

TALANOA RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: A DEVELOPING POSITION ON PACIFIC RESEARCH

TIMOTE M. VAIOLETI

School of Education

The University of Waikato

ABSTRACT *This paper contributes to the theorising on Pacific research approaches from a personal and Tongan perspective. At the same time, it suggests that the majority of the thinking and concepts discussed have similarities and common implications for most other Pacific communities in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In the paper, I discuss the underpinnings of what constitutes 'normality' in relation to research approaches. In order to theorise an appropriate approach to researching Pacific educational and social issues in Aotearoa, I discuss the influence Pacific indigenous values have on the way New Zealand Pacific peoples see their worlds.*

KEYWORDS

Talanoa, Pasifika research methodology, New Zealand Pacific peoples, Tui kakala

Our challenge as politicians is to help shape the future, to make it relevant to our children, not to exclude them. (M. Goshe, speech, July 28, 1999)

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I argue that Talanoa,¹ "a personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations" (Vaioleti, 1999-2003²), allows more *mo'oni* (pure, real, authentic) information to be available for Pacific research than data derived from other research methods. I argue, using the metaphor of *tui kakala* (Helu-Thaman, 1997), that a cultural synthesis of the information, stories, emotions and theorising made available by Talanoa will produce relevant knowledge and possibilities for addressing Pacific issues. In writing this article, I acknowledge and actively support the prior place and reserved rights of Māori as Tangata Whenua in this land.

WESTERN RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES AND RESEARCHING PACIFIC ISSUES

Why hound me with a question when you don't care for an answer,
why play for a pair when there is only one dancer ...? (Vaioleti, 1999,
para. 1)

Historically, research has been driven by hypotheses and often by an institution's approved questionnaires. These do not require a personal relationship between the researcher and the participant in order to obtain the information. The interactions are guided by approved ethics, but these are based on different thinking from that of Pacific peoples. The disparity between the objectivity base of much traditional research and the subjectivity of the participants is often not recognised in Pacific research contexts. For example, in a research situation in a Pacific community, the participants will behave differently depending on the age, gender, cultural rank or community standing of the researcher. These variables may significantly affect results.

In considering epistemology, which deals with the origins of knowledge, the nature of knowing and the construction of knowledge (Maykut & Morehouse, 1995), there is a danger in assuming that all Western, Eastern and Pacific knowledges have the same origins and construction so that, by implication, the same instruments may be used for collecting and analysing data and constructing new knowledge. Researchers whose knowing is derived from Western origins are unlikely to have values and lived realities that allow understanding of issues pertaining to knowledge and ways of being that originated from the *nga wairua* (spirits) and *whenua* of Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Tuvalu or the other Pacific nations. Research methodologies that were designed to identify issues in a dominant culture and provide solutions are not necessarily suitable in searching for solutions for Pacific peoples, whose knowledge and ways of being have unique epistemologies, as well as lived realities here in Aotearoa.

Pacific peoples have endured years of disempowering research, with little social or economic improvement in their health and education. For example, according to Hattie (2002), the OECD statistics reveal that 80% of New Zealand's students are achieving at a world class standard. However, New Zealand has wide disparity in achievement between its top and bottom students, and the majority of Pacific students are overrepresented at the bottom end of these statistics (Vaioleti, 2001). On the basis of results like these, it can be argued that the inclusion of Pacific peoples as research participants over the years has been *ngaue tae 'aonga* (worthless work/wasted effort) (Vaioleti & Vaioleti, 2003).

Mo'ungatonga³ (2003), who for several years has been involved in a major Pacific families research project, related that Pacific peoples seem tired of surveys. If they do take part in research, it is now often with reluctance. One of the indicators used to support this claim is the often-asked, initial and unenthusiastic question: "How long will this take?" that greets her research visits. Mo'ungatonga went on to say that "the facts that they do not understand research talk and find the questions and ticking boxes dry and boring, and also the lack of usefulness of some past research, do not help". She indicated that because she is Pacific, she knows how culturally invasive some New Zealand research approaches can be for Pacific peoples.

