

# Teaching and supervising Talanoa research methodology

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# Introduction

► This presentation explores the scope of Talanoa research methodology as taught in the Master of Applied Practice (MAP) - Social Practice at Unitec.

► The presenters are:

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# Context

- ▶ In the past few years, the MAP has seen an increase in enrolment of Pacific students
- ▶ More than 30% of students currently are Pacific
- ▶ This trend is likely to continue
- ▶ This is why we are looking at a strong focus on Talanoa methodology in our teaching

# Talanoa Methodology

- ▶ According to Vaioleti (2013), Talanoa methodology is a phenomenological approach to research, but is unique in its cultural specificity.
- ▶ It can be considered pan-Pacific, but has a “diversity in meanings” (Tagicakiverata & Nilan, 2018, p. 3), e.g. across Tongan vs Samoan vs Fijian contexts. This diversity reflects cross-cultural differences in understandings of talanoa as an everyday cultural practice or way of being.

# Values of Talanoa (Pan-Pacific)

- ▶ Mo'oni (pure, real, authentic)
- ▶ Mālie (energise and uplift spirits to create a positive state of connectedness and enlightenment), which leads to:
  - ▶ Māfana (warmth)
  - ▶ Faka'apa'apa (respectful, humble, considerate)
  - ▶ Anga Lelei (kindness, tolerance, helpful, calm, dignified)

# Principles of Talanoa Research

These values lead to research that:

- Breaks down power relationships
- Creates and promotes reciprocity
- Is conducted face-to-face
- Is participant-led: the participant can take the discussion wherever they choose to go

# Talanoa as Methodology and Method

Vaiioleti (2013, 2011) has identified at least eight possible forms of talanoa for research purposes. Here are three:

- ▶ Talanoa vave (quick, surface-level talk);
- ▶ Talanoa usu (intimate/deep talk that is māfana and mālie, and involves humour);
- ▶ Talanoa faka'eke'eke, which is closest to an interview and allows for probing questions (see also Fa'avae, Jones & Manu'atu, 2016).

# Talanoa as Methodology and Method

- ▶ These specific expressions of talanoa describe methods of data collection: methods that sit within an overall Talanoa approach, or methodology.
- ▶ Note that Talanoa methodology is one of many Pacific research methodologies. Others include the Samoan approach of Fa'afaletui; the Tongan frameworks of Tauhi Vā, and Kakala; the Tivaevae model from the Cook Islands; and the Fijian Vanua and Iluvatu frameworks.

# Talanoa as *Methodology* and *Method*

- ▶ What is interesting to note is that, in contrast to Kaupapa Māori research methodology, Pacific research methodologies such as Talanoa are usually understood to encompass specific methods of data collection that are also culturally specific (in this case Pacific - such as talanoa faka'eke'eke as described by Vaiioleti: the form of talanoa that is closest to an interview).

# Talanoa as *Methodology* and *Method*

- ▶ In their writing, Suaalii-Sauni and Fulu-Aiolupotea (2014) do allow for some diversity of method within Pacific methodologies, i.e. the inclusion of methods that are not Pacific per se. But ultimately, they settle on a understanding of Pacific methodologies as all-encompassing (covering both methodology and methods).

# Talanoa and non-Pacific Methods

- ▶ While they are uneasy combining Pacific methodologies, such as Talanoa and Fa'afaletui, with non-Pacific methodologies (such as phenomenology and interpretive constructivism), they are more willing to couple “talanoa and fa'afaleui as research methods with other social research methods” (p. 336).
- ▶ Further, they see “little difference in practice” between talanoa methods “and an interview or focus group in terms of the general mechanics of actually carrying them out” (p. 337).

# Talanoa as *Methodology* and *Method*

- ▶ However, they go on to state that for projects using Talanoa or Fa'afaletui methodologies: “in actually saying to ourselves” that specific data collection methods were “‘talanoa’ or ‘fa’afaletui’ sessions, we seemed to be able to better keep on top of our minds the Pacific values” that are central to talanoa (p. 337).
- ▶ In other words, even if the ‘mechanics’ of a talanoa method do not differ greatly from an interview or focus group, there is still a very important difference.

# Talanoa as Methodology and Method

- ▶ As Fa'avae, Jones and Manu'atu (2016) emphasise, the Pacific values to keep top of mind when conducting research that is based on Talanoa methodology “are not merely superficial cultural rituals; they are key to research quality. The richness and type of research knowledge made available to the researcher depends on the depth of the respectful relationship between the researcher and participants” (p. 142).

# Talanoa as *Methodology* and *Method*

- ▶ In summary, even for Pacific scholars who accept the idea of combining Pacific and non-Pacific methods, the preference and encouragement is for the methods to be Pacific - in order to keep a Pacific world view and values 'top of mind' throughout.

# The Scope of Talanoa Methodology

- ▶ Interestingly, researchers using Kaupapa Māori methodology often engage a wide range of research methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups). As Stevenson (2018) notes, “Kaupapa Māori does not inform how to carry out the research project” (p. 55) in terms of specific methods, or the use of aligned methodologies.
- ▶ This set of issues raises a key question for us within the MAP: whether or not to encourage the use of non-Pacific methods within Talanoa research projects.

# The Scope of Talanoa Methodology

- ▶ If we do encourage the use of a range of of methods, it seems important that we stress the need to maintain a talanoa approach and Pacific world view throughout all aspects of the research - just as a Kaupapa Māori researcher maintains Kaupapa Māori values throughout the research process (irrespective of specific methods employed).
- ▶ Quote from a Tongan MAP student's proposal

# References

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