

NUMBER 1/2023

ISSN 2324-3635

OCCASIONAL & DISCUSSION

PAPER SERIES

Talanoa: Pushing Boundaries
to Promote Pacific Ways
of Being in Aotearoa New
Zealand Tertiary Education

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By Daisy Bentley-Gray

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Keywords: Talanoa,
relationships,
Pacific research
methodologies (PMS),
knowledge holders, vā

This publication may be cited as:

Bentley-Gray, D. (2023). Talanoa: Pushing Boundaries to
Promote Pacific Ways of Being in Aotearoa New Zealand
Tertiary Education. Unitec ePress Occasional and Discussion
Paper Series (2023:1). Unitec ePress.

<https://doi.org/10.34074/ocds.102>

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Cover design by Penny Thomson

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ISSN
2324-3635

Talanoa: Pushing Boundaries to Promote Pacific Ways of Being in Aotearoa New Zealand Tertiary Education

Daisy Bentley-Gray

Abstract

The survival of Pacific societies is partly attributed to the ability of Pacific ancestors to transmit stories from generation to generation through myths and legends, stories of creation, songs, oratory, art and natural environments. This paper explores the importance of the practice of Talanoa as a concept and a research tool in promoting Pacific knowledge systems and practices in tertiary education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Talanoa was utilised as the primary research method to gather narratives about how Talanoa is incorporated, from Pacific staff in various roles in tertiary education in a culturally safe and relevant way, both face to face and online. The author also conducted an online survey to gather information about how or whether Talanoa is used widely by Pacific staff in an Aotearoa New Zealand tertiary institution, Unitec New Zealand Limited, before it transitioned fully into the national institute, Te Pūkenga. The research analysed existing literature to ensure that it adds value to this repertoire of knowledge and research. The significance of recognising and acknowledging Pacific oral traditions will add value to and enhance Pacific ways of knowing and engagement in any context. The outcome of this study supports the inclusion of Talanoa as a tool that can be used successfully in tertiary education.

Introduction

Pacific peoples are diverse and are practitioners of multiple traditions; they live and breathe life into the cultures they are born into (White & Lamont, 2013). The diversity and richness found within Pacific societies and diaspora communities abroad are a testament to resilience. As the transmitters and practitioners of oral and cultural traditions, Pacific peoples have journeyed through time and space amidst many challenges (White & Lamont, 2013) such as diseases, natural disasters and impacts of colonisation. In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, Pacific peoples and traditions have experienced change as a consequence of their adaptation. Hence, current contextual applications and promotions of Pacific ways of being will always be in light of transferred practices. These are seen as *transferred* because Pacific traditions and cultures are adapted in the host country, outside of the country of origin, regardless of their practitioners being culturally agile. The term 'cultural transfer', first coined by Michele Espange in the 1980s, formed the basis of a transnational approach, describing the translation and circulation of knowledge between two countries (Yakushenko, 2014). Therefore, the presence of Pacific peoples and their active participation in home cultural practices in diaspora communities make them agents of transfers. According to Yakushenko (2014):

agents of these transfers are the people who contribute to the movement and dissemination of knowledge and objects from one cultural zone to another. They are translators, expats, or people who circulate between countries ... who have received their education abroad. (para. 7)

This paper explores Talanoa, the concept and research tool, and how it is being promoted in Aotearoa New Zealand tertiary education and elsewhere. Firstly, it contextualises Indigenous/Pacific scholarship within the research space with specific references to Aotearoa New Zealand. It will refer to Indigenous and Pacific interchangeably throughout the discussions. However, it will specifically refer to Pacific in parts to emphasise the arguments about Pacific peoples who are also indigenous to the Pacific Islands they and their ancestors belong to. Secondly, it defines Talanoa the concept and Talanoa as a research tool, with references to literature and to narratives of some Pacific staff in conversations with the author, as well as the author's experiences and observations. Thirdly, it discusses how Talanoa promotes Pacific knowledge systems and practices in Aotearoa New Zealand tertiary education with examples from the experience of some Pacific staff at an institute of technology and polytechnic.

Research methodology and method

This paper reflects two aims to understand how and whether Pacific staff within Aotearoa New Zealand tertiary institutions embed Talanoa in their practice. Firstly, engaging in Talanoa allowed each respondent to freely

talk about their experiences as Pacific people in the tertiary and/or other institutions they work in. Utilising Talanoa in this research allowed “contextual interaction with Pacific participants to occur that creates a more authentic knowledge, which may lead to solutions for Pacific issues” (Vaioleti, 2006, 23). As a method, I engaged in Talanoa and participatory observations at various research events and communications with approximately 40–50 staff and peers who took part in recent research events: the 2021 Pacific Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand (PATLAANZ) Conference, the 2021 MIT/Unitec Research Symposium and the Pacific Research Colloquium 2021.