For Pacific peoples, the historical pattern of data collection, knowledge creation and theorising has been established by outside researchers gathering Pacific peoples' stories. They then try to make sense of the stories, and retell them, from their own sense-making stances. In the same way for Māori, Bishop and

Glynn (1999) suggest that, in the end in these cases, the researchers will become the tellers of the researched stories, the narrators and the persons who decide what constitutes the narrative. Smith (1992) powerfully warned that:

They may interpret it within an overt theoretical framework, but also in terms of a covert ideological framework. They have the power to distort, make invisible, to overlook, to exaggerate and to draw conclusions based, not on factual data, but on assumptions, hidden value judgements and often-downright misunderstandings. They have the potential to extend knowledge or perpetrate ignorance. (p. 53)

Even Pacific researchers, endeavouring to create Pacific knowledge with their own people, must strictly adhere to research methods that are foreign to them. The impact of such action sanitises out elements such as unseen loyalty to kin system, actions associated with recognition of spiritual or cultural order, church obligations and deep cultural concepts that affect Pacific peoples' realities in Aotearoa. These research approaches may fit traditional thought processes and institutional research conventions but they have little use in Pacific situations. Pasifika peoples may see research as work that will contribute to enhancing their ability to meet their cultural roles and obligations. This perception is reflected in a question I am often asked about research: "Who is this work going to be useful for?" because some research is driven by commercial, political or personal needs (e.g., for personal qualifications). This raises a teleological issue, which is generally concerned with the questions of purpose (Maykut & Morehouse, 1995); that is, what is the purpose of research and in this case, Pacific research. I address this question later in this paper.

However, I concede that more recently there has been a considerable shift from traditional research approaches to a wider range of qualitative approaches (Eisner, 1991) that will be closer to Pacific ways. Bishop and Glynn (1999) state that "integral to this movement has been the realisation of the importance of meaning and interpretation of people's lives within their cultural context" (p. 105). *Talanoa*, the focus of this paper, is a derivative of oral traditions. Under the control of appropriate researchers, it allows contextual interaction with Pacific participants to occur that creates a more authentic knowledge, which may lead to solutions for Pacific issues.

TALANOA: THE CONCEPT AND ITS PLACE IN PACIFIC WORLDS

Superficially, *Talanoa* can be referred to as a conversation, a talk, an exchange of ideas or thinking, whether formal or informal. It is almost always carried out face-to-face. *Tala* means to inform, tell, relate and command, as well as to ask or apply. *Noa* means of any kind, ordinary, nothing in particular, purely imaginary or void. Churchward (1959), in the Tongan dictionary he compiled for the Government, described *Talanoa* as to talk (in an informal way), to tell stories or relate experience (p. 447). *Tala* also means to command, tell, relate, inform and announce, and *noa* means common, old, of no value, without thought, without exertion, as well as dumb (unable to speak) (Churchward, 1959). *Talanoa*, then, literally means talking about nothing in particular, and interacting without a rigid framework.

The communications of Talanoa are not devoid of important information. While in Samoa in 2002, my understanding of Talanoa from the local people was that it is the ancient practice of multi-level and multi-layered critical discussions and free conversations. It also includes the way that community, business and agency leaders receive information from the community, which they then use to make decisions about civil, church and national matters. In Fiji, it is a method proposed to disseminate information by local government departments, NGOs, village representatives, business representatives and local agencies. It is also recommended for collecting information from villages, leaders and different government agencies, with the aim of using findings to formulate national policy proposals (Morrison, Vaioleti & Veramu, 2002).

Potentiality is a cultural aspect of Talanoa. It allows people to engage in social conversation which may lead to critical discussions or knowledge creation that allows rich contextual and inter-related information to surface as co-constructed stories. However, in research it is more than just potentiality. In a good Talanoa encounter, *noa* creates the space and conditions. *Tala* holistically intermingles researchers' and participants' emotions, knowing and experiences. This synergy leads to an energising and uplifting of the spirits, and to a positive state of connectedness and enlightenment (see *malie*⁴ in Manu'atu, 2002). It is the new knowing that has been missed by most traditional research approaches.

In Talanoa, it is the sum of *noa* and *tala* that adds to the total concept. It requires researchers to partake deeply in the research experience rather than stand back and analyse. Talanoa, then, is subjective, mostly oral and collaborative, and is resistant to rigid, institutional, hegemonic control (Vaioleti, 1999-2002). The following quotation is an example of the use of Talanoa to carry out research with Pacific peoples.

We have our own way to do research. I use Talanoa for most of my interviews for the long term Pacific Island Family research I am involved in, which follows the development of over a thousand young Pacific peoples in Auckland over several years. I find Talanoa friendly; it allows relationships between me and my participants, which helps my work greatly. At the beginning of my interviews I would ask the mothers how their days had been while helping them with their chores, things that were totally irrelevant to my topic. They would talk about several things, and I, about my work and myself, until they felt at ease. Once they accepted and trusted me as a person, out came their stories, including the information I was wanting to know about. The stories around the information I was looking for were what made me know that the information was authentic. I rarely needed to ask specific questions. On some occasions, I would do so, however, in order to probe and to maintain the *malie* of the Talanoa. (Mo'ungatonga, 2003)

Mo'ungatonga's (2003) subjectivity contextualised her research approach, and allowed power sharing to be an integral part of her methodology. Smith (1992) states that, "when doing research either across cultures or within a minority culture,

it is critical that researchers recognise the power dynamic which is embedded within the relationship with their subjects" (p. 53).

