Kakala Research Framework:

A Garland In Celebration of a Decade of Rethinking Education

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Introduction

Have you ever seen a group of women sit down to string a few garlands? Usually it looks something like this. Picture a group of older women sitting on a mat under a tree, sprawled around them are scented flowers, usually carefully wrapped with some piece of cloth, a variety of needles and strings of *fau* (stripped from bark of the *fau* tree). Buzzing around them would be children of different ages, who would be venturing out to different gardens throughout the village collecting flowers and leaves for the women to carefully string together into a *kakala*, a garland. As with everything else in Tonga, each *kakala* is ranked as each flower and design used in a *kakala* are ranked. It is a communal process that demonstrates collaboration, sharing of resources and the passing of skills to the next generation. But at the same time, it is a process with a distinct focus of preparing a designed garland for a particular occasion and with a definite person in mind. It may seem from afar to be disorganised and chaotic, but it is purposeful, strategic, and with meticulous attention to fine detail.

The original *Kakala* framework was put together by Professor Konai Helu Thaman as an articulation of her conceptualisation of teaching and learning. Professor Konai Thaman and others have written extensively on the original *Kakala* framework. The original *Kakala* framework gave Pacific students an opportunity to articulate theories from their perspectives and to recognise Pacific world views in their thinking. The original *Kakala* framework, in a way opened the door for others, it encouraged other Pacific academics to take courage and conceptualise from their distinctive world view recognising and giving value to Pacific philosophies, values, and customs. The original *Kakala* was an example of how it may be done. The beauty of the original *Kakala* was its apparent simplicity but complex underlying structures. The original *Kakala* framework led the way for others, including the *Vanua* and the *Iluvatu* frameworks from Fiji, the *Tivaevae* framework from the Cook Islands, and the *Lakalaka* Educational Policy framework and the *Langa fale ako* Teachers Professional development framework, both from Tonga.

The *Kakala* Research Framework as it is today was put together by Professor Konai Helu Thaman, Dr 'Ana Taufe'ulungaki, and Dr Seu'ula Johansson Fua with additional ideas from the work of Dr Linita Manu'atu. It was two senior Tongan academics sitting to string the garland, with one younger Tongan academic gathering garlands, including flowers from Dr Manu'atu's garden, upon instructions from the two senior

academics. We started with the original Kakala processes of Toli, Tui, and Luva and we completed the Kakala research framework with the addition of Teu, Malie, and Mafana. In some ways, the process of stringing the Kakala research framework was very much like that of any other group of women making garlands. For me, as the apprentice, it was an exciting process of re-thinking about education, about research, and about being Tongan. It was my own personal re-education as I worked with these two academics in search of a research framework that would capture the reality and the truth about our world view. The Kakala research framework was a space that would allow us to be who we are, with all of our insights, knowledge, experiences, and inherited gifts and to position ourselves where we belong without shame or pretence. It is from this position as a researcher that we can do justice to our world view and to present an accurate account of what and who we really are.

Rationale For a New Research Framework

In 2006, the Institute of Education took up a research project, funded by NZAid at the time, to study how education can help alleviate poverty. It was rumoured that the project had been given to the University of the South Pacific (USP) but no one really wanted to conduct the study. As the "new kid on the block" I was given the project with instructions to "redesign and make it look Pacific". I was encouraged to think like a Pacific person and make sure that the proposal reflected the reality of our context; to re-conceptualise from my context. This took many meetings with the Institute of Education's director at the time, Dr 'Ana Taufe'ulungaki, and with Professor Konai Thaman; many meetings of re-educating, re-conceptualising, re-thinking, and re-designing the whole research process and the key variables of the study. We wanted a research approach that would capture the reality of Pacific people's livelihoods, a research approach that would find answers rather than further describe problems. So, rather than looking for more problems, we turned the research approach to focus on what strategies and processes are currently working; how is education being used to alleviate poverty and how are people living sustainable livelihoods. From experience we collectively knew that there were many people living perfectly sustainable livelihoods in the Pacific, with less than US$1.00 per day (the common criteria for defining poverty). But how dowe capture this reality? And more importantly, as Pacific researchers we asked how we could uphold the honour of our people in the research process. We were certainly not keen on asking people to "describe their state of poverty".