Secondly, an online survey was also sent to 40 Pacific staff comprising those in academic and non-academic roles at Unitec New Zealand Limited to gauge their understanding of Talanoa and how, or whether, Talanoa is incorporated into their work. Therefore, the responses reflect current practices and those that Pacific staff expressed they would like to happen at the institution. The response to the survey was less than a third, with only 11 responses; of these, eight staff agreed to the value of embedding Talanoa in their daily work while two said maybe and one said no. One of the eight respondents who saw value in embedding Talanoa in their work commented that *“Talanoa creates a connection with those who I work with, and does so in a safe and enriching way”* (Anonymous, personal communication, October 2021). Another staff member said Talanoa was used to facilitate a course they taught, of which they said, *“non-Pacific staff like this approach and enjoy the course because of the use of this strategy as a way of sharing knowledge”* (Anonymous, personal communication, October 2021). Although eight staff saw value in embedding Talanoa in their work, only seven currently did so, three did not and one was unsure. One of the seven staff who embedded Talanoa in their practice shared: *“With students, I use Talanoa to build rapport and trust. I believe that students recognise if they can trust you, through how you communicate with the[m]”* (Anonymous, personal communication, October 2021). However, one respondent said:

Our structure doesn't enable talanoa to occur in the true sense – we also [have] a different leadership mentality ... Ideally it would be talanoa ... but we are not set up this way. Directions for us come from EXLT [Executive Leadership Team] – we are not in those forums, we relay these down to our staff. The only time you get to talanoa is with those you have a relationship with [your staff] ... yet to reach an agreed outcome has to be mandated from above ... EXLT.
(Anonymous, personal communication, October 2021)

The response reflects a factor that they see hindering the practice of Talanoa as it is understood and done. It implies and reflects on research that others, such as Chu et al. (2013), Airini et al. (2010) and Anae et al. (2001), have found with regards to institutional structures, which act as barriers to success for Pacific people. Therefore, this study also reflects the literature, which supports the growing influence of Talanoa within tertiary education contexts.

Pacific and research

The Pacific has attracted the research interests of both Pacific and non-Pacific scholars and academics. However, Pacific people's interpretation and input in the early records about the Pacific was minimal, if any, leading to some misconceptions surrounding the level of research capabilities of Pacific people. According to Otsuka (2006), research about Indigenous people must be culturally appropriate to "produce more accurate and valid data to address local issues" (p. 2). Hence, research must be inclusive of not only the researcher's cultures and norms but also of those of the researched. Tualaulelei and McFall-McCaffery (2019) explain that the proliferation of Indigenous research methodologies in recent decades has expanded the pool of research methodological approaches with which researchers can choose to engage. Anae (2019) argues that a 'renaissance' of Pacific scholarship in the last two decades aims to "decolonise and reindigenise research agendas and research outputs by doing research based on indigenous theories, PRM, and PRE" (para. 2). The concept of research is a Western construct, and defined by Western Sydney University (2020) as:

the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it leads to new and creative outcomes. (para. 2)

According to Hampshire College (2022), "Research is a process of systematic inquiry that entails collection of data; documentation of critical information; and analysis and interpretation of that data/information, in accordance with suitable methodologies set by specific professional fields and academic disciplines" (para. 1).

Research describes the processes Pacific people have long engaged in, whether formal fact-finding missions or smaller and more personal (informal) knowledge-acquisition. However, the ideals about how research is done have historically been linked to Eurocentric standards, resulting in misinterpretations and/or misconceptions that research is exclusive to Western culture. Smith (1999) argues that the term 'research' is deeply intertwined with imperialism and colonialism, which remains an offensive reminder of the past for colonised people. Indigenous research and research methodologies need to be acknowledged and accurately used to ensure Indigenous worldview is influential (Gegeo, 2001). In this regard, Pacific research methodologies (PRMs) need to be recognised and valued in the same way as Western-derived methods. Vaka'uta (n.d.) explains that "individual, institutional, and civilizational/epistemological racism ... [must be combatted] ... through awareness, advocacy, re-education, and intervention ... [to make way] ... for alternative ways of doing, thinking and being" (5:30–5:52). The significance of having the recognition acknowledges the ontologies and epistemologies that inform the PRMs and minimises criticism often associated with PRMs.

Historically, the misconception deeply rooted in the space of research disavows Pacific knowledge and ways of being as research. Indigenous

knowledge systems and traditions were dismissed as primitive and incoherent accounts that did not qualify to be recognised in the same light as Western research paradigms (Tunufa'i, 2016). According to Smith (2012), the procedures by which Indigenous peoples were coded into Western systems of knowledge compared and devalued them. The measures with which Pacific ways of knowledge acquisition were benchmarked were foreign to the essence that these same Pacific ways of being had developed. Colonisation disrupted and displaced the value of Pacific ways of being within their places of origin and destination (Vaioleti, 2006).