Talanoa's non-linear and responsive approaches are qualities that may allow Talanoa research methodology to have universal appeal to Māori, indigenous, oral tradition communities and those who are interested in using specific qualitative and localised critical research. Morrison et al. (2002) claim that the concept of Talanoa for Tongans is the same as it is for Samoans, Fijians and other Pacific nations, although some may have local variations. Talanoa is natural for most Pacific peoples.

Crocombe (1975, cited in Ministry of Education, 2001) discusses Talanoa and its appropriateness for researching Pacific issues at the centre of Pacific ways. It involves talking things over rather than taking a rigid stand, and being prepared to negotiate. The Pacific way is spoken rather than written, based on oratory and verbal negotiation which have deep traditional roots in Pacific cultures. Therefore, in Talanoa people are flexible and open to adaptation and compromise. The universal Pacific notions of generosity with time, labour and property and the place of leisure, dress, food and dancing are relevant, as are the inseparable dynamics of church and culture, and the indigenisation of Christianity.

Gilligan (1982), in her book *In a different voice*, refers to the fact that three long-term studies she carried out reflected her general assumption that "the way people talk about their lives is of significance, that the language they use and the connections they make, reveal the world they see and in which they act" (p. 2). Skilful application of Talanoa for Pacific research will make available more valid and authentic information than other methodologies. Talanoa drives Pacific people in Aotearoa/New Zealand, young and old, to hold kava parties, social gatherings and official engagements seven days a week, as they do in their home countries. Talanoa validates the experiences and ways of Pacific peoples in Aotearoa.

TALANOA RESEARCH: WHAT IS IT? HOW DOES IT WORK?

Along with qualitative research, grounded theory, naturalistic inquiry and ethnography, Talanoa belongs to the phenomenological research family. Phenomenological research approaches focus on understanding the meaning that events have for participants (Patton, 1991). As Bishop (1996) suggests, Kaupapa Māori research (KMR) is for Māori; Talanoa's philosophical base is collective, orientated towards defining and acknowledging Pacific aspirations while developing and implementing Pacific theoretical and methodological preferences for research.

Talanoa removes the distance between researcher and participant, and provides research participants with a human face they can relate to. This is an ideal method of research because relationship is the foundation on which most Pacific activities are built (Morrison et al., 2002). Whilst it is similar in approach to narrative research, Talanoa is different in the sense that participants in a Talanoa group will provide a challenge or legitimation to one another's stories and shared information. Because Talanoa is flexible, it provides opportunities to probe, challenge, clarify and re-align. It should create and disseminate robust, valid and up-to-the-minute

knowledge because the shared outcome of what Talanoa has integrated and synthesised will be contextual, not likely to have been already written or subjected to academic sanitisation.

With *Ko 'eku ha'u keta talanoa ki he ...* (I have come so that we can discuss/talk about/converse about ...) as the beginning of most Talanoa, its purpose then should be clear, and will guide the encounter between researchers and participants. An open technique is employed, where the precise nature of questions has not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the Talanoa develops. The Talanoa will end when it loses its *malie* or starts to revisit areas covered already, since then it is probable that no more new points will be added to those that have been co-constructed. It is a respectful, reciprocating interaction. Talanoa is a good conversation: one listens to the other. When to speak and what one says depend upon what the other has to say.

The reciprocity embedded in Talanoa will raise the expectations that researchers and participants have of each other, promoting mutual accountability, which adds to the trustworthiness and quality of the research. The effect of reciprocity is such that when people give *koloa* (in this case, time and knowledge) they will expect it to be respected and honoured, and to be used well. Developments will be followed with interest. Because of the relationship that has been developed, quality will be added to the research. The researcher will not want to let down participants with whom he or she has developed a relationship.