To re-think the whole notion of "education" and "poverty" required us to re-conceptualise from our own source of knowledge system. It required us to dig deep into our own Tongan knowledge system, values, and experiences. To think like a Pacific researcher, you must first learn to think as a Tongan (in my case), or as a Fijian, a Maori Cook Islander, a Malaitan or Ni-Vanuatu; to think first from your own cultural context via the language of the place with questions, such as, what does

this mean in my context, how do we do this in my village, or do we do this at all, why and why not? Re-conceptualisation is a process of thinking from your context, not about translating some foreign ideas into your context – that is just translation. To re-conceptualise is to dig deep before you can emerge with old traditional knowledge but newly crafted in a contemporary setting. This is in line with social constructivism, where we are given space to think from our own context, to construct the world as we know it from our experiences, observed facts, and reality.

Once we started re-conceptualising the key variables of the study – "poverty" and "education" – we knew that the traditional Western methods of research would not be sufficient to capture a traditional knowledge system that was most often difficult to access. We needed to gain participants' trust, and to value their time and skills and willingness to share their traditional knowledge system with our field researchers. We need to widen the scope, to open up our traditional ways of doing research, so that we could fully capture the traditional knowledge system of our participants. We needed a research approach that would enable our participants to trust us, to see the study as useful for them, and that would honour their knowledge, skills, and values that we wouldask of them. We needed a research approach that would fully recognise their values, their beliefs, and their way of life.

The traditional knowledge system for each of our Pacific cultures is located within a definite paradigm, with its own particular philosophy, processes, and structures. Often, these traditional systems are treated at most superficially, and almost always, studied through the eyes of non-Pacific researchers. From as early as the 17th century explorers recordings of our cultures, our traditional knowledge systems have been partially understood at best, misrepresented and often relegated to knowledge that is "interesting" with little value to contemporary life. Yet, we who live in the region know that there are villages and island communities that are thriving and living sustainable livelihoods by utilising the skills and knowledge –traditional knowledge systems –passed down from generation to generation.

We needed a research framework that would no longer confine and bind us to pretend that we are outsiders in our own context. The research framework that we wished to design would allow us as insiders to beinsiders, studying our own people, our own knowledge system. A research framework was needed that would allow us to access and capture the authenticity of our traditional knowledge system in its intended form, structure, and processes. It was out of this need that we then developed the *Kakala* Research Framework for the pilot of a study on sustainable livelihood and education.

Kakala Research Framework

The *Kakala* research framework consists of six key components; *Teu, Toli, Tui, Luva, Malie,* and *Mafana.*

The *Kakala* research framework was originally piloted using the Sustainable Livelihood and Education in the Pacific project (SLEP) with the framework being piloted in the field work conducted in Tonga. The SLEP study was later used as a guide to conduct similar studies in Nauru and in Marshall Islands. In both cases, field researchers from Nauru and Marshall Islands developed their own research framework to guide their work. Findings from the SLEP study have been published elsewhere (Taufe`ulungaki, Fua, et. al 2007; Fua, 2009). The main outcome of the SLEP study has been its input into the new Curriculum framework for the Tonga Primary school curriculum introduced to schools in2012.

The *Kakala* research framework has also been used in many other research projects in Tonga, particularly with projects at community level, including the Tonga Police National consultation in 2009, National Domestic Violence study 2009-2010, Profile of School Leadership for Tongan Schools 2010-2012, and the National Consultation on Teacher Professional Development 2010-2011. The *Kakala* research framework continues to be used by emerging researchers in Tonga, but much remains to be explored with this research framework which belongs to all Tongans.

Teu

Teu basically means to prepare, it is the preparatory stage before the work begins. It is a time for conceptualising, designing, and planning for the work ahead. In this stage we ask such questions such as: how do we define it? What does it mean for us? What is our source of conceptualisation? Who? Why? We refer to this stage as the conceptualisation stage.

Toli

Toli means to pick a flower, or choose an object. It is commonly used in reference to picking flowers or fruits. When picking flowers for a garland, the flowers are purposely selected and carefully picked depending on the design that has been chosen during the *Teu* stage. It is a critical stage in the research process; all else depends on the *Toli* stage. In the research process this is the data collection stage. Just as young girls gather flowers from different gardens around the village, field researchers will need to know how to approach participants and seek information. As such the process of data collection and the ethics used to access the knowledge are critical to obtaining authentic and accurate data. In the *Toli* stage, we also developed Tongan research tools of *Talanoa* and *Nofo* and clarified Tongan research ethics.