Prior to Indigenous people gaining a foothold within research, Western notions and research practices determined what was considered research, regardless of the researched populations and cultural traditions. The works of earlier Indigenous and Pacific researchers such as Smith, Thaman, Nabobo-Baba, Vaioleti and Anae achieved huge milestones that allow many other Indigenous/Pacific researchers today to enjoy the ease with which research boundaries are challenged and reformed. Despite the leaps in the research space by Pacific scholars, academics and researchers, much work still needs to be done for Pacific ways of being to be normalised in all settings.

Pacific research, including Talanoa, is being advocated for constantly in the tertiary space to ensure a more expansive and accurate representation of Pacific peoples and their ways of being, also referred to as the decolonising research movement. Scholar and leading advocate in decolonising research Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) explains that Indigenous peoples should lead research about Indigenous peoples. "When indigenous peoples become the researchers and not merely the researched, the activities of research are transformed. Questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently and people participate on different terms" (Smith, 1999, p. 193). Hence, Smith (1999), among many others such as Vaioleti (2003) and Kalavite (2010), argue that Indigenous peoples, including Pacific peoples, should take charge of research that is being conducted on them and about them. She also argues that the processes and outcomes of research conducted on Indigenous peoples are transformative when Indigenous lenses are applied to research. Smith (2004, cited in Naepi, 2019) explains that "the Pacific has been authored by non-Indigenous Pacific scholarship in such ways that have marginalized the Indigenous knowledge systems of the Pacific and Pacific authority over knowledge" (p. 2). Anae et al. (2001) argue that past misinterpretation and/or misreading of epistemologies have led to poor representation of data about Pacific peoples. Furthermore, Gegeo (2001) calls for research strategies to be informed by Indigenous epistemologies and to acknowledge that Pacific cultures have philosophies that non-Indigenous researchers have ignored.

Anae et al. (2001) explain that Pacific research "methodologies that are ... sensitive to contemporary Pacific contexts ... [are] capable of embracing existing Pacific notions of collective ownership" (p. 28). It is imperative that research about Pacific peoples and ways of being considers the cultural and ethnic diversity that exists, as well as the similarities in cultural values. For example, references to the Pacific in the Aotearoa New Zealand context should always reflect the nine Pacific cultural groups comprising Sāmoan, Tongan, Fijian, Cook Island, Niuean, Tokelauan, Tuvaluan, Rotuman and Kiribati

(Kalavite, 2010). Hence, these peoples' ontologies and epistemologies should be at the core of strategies from the development to implementation phases, therefore including Pacific peoples at all levels to gain consensus.

According to Fletcher et al. (2009), Pacific research methodologies (PRMs) provide a holistic view of knowledge and scholarship, oral communication style, and protocol of consensus and respect. PRMs recognise the overarching nuances of Pacific ways of knowing and being, including communal ownership. It is expected that those who engage with PRMs will demonstrate expertise and knowledge in Pacific protocols, values and etiquette, of one's family, village and ancestry, and transfer this ability to future generations (Tuafuti, 2011). Naepi (2018) explains that PRMs allow Pacific researchers to move away from the foundations built on ideologies that dismissed Pacific knowledge as inferior and apply a Pacific lens in understanding the Pacific. Similarly, other Pacific scholars, such as Gegeo (2001), Smith (1999) and Davidson (2008, cited in Tunufa'i, 2016), argue that Indigenous/Pacific peoples' research should always place Indigenous/Pacific peoples at the centre, not as mere parts. The whole notion of research should be transformed to include Pacific ways of being. Only when Indigenous/Pacific cultures, knowledge, understanding and genuine appreciation influence research will accurate depictions of Pacific peoples and cultures be revealed (Davidson, 2008 cited in Tunufa'i, 2016). Oral traditions should not be underestimated or ridiculed, because these have a depth that cannot be compared to modern technology (Sanga et al., 2021; Vaioleti, 2006). According to Mercer (1979), although oral tradition received much criticism for its reliability and use by early explorers, settlers and later missionaries, it has not been discounted altogether. Indigenous scholars such as Peter Buck (1926, cited in Mercer, 1979) have argued the importance of accurate use and references to oral tradition, which was significant for Māori. Hence, Pacific peoples must be leaders in this space for PRMs to authentically represent and advance Pacific ways of being.

Talanoa – the concept

Talanoa is a concept that is associated with Pacific communities and peoples, which refers "to a conversation, a talk, an exchange of ideas or thinking" (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 23). Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba (2012) define it as "talking about nothing in particular, chat, or gossip and it is within the cultural milieu of Talanoa that knowledge and emotions are shared" (p. 1). The concept of Talanoa comprises the word *tala*, which means to inform, tell, relate, command, ask and apply, and the word *noa*, which denotes nothing specific, anything, abstract and void (Vaioleti, 2006; Tunufa'i, 2016; 'Otunuku, 2011). Hence, Talanoa alludes to applying or telling knowledge or information about nothing specific. Halapua (2003, cited in Tufuna'i, 2016) refers to Talanoa as a 'dialogue'. Prescott (2008, cited in Fa'avae et al., 2016) explains that as an oratory practice, Talanoa is recognised in "Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Cook Islands, Niue, Hawai'i, and the Solomon Islands" (p. 140). Chu et al. (2013) explain

that Talanoa is utilised in Sāmoan, Tongan and Fijian cultures to develop relationships. Therefore, discussions do not necessarily follow a rigid and formally structured format, but become more meaningful to the practitioners over time (Vaiotei, 2006).