Talanoa firmly places the power to define what the Pacific issues are within the encounter between the researcher and the participant. Participants will disclose information only when they feel the time is right and the context appropriate. If protocols are ignored, the participants may end the Talanoa. Or worse, they may reciprocate (*utu, totongi*) the wrong to teach researchers a lesson, to remind them of their obligations in this symbiotic relationship. This kind of reaction is apparent in Mead's (1928) research, based on three months' fieldwork on the American Samoa island of Ta'u. Her young female participants misinformed her as *totongi* for her culturally insensitive questions and approaches about their social lives. The inaccurate data contributed to her claiming discovery of a culture where the stress of adolescence did not exist. Her book, *Coming of age in Samoa*, based on inaccurate data, became the best-selling anthropology text ever (Freeman, 1983).

Despite Talanoa's potential to be threatening, it is in a sense well reflected by the Māori proverb: "Ka tou rourou, ka taku rourou, ka ora e te iwi" (with your food basket and my food basket, we will feed the people well). It is an encounter that will almost always produce a rich mosaic of information. Skilled researchers and their participants can then pick relevant information in order to arrange and weave it into knowledge or solutions relevant to their particular need.

TALANOA AND TUI KAKALA: A POSSIBLE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to extend Talanoa as a cultural research approach, I will now consider the work of Professor Konai Helu-Thaman (1997) in *Kakala: A Pacific concept of*

teaching and learning, in combination with my interpretation of Talanoa. This section of my paper is heavily borrowed from Helu-Thaman's work.

Kakala is Tongan for fragrant flowers and leaves woven together in special ways according to the need of the occasion they are woven for. It is worn either around the waist or around the neck. However, as for the shared concept of Talanoa throughout the Pacific, *kakala* is *lei* in Hawaii, *hei* in the Cook Islands and *salusalu* in Fiji. In most Pacific cultures, there is a special mythology and etiquette associated with *kakala*. The making of *kakala* (*tui kakala*) involves three different processes: *toli*, *tui* and *luva*.

The Metaphor of Kakala

Toli involves deciding on, selecting and picking the different flowers and leaves required for making the *kakala*. Once picked, the flowers are ranked and arranged according to their cultural importance. The type of *kakala* made depends on the occasion and who is expected to wear it. In terms of a traditional research approach, *toli* equates with the stages where a problem is recognised, the research is decided on, the participants are chosen and the data are collected and analysed. For researching Pacific issues, the selection of the information made available by Talanoa determines the type of community that the research is to benefit and the knowledge or solution sought.

Tui is the process of making or weaving the *kakala*. It will involve sorting, grouping and arranging the flowers and leaves according to their cultural importance before the actual weaving. The time taken to make a *kakala* depends on its nature and complexity. In *tui kakala*, the meaning, the visual impact, beauty and the right bouquet are achieved by the skilful use of the right types, right amount and right combinations of flowers, as well as how they are arranged in hierarchical relationship to one another as determined by the purpose for which the *kakala* is made. Not everyone is adept at making (*tui*) the most beautiful *kakala*.

Tui is a vital stage of the research. This is where the stories, spirits and emotions from the deep Talanoa encounters are arranged and woven further; in other words, the integration, synthesis and weaving of knowledge made available by the Talanoa. The authenticity, relevance and usefulness of the research are dependent on the type and amount of information used, how data are arranged in relation to one another and how they are presented as research. Cultural and technical skills are important at this stage, as incompetent selection and synthesis of the rich information from Talanoa can easily lead to invalid findings.

Luva is the giving away of the *kakala* to the wearer, who may be a dancer, a special guest or someone leaving on a long trip. *Luva* is important in the context of Polynesian values of *'ofa* (love, compassion), *faka'apa'apa* (respect) and *fetokoni'aki* (reciprocity and responsibility for each other). In relation to research, *luva* is when the research is given for the benefit of the community, and is comparable to the metaphor of *koha* in Kaupapa Māori research (Bishop, 1997; Bishop & Glynn, 1999). For the researcher and her or his institution, the *kakala* (the new knowledge) is expected to be passed on so that others can benefit from it. *Luva*

symbolises the importance of Pacific 'ofa, faka'apa'apa and fetokoni'aki for the health of Pacific communities.

The *kakala* approach is comparable to grounded theory when major themes of the Talanoa are identified, developed and explained. Talanoa creates the opportunity for the theorising of both researchers and participants to interface. The resulting knowledge is what *tui kakala* will integrate and weave to make authentic knowledge, from which valid solutions for Pacific issues can be found.

PACIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND THE UNDERPINNINGS OF TRANSFER

'Ulukalala and Vaoleti (2002) make the following comments with regard to the society and knowledge in Tonga at the time when the first Christian Missionary arrived with formal education in 1826. There was much similarity between Tongan and Christian ways.