Tui

Tui has several meanings in the Tongan language, including "belief", "knee" and to "string a garland". In the Kakala research framework, Tui is used to refer to the analy-

sis stage of the research process. Tui in a garland process always follows a particular pattern in accordance with the event and the person that the garland is intended for. In a research analysis process, we are looking for patterns in the data, as we look for similarities, variations, and new emerging patterns in the data. As in the garland process, the Tui process is also a collective process involving the senior women stringing the garland and the young girls who gather the flowers. It is not uncommon to send the girls out again to gather more flowers, or gather another type of flower or leaves to complete the desired pattern. It is also common to change the pattern originally planned, as the flowers for the planned pattern may not be available or sufficient to complete the pattern. There is a process of negotiation and correction between the women stringing the garlands and the girls picking the flowers. Similarly, the research analysis process is a process of negotiation, passing of information, and readjusting initial plans depending on the information received from the field researchers. In the research analysis the field researchers and the principal researcher are all involved in the analysis process. During this stage, we asked such questions as: does the information make sense? What is the context behind the context? Where is the solution? Are emerging solutions meaningful, sustainable strategies for addressing real problems?

Luva

Luva means a gift from the heart. To *Luva* a gift usually means that the gift is given with heartfelt sincerity, humility, and honour. It is also associated with the notion that much work and sacrifice has been required to create the gift being given. In the *Kakala* research process, the *Luva* process refers to the reporting and dissemination stage, signalling a process of returning the gift of knowledge to the people who had given the knowledge. The main purpose of the *Luva* process is to honour those who have given their knowledge, who have participated in the study. The report, the outcome, and the dissemination of the findings of the study must firstly benefit the lives of those who have participated in the study. As such, the reporting process must give voice to Pacific people, and the report is done with care, with respect and always to protect Pacific knowledge systems, ensuring that it serves the needs of Pacific people.

Malie

Malie is said when an audience appreciates a performance; it is an expression of "bravo" or "well done". It means that the audience, at least in the Tongan protocols for performing arts, has not only understood, but appreciates the inter-play between the music, the dance, the costumes, and the performers. It is a response from the audience about the performance that provides encouragement and support for the performers. In order to appreciate a performance in the Tongan context, it normally

requires a certain level of understanding of the music, the costume, the performers, and the expressions of the story being performed. This means that there is a shared understanding between the audience and the performers and when this is executed well, there is *Malie*. For the *Kakala* research framework this a point where we evaluate the whole research process, asking such questions such as: Was it useful? Was it worthwhile? Who was it useful for? and Who benefited from the research process? Were the *Talanoa* sessions meaningful, honest, exciting, and worthwhile? Did it make sense? Did it serve the needs of our communities and was the process meaningful? The evaluation process of the *Kakala* research framework happens throughout the research process, rather than at the end. It involves constantly monitoring the research process from the conceptualisation stage to the data collection to the analysis stage. It is an ongoing process of monitoring the research process against the key ideas of utility, applicability, and relevancy to the context.

Mafana

Mafana refers to warmth, something that is heartfelt and has touched one emotionally. In the context of a Tongan performance, one observes *Mafana*, when a member of the audience, in the appreciation of the performance, joins the performers, either dancing with them or putting money or *tapa* cloth around a performer. The moment of transition from being a mere spectator to being part of the performance is a moment of great exhilaration, of *Mafana* and willingness to be part of something exciting. *Mafana*, then, is seen as the final evaluation process of the *Kakala* research framework, where we seek whether transformation, and application and sustainability of the transformation, has taken place. It is the moment when the researcher and the knowledge giver are both transformed and in that transformation they have created a new solution or a new understanding to an existing problem. And part of that transformation is the willingness to step forward and be part of the solution or be part of the movement towards reaching that solution. This transformation phase is also empowering and recognises people's ability to resolve their own problems. In the evaluation process of the *Kakala* research framework we ask such questions as: Were the outputs practical and sustainable? Were the participants transformed, empowered to make real changes? What were the impacts and results of the process on the researcher and those that participated in the research process?