An online survey to gather information about how Talanoa is understood and used by Pacific academic and professional staff at Unitec was sent to 40 staff, with only 11 responses. Those who responded perceive Talanoa as a conversation, which creates connections and alludes to other embedded Pacific values such as the *vā*. In addition, Talanoa is a forum that is open and respectful, with unwritten rules influencing the ease and flow of the Talanoa (Anonymous, personal communication, October 2021). Furthermore, Talanoa is described as conversations between people with equal opportunity to speak, be heard and listen. Hence, engaging in Talanoa implies a relationship where there is an expectation that all parties will talk without fear and listen carefully. People involved in Talanoa must build open relationships (Naepi, 2019).

Talanoa: Tongan, Fijian and Sāmoan perspectives

Talanoa is a concept that is deeply rooted in Tongan, Fijian and Sāmoan contexts. The Pacific values of respect, empathy (love and care), humility and *vā* (sacred spaces/boundaries), amongst other common values, are demonstrated in the process of Talanoa in all contexts (Vaiotei, 2006; Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2012). However, in the research space, these values influence the effectiveness of Talanoa between the researcher and knowledge holder. Although there are multiple works by Pacific and Indigenous scholars, academics and writers that provide evidence of increasing engagement in Talanoa, it should be noted that there are variations in the intent and application of Talanoa that are culturally unique to each ethnic group. The implications of demonstrating relevant cultural etiquettes that are uniquely Sāmoan, Tongan and Fijian to respective knowledge holders will add value that contributes to the success of the Talanoa. Tunufa'i (2016) explains that misunderstandings can occur if Talanoa is not equally understood by multi-ethnic participants.

TALANOA: INTERPRETING TONGAN AND FIJIAN PERSPECTIVES

Vaiotei (2006), a Tongan scholar who is considered significant in theorising and, therefore, popularising Talanoa in Aotearoa New Zealand, provides a Tongan perspective of Talanoa. The four values that are integral to Talanoa from a Tongan perspective are *'ofa* (love), *māfana* (warmth), *mālie* (humour) and *faka'apa'apa* (respect), which are also alluded to by Manu'atu (2002), Mahina (1998) and Seve-Williams (2009) (cited in Ministry of Education, n.d.). Similarly, Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba (2012) explain that Talanoa embodies the four values of respect, empathy, love and humility in the Fijian context. In addition, they emphasise the significance of reciprocity between the

researcher and knowledge holder, which alludes to “deep interpersonal relationships and sharing between all parties involved” (p. 3).

However, despite the explicit similarities in perspectives and embedded core values, there are unique elements that make Talanoa Tongan and/or Fijian. Halapua (2022) reflects on the differences in how Talanoa was used to address situations in Fiji between 2000 and 2003, and in Tonga in 2005, which convinced him that people and culture, place and time determine outcomes.

The universal and Pacific understandings and practices of respect may be part of both a Tongan and a Fijian perspective of Talanoa. However, unique Tongan and Fijian cultural elements and worldviews embodied in how Talanoa may be practised by respective practitioners make Talanoa uniquely Tongan or Fijian. ‘Otunuku (2011) discusses Talanoa from a Tongan perspective in which he ensured an authentic Tongan approach to the study, which explored the “experiences of schooling for Tongan parents and caregivers of secondary school students” (p. 44). In this study, ‘Otunuku (2011) describes the significance of the church and education for Tongans, and knowing this enabled the research to navigate the topic within a specific setting that was familiar to the Tongan knowledge-holders. ‘Otunuku also stated that “both the church venue and cultural protocols were observed and practiced because those were important aspects of life for both the participants and the moderator/researcher” (p. 47). Furthermore, Naepi (2019) explains that, in a Fijian context, Talanoa occurs as either “formal and instrumental (veivosaki) and more informal talanoa” (p. 10). In addition, Talanoa is always between two or more people with specific roles as storyteller and audience/listener. Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba (2014, cited in Naepi, 2019) explain that “Fijians can have particularly meaningful talanoa referred to as vakamosi yalo (painful to the spirit-soul) or vakamarautaka na yalo (causing happiness to one’s spirit-soul)” (p. 10).