Ko e 'ulungaanga motu'a, koe 'ulungaanga faka-Tonga pee, ka koe me'a ke tau manatu'I, na'e toki 'alu ange pee'a Misa Tomasi ia ki Tonga he 1826 kuo 'osi lotu pe a Tonga ia mo 'enau 'ulungaanga faka lotu pe ki nautolu – koe 'ulungaanga faka'apa'apa – koe taha ia 'oe 'ulungaanga 'oku 'ikai te tau lotu fie mavahe mei ai. 'Oku tau sio ai pe 'I muli ni, 'a e faka'apa'apa 'a e tuonga'ane ki he tuofefinee. 'Ikai tena mohe ha fale 'e taha – fa'ahinga 'ulungaanga pehee, he na'e toki ha'u pe kau Misinale ia ki Tonga kuo taau pe e anga faka-Tonga ia mo e lotu.

The old ways of thinking and mannerisms were indigenous to Tonga. One must remember that Thomas arrived only in 1826 with education and the Christian ways of being, but Tonga had its civilised ways already, which the Christians' ways resembled. The people cared for and respected one another. Tongans who reside overseas still respect and value the brother and sister covenant and follow old traditions. When the missionaries arrived, the Tongan ways of being were already in place, being at the same level of enlightenment as those brought by Christianity.

Pacific peoples, then, had their own ways of doing things and unique epistemologies. Pacific peoples created knowledge that they have used to order their lives for between 4,000⁵ and 30,000 years. Early research approaches that arrived in the Pacific, including Aotearoa, some hundreds of years ago from the West challenged the validity of the time-proven knowledge and the Pacific creation stories. Any assumption that Pacific peoples had no education, that their values were primitive and that they were not able to create credible knowledge unless it adhered to a Western framework, is ethnocentric and arrogant (Helu-Thaman, 1998).

According to Helu-Thaman (1998), there were two types of knowledge in Polynesia: communal knowledge necessary for day-to-day living and the highly specialist and often tapu knowledge. Special knowledge was *koloa* (taonga, treasure), belonging to certain *kainga* (whānau, family kin) and kept *fakamolumalu*

(sacred) by *tufunga* (tohunga/learned people). *Tufunga* were also the kaitiaki (guardians) of those *koloa* and their persons were often tapu. When encountering these people, there are cultural protocols which must be strictly adhered to. Such was the importance of their knowledge for spiritual and economic security, as well as the integrity of their *fanau* (whānau), that they decided to whom to pass the knowledge in order to safeguard the *koloa* of their *fanau*.

Only those whom the *tufunga* see as *mateuteu* (ready), *fa'a kataki* (tolerant, having endurance, loyal), '*ofa, fakatoo ki lalo* (possessing humility, respect for tradition) and who will use the knowledge for the benefit of the whole (*poto*) were given the special knowledge. So, in the context of research, the participants must be able make the decision as to who carries out the research. Researchers must have credibility with the community. It is vital, then, for researchers and their sponsors to fully appreciate the essential cultural underpinning for the context in which special knowledge is gifted to them. That is, the knowledge is given on the age-old premise that it is to be used for the betterment of the *fanau* and not only for personal gain, such as a degree qualification or for building intellectual capacity or commercial interest. Pacific research must advance Pacific peoples directly.

PACIFIC RESEARCH PROTOCOLS (ETHICS): A TONGAN PERSPECTIVE

It seemed to me that '*ofa* to Tongans, is the philosophy behind their way of life. (Kluckhohn, 1951, cited in Kavaliku 1977, p. 40)

In the past in Tonga, rituals and protocols underpinned the systematised gathering of food and material for wealth creation or knowledge, protecting and validating the mana of those who gave these *koloa*. Researchers have a responsibility to both their institutions and to their participants, on whom they rely in their search for knowledge. They must take into account the possible effect they may have on the participants and act in ways that preserve their dignity (Cohen et al., 2001, p. 56). Cavan (1977, in Cohen et al., 2001) argues that

... ethics is a matter of principles, sensitivity to the rights of others. Being ethical limits the choices we can make in the pursuit of the truth. Ethics says that while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better, even if the respect ... leaves one ignorant of human nature. (p. 56)

If researching ethically is about respecting human dignity, then it is critical that the process is culturally appropriate for the participants. It is imperative that Pacific research ethics (protocols) emerge from Pacific world views in order to keep synergy with the methodology and to protect the integrity of participants as Pacific cultural beings. In this case, the protocols must be based in '*anga faka-Tonga* (Tongan ways). The following concepts, which are seen as Pacific, although the terminologies are Tongan, are proposed to ensure that the appropriate protocols are adhered to.