Tongan Research Tools

In developing the *Kakala* research framework it also became evident that the traditional Western research tools of interview and observation were not sufficient to fully capture the dynamics of the Tongan traditional system. It was also recognised that the use of interview and observation were not sufficient to gather authentic, rich descriptive data from our own context. We re-examined the use of the *Talanoa* as a

research tool and found that the process needed refinement and clearer guidelines for the intended field researchers. Additionally, we recognised that even through *Talanoa* we do not always find the most accurate picture. Therefore, we formulated a new research tool, *Nofo*, as a way to complement the *Talanoa* tool. I have published more detailed description of *Talanoa* and *Nofo* elsewhere (Fua, 2010; Fua, 2009) and therefore will only give a brief description here.

Talanoa

Talanoa is generic term referring to a conversation, chat, sharing of ideas and talking with someone. It is term that is shared by Tongans, Samoans, and Fijians. *Talanoa* can be formal, as between chiefs and his or her people, and it can be informal, as between friends in a kava circle. *Talanoa* is also used for different purposes; to teach a skill, to share ideas, to preach, to resolve problems, to build and maintain relationships, and to gather information. As *Talanoa* is context specific, the language and behaviour used in a *Talanoa* can change with the context and the people that are involved in it. But most importantly, *Talanoa* is a skill, with associated knowledge about usage, form, and purposes. The skill of *Talanoa* is embedded in the values and the behaviour that are associated with the *Talanoa*, and it is the context of the particular *Talanoa* that determines the appropriate behaviours and values for it.

When we used *Talanoa* in the *Kakala* research framework there were several features that were made obvious.

Talanoa is used as research tool – not a research framework, or a research approach, but a tool that fits the qualitative research approach. *Talanoa* operates from a constructivist perspective where knowledge is socially constructed through the process of *Talanoa*.

Talanoa is used mainly for data collection and data analysis.

Talanoa is not an interview, but a shift in thinking from semi-structured interview; it is seen as the loosest type of data gathering tool. *Talanoa* approaches the participant with an idea that the participant is asked to muse, to reflect upon, to talk about, to critique, to argue, to confirm, and express their conceptualisation in accordance with their beliefs and experiences.

Talanoa, most importantly, requires *Fanongo* or deep listening and feeling/ sensing. *Fanongo* is the role of the researcher in a *Talanoa* session. The researcher is required to *Fanongo*, not only to the words being spoken but also to the silences, to the implied meanings, and the shared understandings. *Fanongo* is a critical skill for the researcher to have in order to generate, encourage, and contribute to the *Talanoa* in such a way that would allow the participant to clarify their conceptualisation.

Talanoa is also naturalistic in nature, requiring the researcher to be fully immersed in the context. This is why the language of the *Talanoa* should be in the language of the participant, not the researcher. This also means that the setting of the *Talanoa* should be in the participant's most natural setting. If it is a *Talanoa* about fishing,

the most natural setting would, of course, be out in the sea using the language of the fisherman. This also means that *Talanoa* is limited by neither time nor space. The context of the *Talanoa* determines the time and the context.

Finally, *Talanoa* should be recognised as a skill with particular guiding principles. For *Talanoa* to be effective in the Tongan context, the researcher needs to observe the basic principles of *faka`apa`apa* (respect), *loto fakatokilalo* (humility), *fe`ofa`aki* (love, compassion) and *feveitokai* (caring, generosity). These principles are the guide for conducting effective *Talanoa*.

Nofo

Nofo refers to "reside" or to "stay". We used *Nofo* as a compleimentary research tool for *Talanoa*, whereby the researcher takes an emic perspective and goes to live and experience the lives of the participants. The *Nofo* method is in line with auto-ethnographic tradition of inquiry.

When *Nofo* is used as a research tool, several features are made obvious.

In using *Nofo*, a researcher is engaged in observation, participant observation and *Talanoa*, as the researcher is immersed in the context. *Nofo* is also heavily reliant on adopting the most appropriate ethical conduct in a given context. Pacific cultures are rich in protocols and as relationship is at its most fundamental social fabric, behaving appropriately is most critical in gaining access to a place and gaining trust of people. *Nofo* is also very flexible and adaptable to the purpose of the research; it can be carried out in a village setting, a school setting, or work place. *Nofo* can also vary in time and the duration that a researcher may spend in a certain context varies. Similarly, *Nofo* can be done continuously in one particular setting or a series of *Nofo* sessions spread over time.

