Mātauranga includes "language, whakapapa, technology, systems of property and value exchange, forms of expression, and much more". Mātauranga has expanded in response to exploring, theorising and understanding at local whānau, hapū and iwi level. It emphasises relationship-based learning using whānau and hapū understandings in our own environments. Western epistemology is the key to Western culture, to living and developing as a Western nation. Likewise, mātauranga is the key to Māori living and developing as Māori (Broughton & McBreen, 2015). "Through learning te reo me ōna mātauranga, we retain values and ways of life central to our identity and existence. In doing so, we create our world and assure our survival as a people" (Rāwiri, 2012, p. 1). Broughton and McBreen (2015) highlight the importance of relationships between whānau, hapū and iwi and their environments to be restored in order for the mātauranga to flourish and thrive.

There are scholars who have emerged in diverse academic fields and disciplines, including history, health, education, theology, women's studies and environmental studies, who contributed to the debates on Indigenous knowledge Mātauranga and who have developed approaches to research within their field of study (Smith et al., 2016). The call to decolonise research methodologies and the broader institution of research, as well as the design of Māori and indigenous research methodologies such as Kaupapa Māori research (Smith et al., 2016). Māori scholar Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith introduced the Kaupapa Māori research: "Kaupapa Māori research is researched by Māori, for Māori and with Māori" (Smith, 2018, p. 47). In the 1990s, Kaupapa Māori research began to be applied as a methodology for Māori researchers working with Māori communities in research. The Kaupapa Māori approach was generated by reconnecting Māori knowledge traditions with contemporary research approaches and by reminding ourselves that our ancient knowledge systems helped our ancestors navigate the Pacific, build ocean-going waka, develop technologies and meet environmental challenges (Smith et al., 2016).

Talanoa methodology

In the Pacific context, in order for researchers to gain acceptance into the intellectual and spiritual inside of a community, such as an extended family or a church community, researchers must follow the structures of appropriate research method and methodology and have the competency to engage participants authentically and respectfully. Nabobo-Baba (2008) claims that Pacific researchers need to use culturally appropriate framings and methodologies when researching with Pacific participants. Talanoa is defined by Vaioleti (2006) as a "… conversation, a talk, an exchange of ideas or thinking, whether formal or informal" (p. 23). The talanoa research methodology shares commonalities with phenomenology, where meaning is co-constructed. Phenomenology fits within an interpretive paradigm aiming at understanding the meaning of phenomena and how they fit within a social, cultural and political context. The talanoa research methodology shares a commonality with the interpretive and flexible nature of phenomenology, blending it with cultural protocol and practices to obtain the most valid data of phenomena (Vaioleti, 2011). Talanoa is arguably one of the most prominent research methodologies utilised in the Pacific (Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2012). It provides a platform where researchers and participants engage in a "social conversation which may lead to critical discussions, knowledge creation or co-constructed stories" (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 24). Nabobo-Baba (2008, p. 143) contends that Pacific researchers need to use culturally appropriate framings and methodologies that recognise "Pacific world views, cultural knowledge and epistemologies".

Talanoa method

Within talanoa, there are several methods for data collection such as talatalanoa (preparatory exchanges), talanoa faikava (focus groups), talanoa faka'eke'eke (interviewing), tālanga (interactive dialogue) (Vaioleti, 2011, 2013). In Tongan, talatala can mean consultative (Vaioleti, 2016) and noa means in this context flexible, or talking without the influence of predetermined agenda (Halapua, 2003; Vaioleti, 2006). Therefore, talatalanoa can be defined as a consultative talk with a view to uncover something (Vaioleti, 2016). Talatalanoa involves speaking and listening. While a participant or the researcher is doing the talatala (talk), the other participant/s are expected to be silent (noa), listening attentively. As trust is vital for a good talanoa, talatalanoa is crucial to building trust, harmonious relationship and respect among participants. Paea (2015) translates talatalanoa as a process of "maintaining warm relationships based on the good spirit of freely committing to one another's needs" (p. 56), through talanoa. Talatalanoa is normally carried out with positive spirit (Vaioleti, 2016).