Faka'apa'apa (respectful, humble, considerate)

Researchers are encouraged to be cautious, respectful and to see, not just look; to hear, not just listen, and to observe; to know the culture and context they are engaged in and then behave accordingly. Requirements include not dominating. A researcher's first contact with participants should be face-to-face, while ensuring that the appropriate communication is used at all times. A researcher should also ensure that his or her dress code is always appropriate and that body language is relevant, including how to sit, stand or look. He or she must watch out for older people, brothers and sisters who may be present, as each situation demands a different set of behaviours. *Faka'apa'apa* and *'ofa* are the basis of relationships that will enable credible exchanges. *Faka'apa'apa* and *tauhi vaha'a*, explained below (under *Poto he anga*), are fundamental to each other.

Anga Lelei (tolerant, generous, kind, helpful, calm, dignified)

In the world of Pacific peoples, there may be activities that a researcher does not understand, so he or she must stay observant in order to learn and act appropriately. A researcher must understand a participant's situation. If there is work that a researcher can help with, then he or she can help do it while talking. It will be an opportunity to observe behaviour that will enrich the *Talanoa*. Further, the participants must feel that their contributions are worthwhile and helpful; otherwise they may not contribute freely. A little gift of light food may be appropriate but the researcher needs to be careful not to offend or to create a sense of dependency. *Mata'ofa*, directly translated as a loving face or a face that radiates love, encourages the researcher to be inclusive, generous, positive, warm and perceptive.

Mateuteu (well prepared, hardworking, culturally versed, professional, responsive)

Pacific peoples are made up of many different communities, each with its own culture, language and values. A researcher must do his or her homework before involving participants. Knowing their *whakapapa* (family background) and those of their participants (*fakahohoko*, exploring possible ancestral connection) is a prelude to most initial *Talanoa*. Knowing the participants' social standings is also advisable, so that researchers can act, relate and behave appropriately. Many Pacific families have *fatongia* (family, church and other societal duties) that can disrupt any *Talanoa*, so it is advisable to prepare for possible disruptions.

All research materials should be prepared ahead of time. The researcher should be knowledgeable about the subject under investigation before engaging participants, as it is important not to waste participants' time. Therefore, all work involving participants must be meaningful. A researcher must honour the participants' kindness and willingness to be involved in the research.

Poto He Anga (knowing what to do and doing it well, cultured)

Each stage of any research is a potential ethical challenge. *Poto* helps us to recognise that we are part of a natural order, the natural way of being. *Poto he anga* must be exercised from the conception of the research through to the end and it

requires consultation and accountability. It may include inviting participants to contribute to the design of the research. They may decline but inclusiveness and humility have been shown. It includes using respectful ways when dealing with the participants, keeping confidentiality and ensuring that the writing and publishing do not embarrass. Pacific peoples possess the ability to maintain enthusiasm but any hint of displeasure may affect a relationship and, therefore, the research processes and results. Skilled application of these concepts comes with years of experience. It is recommended that suitable people supervise Pacific projects. In Talanoa, the participants may lead the speaking turns. It is also important not to flaunt one's knowledge or be 'smart' ('*oua 'e fiepoto*).

Integral to *poto he anga* is *tauhi e vaa/vaha'a*⁶, which refers to what researchers do to maintain a good relationship between themselves, the participants and other stakeholders. This activity may be associated with advocacy and require researchers and their institution to engage in proactive strategies. It includes co-identifying the need for research, and protecting participants' interests, their language, culture, welfare and reputation before, during and well after the project is completed. When participants give knowledge to the researchers, they and the institution are implicated by reciprocity to honour this gifting by continuing support and *tauhi e vaa* commitments to the participants' community. Accountability in Kaupapa Māori Research is similar to the symbolic undertaking by researchers to commit to an ongoing relationship with Māori after accepting the koha (gifting) of Māori knowledge from the community (Bishop, 1996; Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

'Ofa Fe'unga (showing appropriate compassion, empathy, aroha, love for the context)

'*Ofa* is seen as the justification for behaviours, whether it is through not having enough or having a lot (Kavaliku, 1977). For '*ofa*, an esteemed person is one who satisfies perceived needs by being generous to the point of there being nothing left to give away. *Fe'unga*, however, limits '*ofa* (compassion or generosity) to what is appropriate for a given situation. *Poto* in '*ofa fe'unga* is about the capacity to work with others for their benefit in trying circumstances (Helu, 2002), without causing dependency or interfering with the integrity of the research or the stakeholders. A person displaying awareness of *poto* or wisdom has '*ofa*. In the research ethics context, it is about not affecting the world of the participants in a negative or superficial way. Thus, '*ofa fe'unga* is fundamental to maintaining integrity and is at the centre of all research activities.