TALANOA: A SĀMOAN PERSPECTIVE

Sāmoans are natural practitioners of Talanoa, as are Tongans and Fijians; hence, theorising and utilising it as a research tool seems relevant and appropriate. Growing awareness of Talanoa as a theory and research tool appears to support the significance and value of talanoa in the research space (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014; Anae, 2019; Mauga, 2020; Tuitama, 2020; Vaoleti, 2006; Fareilly & Nabobo-Baba, 2012). A Sāmoan perspective and application of Talanoa as a research tool varies from researcher to researcher for various reasons, including personal experiences. However, regardless of the differences, Sāmoan cultural values take precedence in any situation. Traditionally, Sāmoans regard the role of the aiga (family) as paramount in their existence (Cultural Atlas, 2022; Tuitama, 2020). Tuitama (2020) acknowledges her upbringing by her parents and grandparents, who were instrumental in instilling the importance of a Godly life, culture and family. The complexities and discrepancies (Fitzgerald & Howard, 1990) associated with a person’s aiga also shape their worldview (Tuitama, 2020); hence, according to Suaalii-Sauni and Fulu-Aiolupotea (2014), Sāmoan researchers who utilise Talanoa do not necessarily provide mirroring foundations and outcomes of their Talanoa. For example, in the practice where both the

researcher and knowledge holder are Sāmoan, the Talanoa may start with both parties learning about the other person's village and genealogy, ultimately establishing connections and compelling both parties to do what each perceives as the right thing (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014). The diverse ways in which Sāmoan researchers embed their values shape and form the basis of any Talanoa between them and their knowledge holders (Fuluifaga, 2017). The significance, however, is how one approaches one's knowledge holders, which must always be done genuinely. A passage from a speech by Sāmoa's former Head of State Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi's (2003) sums up how many Sāmoans engage in talanoa:

I am not an individual; I am an integral part of the cosmos. I share divinity with my ancestors, the land, the seas and the skies. I am not an individual, because I share a tofi (inheritance) with my family, my village and my nation. I belong to my family and my family belongs to me. I belong to my village and my village belongs to me. I belong to my nation and my nation belongs to me. This is the essence of my sense of belonging. (Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi, 2003, cited in Henderson, 2016, p. 316)

This implies that the Sāmoan concept of fa'asinomaga (belonging) informs the researcher and knowledge holder of who they are and where they come from as an integral part of the Talanoa. In addition, knowing one's fa'asinomaga aids in developing rapport as it will indicate the researcher's intentions about the Talanoa. Fuluifaga (2017) explains her awareness of being perceived as a New Zealand Sāmoan or 'outsider' by her participants because she is New Zealand born. Hence, a level of trust must be developed early between the researcher and their knowledge holders, which assumes both parties with their own fa'asinomaga can make connections. In a Sāmoan context, fa'asinomaga implies a predetermined existence of the individual. According to Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese (2007), "Fa'asinomaga is man's inheritance designated by the designator – God" (para. 33). Therefore, a person's fa'asinomaga directs their path and ways of being, which include how they engage in Talanoa.

Another Sāmoan concept that is used interchangeably with talanoa is talanoaga. According to Tunufa'i (2016), talanoaga is a noun form and talanoa is the verb form used more commonly during informal conversations. Talanoaga "refers to a formal gathering to discuss specific familial or community matters" (Tunufa'i, 2016). However, despite the differences in processes and nature of talanoa and talanoaga, those who engage in one or the other would almost always be familiar with the protocols involved.

A Sāmoan perspective of Talanoa as a research framework includes four core values that are integral to it, which are fa'aaloalo (respect), alofa (love/empathy/care), loto mau lalo (humility), vā fealofa'i (respectful relationship). Though similar to the values highlighted in both the Tongan and Fijian perspectives, these values in the Sāmoan context provide significant meaning that Sāmoans would know and be comfortable engaging in. Although universal applications of these concepts can still be applied in any context, Sāmoan nuances add value to Sāmoan-focused research. For instance, vā fealofa'i between Sāmoans takes on a special meaning that assumes both researcher and knowledge holder know their cultural and professional roles and positions

within the context of the Talanoa. Muliaumasealii (2017) explains that “vā fealoaloa’i is the space between all relationships that encourages unity and harmony and like all values is nurtured within the aiga and nu’u (family and village)” (p. 26). The knowledge holder will be acknowledged in Sāmoan if English is not prominent, immediately easing the tension that may exist before the Talanoa. Having Sāmoan cultural understandings would be relevant in this space; for example, if the researcher is an untitled Sāmoan woman, she will know the limitations that she will face when planning to engage in Talanoa with a knowledge holder who is a chief. As such, specific protocols must be followed to ensure that the vā (dynamic – distance, space, relationship, boundaries) is observed and respected for Talanoa to happen authentically. According to Muliaumasealii (2020), vā is “a concept that governs relationships and the way in which one relates to the other” (p. 145). Tanielu (2004, cited in Tuafuti, 2011) emphasises “the importance of using Sāmoan cultural beliefs and values in research methods” (p. 36). Muliaumasealii (2020) explains that her background as a Sāmoan ethnographer enabled her to engage in the situation instead of being detached. Hence, a Sāmoan researcher engaging in Talanoa will be mindful and careful in demonstrating fa’aaloalo, alofa, loto mau lalo and vā fealoa’i because the knowledge holders and observers will pick up any shortcomings, which would ultimately impact the Talanoa.