Tālanga is a type of talanoa that involves a friendly discussion (Churchward, 1959). It is a "dialogical process that involves both the acts of speaking and listening, and they must always go together" (Vaka'uta, 2009, p. 129). Tālanga is interactive and purposeful (Ofanoa et al, 2015); it is an open-ended conversation which navigates numerous perspectives, options, solutions and/or meaning (Vaka'uta 2009).

Vanua

Nabobo-Baba (2008) asserts that a researcher needs to use culturally appropriate framings and methodologies that recognise Fijian world views, cultural knowledge and epistemologies when doing Vanua research. The Vanua approach recognises the Fijian people as holders of the knowledge and therefore treated them as knowers and participants of research. Nabobo-Baba (2008) states the eight steps in Vanua research as follows:

1. Conception – Includes the consideration all people that are needed in the research are identified, and appropriate gifts, plans, schedules and timelines are mapped out.
2. Relationship – Researchers bear in mind that in the community people and personal relationships are very important. Part of good preparation will be to appreciate that such relationships exist and may either deter or support research processes.
3. Sevusevu – Fijian customary process of a i sevusevu (the presentation of yaqona 'piper methystica) is a norm for requesting entry alternative into a vanua (home, village, community).
4. Na talanoa – The appropriate method or tool for collecting information is through talanoa.
5. Reporting or writing is guided by vanua values and protocols of knowledge.
6. Reciprocal relationship – Even after the research the researcher will have a bond with the Fijian people.
7. Thank you – It is important the researcher thanks the people who have looked after you or given something of value to you.
8. Giving back to the people and the land – If possible, the research needs to inform practice and the lives of people, especially the researched community.

Nabobo-Baba (2008) further states these eight steps can be used with other methodologies (multiple methodologies) to address appropriately their research questions and their realities, as has been suggested in the case of Kaupapa Mäori Research.

Methodology

This section outlines the different methodological approaches that each researcher used in conducting research in their community.

Talanoa methodology

'Elisapesi used talanoa methodology in her research in order to gain acceptance into the intellectual and spiritual inside of the community in Tonga, such as an extended family, a school community, or a church community. It is crucial for researchers in the Pacific context to follow the structures of appropriate research methodology and have the competency to engage participants authentically and respectfully. Nabobo-Baba (2008) claims that Pacific researchers need to use culturally appropriate framings and methodologies when researching with Pacific participants.

Critical realism

Tepora adopted a critical realism lens towards her talanoa research in order to examine the underlying narrative structures that influenced the agency of research participants within the context of higher education quality assurance policy development and enactment in Samoa. Underlying influences refer to discursive or narrative structures and systemic or relational social structures (Scott, 2010) influencing individual actions and social events (Danermark et al, 2002) such as educational policy frameworks (Tikly, 2015) and human behaviour in general (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). Critical realists accept there is an empirical reality described as 'intransitive', but also accept that our knowledge of that reality is relative (Archer et al., 1998, p. x), constructed (Walsh & Evans, 2014, p. e3), or construed (Easton, 2010).

The proposed blending of critical realism and a Pacific research paradigm in Tepora's research project is not a seamless fusion. On the one hand, critical realism asserts that reality has both a transitive and intransitive dimension (Bhaskar, 2008), that "it must be acknowledged that reality is what it is and continues to be so independently of the transitive theories or knowledge we may have of it" (Lopez, 2003, p. 76). On the other hand, the ontology of Pacific research assumes that "the social world and hence the phenomenon under investigation is intangible, soft and internal to people's cognition" (Sanga, 2004, p.44). As noted by Tualaulelei and McCaffery (2019), Pacific research approaches seem to be predominantly interpretive and use Pacific linguistic nomenclature and metaphors from everyday life in the Pacific. It would seem the ontological premise of critical realism and Pacific research are at odds.