In the Pacific, good relationships with and between God/s, the land and nature are the basis of all ethical behaviour (*tauhi vaha'a*) (Morrison et al., 2002). *Faka'apa'apa*, *anga lelei*, *mateuteu*, *poto* and '*ofa fe'unga* should secure good relationships and contribute to the success of the research. The Talanoa, *kakala* and the protocols together should add to Talanoa research methodology. In this methodology, the social, political, intellectual and cultural legitimacy of Pacific peoples are taken for granted, and Pacific cultures, knowledge and values are accepted in their own right.

SOME POSSIBLE CONCERNS AND LIMITATIONS

Problems can arise if Talanoa research methodology is examined using conventional interpretations of research validity and reliability. Talanoa affects the learning of both researchers and participants. Therefore, viewpoints and reactions will change. Reliability is concerned with consistency. Talanoa research methodology is unlikely to yield similar results over time. Learning from Talanoa and normal life processes means that people's reasons and ideas about an issue or topic will change. This is also true for other types of qualitative research; reliability as it is understood in experimental research is not appropriate. The participants involved will be the most suitable and knowledgeable for that particular time. If they are not, it is likely that they will direct the researchers to the most appropriate people, as dictated by a Pacific natural and cultural order of things. This is a strength of Talanoa, rather than a weakness. Perhaps what Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Cohen et al., 2001) suggest; that is, to "replace validity and reliability with trustworthiness and its components" (p. 138), is more fitting.

When Pacific peoples learn or share, much information is communicated through the senses, so it is vital that researchers understand the *laumalie* (essence, spirit, wairua) of concepts, notions, emotions or expressions in the Talanoa encounter. There is an ontological issue to be considered here. If ontological assumptions are to do with the nature of reality, then any claim that non-Pacific researchers can interpret Pacific peoples' Talanoa with any degree of accuracy is open to question. If researchers are not knowledgeable in Pacific ways or skilled in *tui kakala*, they cannot accompany the participants to the cultural, contextual and spiritual depths of their sharing and theorising. The research will be poorer for that, and misleading.

These concerns and limitations highlight the need for a highly interactive, informal, flexible and ecological approach where researchers (perhaps non-Pacific researchers too) will engage more meaningfully.

CONCLUSION

In order to theorise a more appropriate research methodology that will have synergy with Pacific peoples' ways of operating, this paper has examined the influences of collective processes in the way that Pacific peoples operate. It has argued that Talanoa (and *tui kakala*) as a proposed Pacific research theoretical and methodological framework is more appropriate for researching Pacific issues. I have also proposed a set of research protocols or ethics to preserve the integrity of all participants in the research and the *koloa* that has been shared.

Talanoa research methodology is a challenge. The use of disempowering traditional research on Pacific peoples has not yielded significant advancements for them. Talanoa can be just as rigorous as existing research approaches, although in a different way. It will allow Pacific peoples to help identify issues, then co-create knowledge and solutions for themselves. Implementation of findings based on Talanoa research methodology should be more trustworthy, relevant and widely supported by Pacific peoples, because they will feel that they have had meaningful engagement in the research processes.