All in all, the variation in how Talanoa is practiced by Tongan, Fijian and Sāmoan practitioners reflects the unique cultural traditions that are specific to each culture despite the overwhelming shared values. The ability of researchers to demonstrate specific cultural practices unique to their knowledge holders in the Talanoa process adds value and results in respectful and effective relationships that ultimately affect the research. Hence, practitioners of Talanoa, regardless of ethnicity, are mindful to establish respectful relationships to ensure successful outcomes (Vaiioleti, 2006; Ponton, 2018).

In any Talanoa, respect and adherence to the vā, or ‘teu le vā’, can be complex in the research space. Tuafuti (2011) explains that respect of and commitment to the vā “in research can cause the researched to be too respectful towards the researcher, with the effect that their voices will still be unheard” (p. 38). Therefore, the researcher and knowledge holder would need to find how best to draw out the voices of the knowledge holder truthfully while maintaining a respectful relationship (Fa’avae et al., 2016). For example, the researcher would need to be culturally aware to articulate how the Talanoa would occur and assure the knowledge holder that what they say would be in confidence. Before the information is published, the researcher must first validate it with the knowledge holder. Consequently, the information becomes the property of the knowledge holder, which is shared further by the researcher.

Talanoa – the research tool

Talanoa as a research tool is holistic in its use and application, as it considers the emotions, knowledge, interest and experiences of both the researcher and knowledge holder (Farely & Nabobo-Baba, 2012). References to knowledge holders in this paper describe Pacific peoples who hold information the researcher seeks. IGI Global (2022) defines knowledge holders as “Members of indigenous and local communities who are knowledgeable in various aspects and forms of indigenous knowledge; [s]uch members are recognized in their communities for their expertise and depth of knowledge” (para. 1). The concept of knowledge holder acknowledges and validates the authority and positions that Pacific peoples hold relevant to the subject being investigated. It also assumes that the knowledge holder plays a significant part in the study being conducted and that their contribution will add value to it.

Talanoa is one of a growing number of Pacific research methodologies (PRMs) that have become a prominent feature in research. In the Aotearoa New Zealand context, Talanoa is a mainstay in research carried out by Pacific peoples, about Pacific peoples, and for Pacific peoples (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014). According to Gremillion et al. (2021), “Talanoa occupies a space that challenges and confounds mainstream research activity and categorisation” (p. 45). Naepi (2019) describes Talanoa as invoking Pacific duality because it is both a research methodology and a method, depending on how the researcher engages with it. Vaioleti (2006) describes Talanoa as a qualitative research method belonging to phenomenological research approaches, aiming to understand how knowledge holders perceive lived experience of events. Hence, Talanoa commands the researcher to know and respect the knowledge holders’ culture, knowledge and experiences. Establishing and maintaining good relationships is key to Talanoa, regardless of the context in which it is done. Talanoa can be successful in the research space if/when relationships between the researcher and knowledge holder are grounded firmly by demonstrating core Pacific values that include respect, empathy, humility, and acknowledgment of space and boundaries, amongst other fundamental values.

Although the tone and flow with which Talanoa occurs is determined by the researcher in the way the scene is set, the knowledge holders have the upper hand as those who hold the knowledge of information being sought. For example, Vaioleti (2006) explains that Talanoa enables the knowledge holder to challenge or legitimise what is being shared. According to Vaioleti (2006), the researcher becomes subjective and immerses themselves in the culture of the knowledge holders instead of standing back to analyse. Therefore, the distance that may have stood between the researcher and knowledge holder fades, and the relationship reaches a level of trust and warmth. In almost all regards, Talanoa occurs face to face and the researcher is physically present within the same space as the knowledge holder. However, Covid-related restrictions in 2020 and 2021 have seen the increasing occurrences of Talanoa in virtual space. In October 2021, the Pacific Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand (PATLAANZ) Conference brought together a group of Pacific academics and Talanoa practitioners who engaged

in Talanoa about whether Talanoa in virtual space is considered Talanoa. Although the responses varied, the consensus was that the core values which guide Talanoa in the physical sense can still be demonstrated in the virtual space, therefore making Talanoa in virtual space just as meaningful. For the researcher to engage in Talanoa, he or she must be a practitioner, to know that Talanoa can happen anywhere and anytime that suits the knowledge holders. There is also growing evidence to prove that Talanoa is boundless in its reach and practice, as the world of Covid-related restrictions forced practitioners to adapt to virtual delivery. Hence, as many have traversed this virtual reality, it is also timely that Pacific peoples lead the ways in which this happens. Sanga et al. (2021) explain that the digital space was developed as a deliberate act of leadership to embrace the creative, relational potential of virtual space at a time when other possibilities remained restricted or closed. Talanoa is done authentically in a safe space, and it is different from non-Indigenous methodologies because it empowers the knowledge holder to have ownership of and the right to legitimise or challenge their stories being told.