However, Tepora sees the utility of critical realism in that it allows exploration of why individuals and groups make the decisions that they do, to what extent they act in alignment with their own internal beliefs and suggest why this may sometimes not be possible, as well as examine the external influences on such decision making within the realm of educational policy in the Samoan context.

Interpretivism

The theoretical framework that underpins Alvin's study is interpretivism and constructivism. According to Dickson et al. (2016), the mother of constructivism is the interpretivism paradigm of philosophy. They further state that this "paradigm as an approach asserts that people construct their understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences" (p. 2). A similar sentiment is echoed by Ponelis (2015) that the interpretive research paradigm is categorised by a need to understand the real world as it is from a subjective point of view and pursues an explanation within the context of the participant rather than merely the objective observer of the action. The term ontology refers to the nature of reality and epistemology is concerned with the theory of knowledge regarding its methods, validation and possible ways of gaining knowledge of social reality (De Kock, 2015). The interpretivist ontology states that reality is multiple, created and dependant on us in our interpretation. The epistemological position is that knowledge is constructed and subjective. Interpretivism recognises personal narratives are neither true nor false, but a representation of realities conserved with subjectivities and lived experiences of participants (Makombe, 2017). The constructivist/interpretivist researcher can use a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods when carrying out research (Giddings & Grant, 2006; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). As this study

seeks to find out the perceptions of Fijian students studying science in the constructivist learning environment, a talanoa and CLES will be used to gather data from the participants.

Findings: How we have used talanoa in our research

'Elisapesi Havea

In my research, the two types of talanoa that I used for my data collection were talatalanoa and tālanga. Talatalanoa and tālanga were both employed during the 'talanoa fakataautaha' (one-one-one talanoa) and 'talanoa fakatokolahi' (group talanoa). However, the time of their application during the talanoa varied due to the nature of each method. Talatalanoa was always conducted at the beginning of the talanoa so that I could lay a foundation for tālanga at a later stage. Since talatalanoa is done calmly and with a positive spirit, using simple language, it brought clarity leading to maintenance of respect and humility within. My participants involved high school students, and using talatalanoa would be effective in establishing relationship as well as

At the beginning of the talatalanoa, I did a lea fakafe'iloaki (salutation) to welcome and to acknowledge my kaungā fa'u (participants) for their willingness to take part in my research. Instead of going straight to discuss the researched issues, we started by talking about how they were doing in terms of work and also with family. My research involved high school students, and talatalanoa acted as an ice-breaker. We started by talking about their hobbies and I asked them to share about what they wanted to be in the future. It gave them an opportunity to feel more comfortable and be able to be familiar with me as a researcher. For me, it was crucial to build trust and respect between myself and my kaungā fa'u in the entire research relationship. Talatalanoa then has a vital role in ensuring that harmonious relationships were maintained and all exchanges are open and came from the participants' hearts. Talatalanoa allowed the participants to talk from their heart and to express their emotions towards the subjects being discussed. The application of talatalanoa provided a platform for the researcher and the participants to share information that was helpful to answering my research questions. Starting off the talanoa fakataautaha and talanoa fakatokolahi with talatalanoa helped me to lay a foundation for tālanga which is discussed next.

In my research, tālanga was referred to as an interactive dialogue which involves discussions, exploring meanings, views and perspectives, options, and solutions about/for the issue researched. The credibility of the data will be high as they will be co-constructed from participants' life stories in good spirits and in an environment of mutual respect. I found out from this research that it was during the tālanga that the participants had the opportunity to discuss their views and to co-construct ideas on a particular topic given to them. The interactive and dialogic nature of tālanga led the talanoa to a state of heightened engagements, a state similar to euphoria caused by clarity of meaning that Tongan people call mālie, which Manu'atu (2000) alludes to as an energising energy that uplifts spirits to a positive state of connectedness and enlightenment. Tālanga is often reached when both parties involved start to participate in a more in-depth discussion to navigate and make meanings together and co-construct ideas about the particular topic of discussion. In tālanga, the talanoa is more empowering, interactive, collaborative, participatory, encouraging and purposeful. For these reasons, teachers and students in Tonga could use tālanga to co-create understandings on the impacts and solutions to climate change on the people and the environment.