REFERENCES

- Bishop, R. (1996). *Collaborative research stories – Whakawhānaungatanga*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- Bishop, R., & Glynn, T. (1999). *Culture counts: Changing power relations in education*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press Ltd.
- Churchward, C. M. (1959). *Tongan Dictionary*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, L., Lawrence, M., & Morrison, K. (2001). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). London: Routledge
- Eisner, E. W. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Freeman, D. (1983). *Margaret Mead and Samoa*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Gilligan, C. (1986). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hattie, J. (2002). What are the attributes of excellent teachers? In B. Webber (Ed.) *Teachers make a difference. What is the research evidence? Proceedings of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, October 2002* (pp. 3-26). Wellington: NZCER Distribution Services.
- Helu-Thaman, F. (2002). *Talanoa*. Atenisi University, Nukualofa, Tonga. 20, 23 January.
- Helu-Thaman, K. H. (1997). *Kakala: A Pacific concept of teaching and learning*. Keynote address, Australian College of Education National Conference, Cairns.
- Helu-Thaman, K. H. (1998). *Learning to be: A perspective from the Pacific Islands*. Keynote address, Melbourne, UNESCO Conference.
- Helu-Thaman, K. (2002). *Talanoa*, Suva, Fiji. 29th August.
- Kavaliku, S. L. (1977). 'Ofa. *Pacific Perspective*, 6(2), 47-67.
- Lecompte, M., & Preissle, J. (1993). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research* (2nd ed.). London: Academic Press.
- Manu'atu, L. (2002). *Pedagogical possibilities for Tongan students in New Zealand secondary schooling: Tuli Ke Ma'u hono Ngaahi Malie*. Unpublished EdD thesis, University of Auckland.
- Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning quality research: A philosophic and practical guide*. Washington. DC: Falmer Press.
- Mead, M. (1928). *Coming of age in Samoa*. New York: Mentor.
- Ministry of Education. (2001). *Pasifika education research guidelines*. Auckland: Auckland Uniservice, University of Auckland.
- Morrison, S. L., Vaioleti, T. M., & Veramu, J. (2002). *Participatory approaches to learning and training*. Commissioned report for the European Commission, Soqosoqo ni Vakamarama, Nabua, Fiji.
- Morrison, S. L., Vaioleti, T. M., & Vermeulen, W. (2002). *Training for trainers in participatory learning in Samoa*. Commissioned report for the European Commission, METI, Apia, Samoa.
- Mo'ungatonga, P. (2003). *Talanoa*, Papatoetoe, New Zealand, 18 August.

- Patton, M. J. (1991). Qualitative research on college students: Philosophical and mythological comparisons with quantitative approach. *Journal of College Students Development*, 32, 389-396.
- Rees, G., Morrison, S. I., & Vaioleti, T. M. (2003). *Pacific approaches to adult education in New Zealand*. Report to the Tertiary Education Commission Adult Education Reference Group, Wellington.
- Smith, G. H. (1992, December). *Tane-nui-a-Rangi's legacy: Propping up the sky: Kaupapa Māori as resistance and intervention*. Paper presented at NZARE/AARE joint conference, Deakin University, Geelong.
- Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Dunedin: University of Otago Press.
- Statistics New Zealand. (2002). *Pacific progress: A report on the economic status of Pacific peoples in New Zealand*. Wellington: Author.
- 'Ulukalala, S., & Vaioleti, S. L. (2002, December-February). *Series of Talanoa*. Oakland: USA.
- Vaioleti, E. C., & Vaioleti, T. (2003, August). *Cultural motivations for learning*. Paper presented at the Inaugural Pacific Research: Education Symposium, University of Waikato.
- Vaioleti, L. M. M. (1999). Great Kiwi Schools Poetry Challenge. Retrieved September 12, 2003, from <http://www.poetry.co.nz/view.asp?sum>
- Vaioleti, S. L. (1999-2002). *Series of Talanoa*. Palo Alto, Oakland, San Francisco, California.
- Vaioleti, T. M. (2001, April). *We left our island, people and our culture to educate our children in New Zealand*. Paper presented at the Educating Pasifika Positively 2001 Conference, Auckland.

¹ A phenomenological research approach which is ecological, oral and interactive. The literal meaning is covered later in the paper.

² Several Talanoa with Rev. S. L. Vaioleti, Head of the Church of Tonga, USA, in Palo Alto, Oakland, San Francisco.

³ Peta Mo'ungatonga is a school teacher, as well as being involved in the long term Pacific research in New Zealand.

⁴ In Tongan and Samoan it is a state when reached; the psyche and spirit of both a performer and storyteller energise and uplift to a positive, often sensual state of connectedness and enlightenment (Manu'atu, 2002).

⁵ Exhibition of Lapita pottery excavations findings in Ha'afeva, Tongaleleka, and Nukuleka, Tonga Royal Museum, Dec 2002; Lapita exhibition at the Fiji Nation Museum, Suva, July 2002; Vanuatu Lapita exhibition, National Museum, Port Vila, August 2003.

⁶ Translated as maintaining the space. It is a highly developed 'duty of care' concept seen in the activities performed in order to maintain good relationships between people. It includes the Tongan and Samoan covenant between sisters and brothers. This relationship demands respect, service, affection and closeness but maintains cultural distance and space as well. A celestial example is the constant interfacing that balances the earth's gravitational pull against the moon's centrifugal flinging, keeping them perpetually tied but at safe distances from each other. The moon and earth influence each other greatly but each maintains its own identity, qualities and integrity without the stronger one claiming the other.

Copyright of *Waikato Journal of Education* is the property of *Waikato Journal of Education* and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.