Talanoa: Changing and promoting Pacific ways of being in education

Talanoa is widely used in Aotearoa New Zealand by Pacific peoples whose world views align with the core values and practice of Talanoa. Talanoa for Pacific peoples provides a platform that “validates the experiences and ways of Pacific peoples in Aotearoa” (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 25). The diverse nature of Pacific cultures and worldviews makes the practice of Talanoa unique to each occurrence of Talanoa, as discussed earlier in relation to Tongan, Fijian and Sāmoan contexts. However, each Talanoa will be guided by shared core Pacific values that one would expect in any variation of Talanoa. Hence, Talanoa has become a tool that Pacific peoples use to promote Pacific ways of being within tertiary education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

ENGAGING TALANOA IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND TERTIARY EDUCATION

Talanoa is uniquely Pacific, specifically a Sāmoan, Tongan and Fijian concept and cultural practice developed into a research framework by Pacific scholars to advance Pacific ways of being. However, Talanoa has become the closest to a pan-Pacific framework that is used widely, because the cultural practice of Talanoa is visible across the Pacific (Prescott, 2008, cited in Naepi, 2019). Hence, Pacific people in any sector within Aotearoa New Zealand and abroad ultimately become the transmitters of Talanoa. Therefore, the growing number of Pacific people in tertiary education ultimately increases the occurrence of Talanoa in the tertiary space, reflecting multi-layered transfers through Pacific agencies. The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), the main funding agency for Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) in Aotearoa New Zealand, recognises Pacific learners as a Priority Group alongside Māori learners and learners with a disability (Tertiary Education Commission, 2020a).

Consequently, there is a strong correlation between Pacific learners being a TEC Priority Group and the proliferation of Pacific-specific frameworks such as Talanoa in tertiary education. In many regards, tertiary institutions are compelled to demonstrate responsiveness to Pacific peoples' needs. Thus, their being a Priority Group ensures measures are put in place to better reflect commitments by all in the tertiary sector to meet Pacific peoples' goals and aspirations. The Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) asks that all TEOs ensure eight overarching Priority Goals are demonstrated to support learners to flourish in their learning environment. Four of these goals are:

the achievement and wellbeing of all learners; ensuring that places of learning are safe and inclusive and free from racism, discrimination, and bullying; reducing barriers to success and strengthening the quality of teaching to give learners the skills they need to succeed in education, work and life; taking account of learners' needs, identities, languages and cultures in their planning and practice. (Tertiary Education Commission, 2020b, para. 3)

Talanoa has been normalised in many spaces and is always associated with Pacific peoples. Hence, Talanoa is likely to occur amongst Pacific people within tertiary education, making them agents of transfer. At Unitec, an institute of technology and polytechnic (ITP) in Aotearoa New Zealand, their Pacific Success Strategy 2019–2022 (Unitec | Te Pūkenga, 2022b) mandated all staff to contribute to the success of Pacific learners in their respective roles. Its four overarching goals imply and require the commitment of all staff to Pacific success. For example, staff are provided an opportunity to learn and grow in their capacity to engage in Pacific-specific frameworks that promote success and retention. For Pacific staff in a variety of academic roles, Talanoa is utilised as a research tool that engages Pacific peoples in meaningful ways. Also, many choose to engage with peers, especially Pacific learners, using Talanoa, as it is something Pacific learners will be familiar with and/or comfortable doing.

Similarly, for those in administration and management roles, Talanoa is a tool that people engage in when meeting with peers and communities. Talanoa may not always take place between Pacific people, but also with non-Pacific people; the values that underpin Talanoa will be reflected in how conversations occur regardless of who they are with. There are instances with Pacific people when *we* forget that what *we* demonstrate in *our* conversations and meetings are, in fact, examples of Talanoa in action, because it is *our* norm. Talanoa is an innate part of Pacific people, which influences how it is promoted and how it advances Pacific ways of being. Being in a non-academic and non-Pacific-specific (often referred to as mainstream) role makes it challenging to engage in Talanoa. Thus, a Pacific person in a 'mainstream' role may feel restricted, causing a separation of cultural identity from their professional role. However, changes to processes are shifting how Pacific people are seen, and the stigma once associated with being Pacific is slowly fading because Pacific values and ways of being are promoted and embraced. As a TEC Priority Group, Pacific people are encouraged to bring their cultures into their professional roles, thus prompting them to be agents of transfer. Furthermore, the work must continue to be prompted, provoked and

challenged by Pacific people to ensure genuine occurrences of Talanoa, and that many other Pacific frameworks become visible and thriving aspects of Aotearoa New Zealand society.