Using talanoa as my method of data collection also encountered some problems. For instance, in the Tongan context, young people are sometimes not included in the decision making or sometimes their views and perspectives are considered unimportant. It happens a lot when young people in Tonga are interrupting during a conversation, and they sometimes get told off by adults saying that they are kauitalanoa which means that the young people are speaking while they are required to be silent. And that concept of kauitalanoa sometimes hindered the ability of the young people to contribute to any talanoa. Since my research involved high school students, it was paramount to ensure that the talanoa environment was welcoming so that all participants felt secured and welcome. Some students appeared to be so quiet during the talanoa, so I included them in the discussions by constantly mentioning their

names. I ensured that I catered to everyone's needs and allowed them to engage in the talanoa. I've come to the realisation that some of my student participants took time and effort to navigate their way through the talanoa and most likely they were worried and concerned about being told off for being 'kauitalanoa'. It took a little while for the students to actually gain full confidence to talanoa openly and contribute effectively to the talatalanoa and the tālanga.

Tepora Wright

As a data collection tool, the definition of talanoa in a Samoan context ranges from an informal non-directed conversation (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014) to a more formal discussion of matters of importance (Tunufai, 2016). Cognisant of these conceptualisations, I used talanoa as an informal one-on-one conversation with a research participant on the themes of my research. While I had a set of standard questions to guide the talanoa, there was flexibility in the conversation to follow themes that the participant deemed important. I carried out 41 talanoa conversations in total, 15 of which were follow-up conversations, with individuals involved in the development, setting and enactment of higher education policy at various levels. Each talanoa ranged from 45 minutes to two hours.

In the next few paragraphs, I share some insights on the use of talanoa as a research tool in my Samoan (or Pacific) community. They relate to the different talanoa formats necessarily undertaken because of the different relationality ('va') between the researcher and each participant, the need to authentically engage in the talanoa as a two-way conversation and not a one-sided interview, and the importance of physical sustenance.

Firstly, while I had a list of talanoa questions prepared to facilitate the conversation, I found that the order in which I asked them as well as the way I asked them were slightly different for each participant. These differences were determined by how well I knew the participant, how much they 'warmed up' to the conversation, and the degree of respectful distance I needed to keep with the participant due to cultural etiquette. Thus, I felt the conversation with a participant that I knew professionally as well as personally, who warmed up to the topic quickly, and with whom I was more or less on an equal cultural footing, was more open on both sides. In contrast, the talanoa with participants that I did not know well, who took some time to be comfortable with the theme of the conversation, and who were my cultural elders, were not so open and free. Reflection on this pattern made me realise that there was freedom in allowing the talanoa format to vary depending on the research participant. In essence, I felt that in order to conduct ethical and authentic research in my Samoan community, I must allow the format of the talanoa to vary depending on the participant because a different 'va' exists between me and every participant, and I have to act in accordance with that 'va'. Hence the relationality between me and each participant was slightly different, and of necessity, the order in which I asked my questions and followed the participant's thoughts would vary depending on the participant.

Secondly, I faced a dilemma in the first few talanoa conversations when I realised that I was holding back from offering my own views in the conversation because I did not want to influence the thoughts of the participant and thereby perhaps influence my data. My career to date has been mostly in a field where verifiable data and evidence are seen as paramount to good decision making. However, I realised that holding back from fully engaging as a conversation partner defeated the purpose of using talanoa as a data collection tool in three ways. Firstly, I was not being fully committed to the concept of talanoa as a conversation between two people, in which there is a two-way interaction. Secondly, I was not demonstrating the cultural value of reciprocity if I only sought to 'take' the participant's thoughts and conversations without responding with my own at appropriate times in the conversation. Reflection on these two points led me to a third concern, that I was perhaps forgetting that my participants were not merely sources of data, but also individual human beings who by allowing me to engage with them at this level, had granted me a gift, the gift of talanoa.

Moreover, I found that having the talanoa in an informal setting, such as a café or over food or a hot beverage, greatly facilitated the conversation, as participants seemed to be more comfortable to engage with the conversation. For me, this is more than providing something to eat or drink. Food and

drink are nourishment for the body, but it is also nourishment for the soul to know that the researcher considers the physical comfort of the participant important enough to provide sustenance for the conversation.

Alvin Chand

Alvin has used Talanoa as a method to collect qualitative data for the research and CLES (survey) to collect quantitative data. The research is about finding the perceptions of Fijian students studying science in secondary schools in New Zealand. Students were given the survey to do before the Talanoa sessions. Talanoa sessions were held to gather the information from the participants on the answers they have chosen for the survey. Talanoa sessions took place in a room that was familiar to the students.

Talanoa sessions started with greetings, usually in their mother tongue. E.g., "Ramram" or "Namaste" if a student is Fijian Indian or "Ni sa bula vinaka" for iTaukei students. To make students at ease, they were asked questions such as: How is your day going? How is your family? etc. After welcoming the students, Alvin introduced himself and explained the research questions and asked if they had any questions. Ethical issues relating to the research were then explained to the students. Students sat on chairs and made themselves comfortable before being handed the survey questionnaires (CLES). During the talanoa, students referred to the survey from time to time and were encouraged to let Alvin know if they did not want to speak on specific issues. Students took turns speaking, and there was no hierarchy during the conversation. A recording device was placed in the middle of the group, with the explanation that the recording would only be used for study purposes. Students were encouraged to ask questions so that it became a reciprocal conversation. At the end of the talanoa session, Alvin acknowledged the students' participation and shared with them information on how to access the research findings. The talanoa gives the meaning to the data gathered during the survey. It provides the rich narratives and provides an explanation for the results that are produced by the survey data (CLES).

The Constructivist Learning Environment Survey (CLES) assists researchers to find out the degree to which a particular classroom's environment is consistent with a constructivist epistemology (Taylor & Fraser, 1991). It is a tool for assessing the degree to which the principles of constructivism are evident in specific classroom learning environments. The autonomy scale measures the degree to which students exercised control over their learning activities in a sociocultural context. The items were measured by a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from almost never (1), seldom (2), sometimes (3), often (4) to almost always (5). Hence the numerical responses indicate the secondary school students' perceptions about the degree or frequency that the stated practices occur or are experienced. The CLES tool is organised into five domains which are personal relevance, uncertainty, critical voice, shared control, and student negotiation.

These CLES questionnaires have their origins in Western Australia and have been used in a variety of studies to study the perceptions of students' learning environment in science education (Taylor & Fraser, 1991; Taylor et al., 1997). Taylor and Fraser (1991) established the factorial validity and reliability of CLES with a sample size of 494 in 13 schools; with Year 13 students in 42 science classes. Additionally, Aldridge et al. (2000) cross-validated the CLES in Australia and Taiwan with a sample of 1081 science students in 50 classrooms about their perceptions of the science learning environment in the classrooms. The study by Aldridge et al. (2000) supported the data analysis scale's internal consistency, reliability, factor structure, and ability to differentiate between classrooms.