It is worth mentioning that the diversity amongst Pacific peoples is complex and cannot be generalised, as has been in many instances. The reality of Pacific peoples' sense of identity in Aotearoa New Zealand is challenged by the measures of what constitutes them as Pacific peoples. Cammock et al. (2021) explain that Pacific peoples' "beliefs and values are expressed through cultural practices and traditions, and their spoken language" (p. 121). Hence, self-measured constructs largely influence their demonstration of Pacific cultural practices. For example, one's level of confidence to lead and promote Pacific ways of being is sometimes hindered by one's sense of self-worth as a Pacific person, associated with one's ability to speak one's language and/or be embedded in one's cultural traditions. However, part of normalising Pacific ways of being at some tertiary institutions, such as Unitec, also involves Pacific people working with their Pacific peers to develop a sense of ownership and confidence in demonstrating Pacific values in their everyday activities. Yakushenko (2014) explains: "Cultural exchange is not the circulation of objects and ideas as they already are, but their relentless reinterpretation, rethinking and re-signification" (para. 4). Pacific peoples living in New Zealand are agents of transfer who contribute to the dissemination of their own cultures in the diaspora. For example, the Pacific Research Fono (PRF) is a Pacific-specific committee at Unitec comprising academic and non-academic staff who have research interests. The PRF regularly convenes to provide an opportunity for staff to Talanoa about research-related work they are engaged in. Feedback from PRF members highlights the importance of the Fono in creating a safe space to be Pacific at levels where individuals feel comfortable, regardless of their ability or inability to speak their Pacific language.

It is important for Pacific people in leadership to consistently push for cultural training to be part of the required skills for Pacific people. This could ensure Pacific ways of being are promoted and advocated for in tertiary education. Though Talanoa is specifically Pacific, non-Pacific could learn and be part of Talanoa that Pacific people lead. Having a Pacific person lead the Talanoa assumes they have experience and represent the cultural knowledge and Pacific people's ways of being. Leaders and administrators within tertiary education should promote Talanoa as a way of being that is deeply rooted in Pacific ontologies and epistemologies. This could normalise Talanoa to the point where every person within an institution knows of and/or has genuine and meaningful lived experience of Pacific ways of being. However, Pacific people must lead and own the ways in which Talanoa occurs; for example, at Unitec many initiatives to increase Pacific success are informed by Pacific values and epistemologies and driven by Pacific staff. Talanoa is promoted as a means of conversation and a research platform that Pacific students are encouraged to engage in.

Talanoa should be and is being promoted and encouraged, though inconsistently, as an option available to students in tertiary education. Academic staff who have had Pacific-specific cultural training can help to guide the embedding of assessments that promote the abilities of all

students. For example, Suaalii-Sauni and Fulu-Aiolupotea (2014) assert the value of embedding cultural knowledge in the learning of Sāmoan nursing students. A student reflected: “The way the talanoa approach was used in class and the way the learning environment was arranged were conducive to creating rapport and genuine closeness between us as participants in our talanoa group” (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014, p. 339). According to Airini et al. (2010), Pacific student success is largely influenced by the way in which learning is delivered. Fairbairn-Dunlop (2014, cited in Ponton, 2018) urges educators to validate and value Pacific knowledge to enable Pacific learners to make connections, ultimately increasing a sense of belonging and success. Talanoa is a concept that all students in Unitec’s Social Practice programme are familiar with. Talanoa Pasifika is a standalone Pacific course that is structured into the second semester of the first year of a Bachelor of Social Practice degree. All the students in the programme, in one semester, learn about the diverse Pacific cultural traditions and core values, which Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand reflect. According to Unitec | Te Pūkenga (2022a), students are introduced to Pacific approaches such as Talanoa, as a concept and a research tool, in their study journey. Ultimately, the students who complete the programme become registered social workers within communities and use their skills and knowledge to impact Pacific people that they work with. Talanoa and other Pacific frameworks become part of holistic approaches that consider the needs of Pacific people.

Conclusion

Pacific peoples have pioneered and mastered skills that Western thinkers have ignored; Pacific peoples have been dismissed as incompetent. However, the increase in Pacific and Indigenous scholarship has ultimately challenged and pushed back colonised thinking. This scholarship has promoted and honoured, and continues to do so, Pacific ontological and epistemological realities in ways that give Pacific peoples authority to address the numerous injustices in all contexts. In tertiary education, the solid and consistent push by multiple Indigenous and Pacific educators and leaders has paved the way for many others to follow in the pursuit of justice. PRMs, inclusive of Talanoa, grounded in Pacific ontologies and epistemologies, advocate for and advance Pacific ways of being within tertiary education. Although evidence shows progress in the areas of research for Pacific peoples, more work is needed. Pacific peoples must lead and validate Pacific ways of being in any context, inclusive of tertiary education.

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