Discussion

The three Pacific researchers appeared to be employing talanoa because of its cultural appropriateness to their participants and to the context of their research. This is aligned with Nabobo-Baba (2008), who emphasised the importance for Pacific researchers to use culturally appropriate framings and methodologies that recognise world views, cultural knowledge and epistemologies. Va or relationship

between the researchers and the participants is crucial to be maintained during the research with the Pacific people. The three Pacific researchers acknowledged the efficacy of using talanoa in maintaining warm relationships between them and their participants, and among the participants. It is evident that the nature of the talanoa that took place may be influenced by the 'va' of the researcher and the participants. The talanoa is more open and operated freely when the researcher knows the participants well and there has been connections prior to the talanoa. On the other hand, talanoa would be in a different layer if the participants are elderly people. The 'va' will be maintained by making sure the language used would be suitable and relevant to the participants' age groups. Anae (2010, 2016), Fa'avae (2018) and Muliaina (2018) believe the significance of relationality and negotiation of the relational space between researcher and research participants has been underlined as a fundamental aspect of Pacific research methodology. Anae (2010) emphasises the importance for researchers who are researching about, with, for the Pacific communities to value, cherish, nurture and acknowledge the 'va' or the relationships.

One of the challenges experienced by Havea during her talanoa research was that of engaging young people in the talanoa. Talanoa research involves negotiating the va relationship between the researcher and participant in which the voices of some may be initially silent or unheard (Fa'avae, 2018). In this relational space, Havea realised that young people were hesitant to contribute because they sometimes get told off by adults saying that they are 'kauitalanoa' which means that the young people are speaking while they are required to be silent.

Silence in the presence of adults is one element of the relationship between young people and their elders in some Pacific contexts (Farran, 2016). It is possible that this aspect of the va or relationship between young people and their elders may limit the extent to which talanoa can be engaged within a multi-generational group. Nevertheless, Havea found that she was able to draw the young people into the talanoa, with continued prompting and encouragement.

A second challenge is described by Tepora Wright who reflected that "I realised that I was holding back from offering my own views in the conversation, because I did not want to influence the thoughts of the participant and thereby perhaps influence my data" [quoted based on her fieldwork]. The apprehension with influencing the data is as she acknowledges, due to professional engagement in a field where concerns with verifiable data and evidence are paramount. However, objectivity in qualitative research is an acknowledged misnomer (Bowden & Green, 2010), and is a misplaced concern in talanoa research where valuing of the relational space (Anae, 2016) and reciprocal respect (Vaai, 2014) characterised by empathy (Farelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2012) are most important. The reciprocity of conversation, or the back-and-forth dialogue, acknowledges that participants are not merely a source of data to be picked and collected but equal participants in a mutually beneficial dialogue (Halapua, 2003).

A final point that can be drawn from the experiences of these emerging Pacific researchers is the fluidity with which talanoa can be engaged for diverse research purposes. Chand's research incorporates the use of talanoa research with the CLES survey tool to explore the perceptions of Fijian students studying science in secondary schools in New Zealand. On the other hand, Wright utilised talanoa to explore experiences and reflections of university staff and stakeholders within an educational policy setting to enable deep analysis of the relationship between agency and structure. Havea's research enabled nuanced application of different types of talanoa with her Tongan community, making use of Vaioleti's Talanoa typology (2011, 2013), and thus exploring the extent to which different types of talanoa can be pursued for different purposes. While there was the diversity of application, the embeddedness of talanoa within a culturally appropriate framing reflective of Pacific world views and cultural knowledge (Thaman, 2003; Nabobo-Baba, 2008) ensured that the research process honoured the participation of Pacific people.

Conclusion

This paper highlights the importance for us as Pacific researchers to contemplate our relational positionalities and to be able to grasp a multifaceted understanding about conducting a research by, for, and with Pacific people. To go back to do research by, for, with the community, and being identified as

members of Pacific diasporic communities in Aotearoa, we took into consideration our connections to our land and our people. We felt that it was our responsibility to ensure that we value, cherish, nurture and take care of the 'va' or the relationship between us and our research participants. Talanoa appeared to be the appropriate tool to maintain that trust and embrace harmonious relationships and respect between the researcher and participants. We felt that the authenticity of the data provided to us by our participants was attributed to the use of talanoa. We highlight in this paper that being open about the complexities associated with talanoa, based on our relational positionalities and the diverse contexts in the diaspora is necessary for Pacific indigenous early career researchers.

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