When *Nofo* is used in combination with *Talanoa*, data collected is rich and descriptive, and data saturation is reached quickly in the field work. *Nofo* has also proven to provide additional information to *Talanoa* and as a way to validate information gathered through *Talanoa*. When *Nofo* and *Talanoa* are used together, it allows the researcher to quickly understand the context of the participants and to provide in-depth analysis of the context because of their experience. However, it should also be noted that to use both *Talanoa* and *Nofo* is demanding for any field researcher.

Since the pilot in Tonga, *Talanoa* and *Nofo*, have been used in Fiji, Samoa, Marshall Islands, and Nauru by other Pacific researchers.

Tongan Research Ethics

When using the *Kakala* research framework – and particularly when using *Talanoa* and *Nofo* as research tools –it becomes critical to re-examine the research ethics being utilised to conduct the research. In common practice, the research ethics utilised for

most traditional research comply with the requirements of the University or funding agency. This requires filling in a number of forms and a series meetings of the research ethics committees before a research study is permitted to begin. In this approach to research ethics, the primary concern is to protect the university and the researcher, and the participants to a lesser degree.

When using the *Kakala* research framework, *Talanoa,* and *Nofo*a context specific research ethics is required for several reasons.

To access knowledge, particularly traditional knowledge systems that can often be protected and guarded by families, it is critical that the right ethical conduct is applied in order to gain trust. As most Pacific people know, there is some knowledge that can be easily shared and other knowledge that is *tapu* to outsiders. With the right ethical conduct, a researcher can build relationships that will establish trust and thus gain access to information that participants are willing to share. Understanding ethics also means that, as a researcher, one knows when to respect and leave *tapu* knowledge alone.

Appropriate ethical conduct also means that as researchers we work to ensure that any knowledge gathered is authentic and accurate. Given Pacific people's tendency to tell "stories", and particularly for Tongans to talk in metaphors, it is critical that the researchers know how to engage participants in such a way that the knowledge given is authentic and is understood within the context that it is given.

Most important when considering context specific ethical conduct, is to ensure that knowledge gathered is used for the benefit of the participants, those who have given their knowledge.

Some of the key features of Tongan research ethics are as follows:

Ethical conduct of a researcher is lived by the researcher, not just for the field work, but in their everyday lives. As we live in small communities, potentialparticipants judge researchers as persons belonging to a community, rather than just researchers.

Ethical conduct for each context is defined by the cultural and customs of that context.

Research process is constantly monitored according to the research ethics of the researchers. The ethical procedure is not completed at the beginning of the research project forgotten during the process.

Ethical conduct not only guides the relationship between the researcher and the participants, but also the relationship between researchers.

The researcher is held accountable to the participants.

The core research ethics for Tonga are founded upon *faka'apa'apa* (respect), *loto fakatokilalo* (humility), *fe'ofa'aki* (love, compassion) and *feveitokai* (caring, generosity).

When conducting research in a Pacific context, we have for too long relied on Pacific people's generosity with their time and their knowledge and have neglected to re-examine our behaviour as Pacific researchers. If we want to value Pacific knowledge, it is important that as Pacific researchers we apply a more rigorous standard in ourselves and others who choose to do research in our region.

Tuli E Malie – Transformational Sustainable Application

Ultimately, at the end of every research process we have to ask, was it all worth it? The big "so what" question. The questions for us as researchers who have used the *Kakala* research framework are: Was it worth designing a new research framework and one in particular for Tongan context? Could we have gathered the same information if we had used "mainstream" Western research frameworks and methods? The answer, is quite simply, no, we would not have been able to access traditional knowledge systems shared with us amongst villages, nor would have gathered more information than expected.

The *Kakala* research framework and the use of *Talanoa* and *Nofo* with associated Tongan ethical conduct, allowed the research team to access traditional knowledge rarely shared in research. The findings from the research published elsewhere (Taufe'ulungaki et.al, 2007) show new understandings of poverty, sustainable livelihoods, and expectations of education for Tongans. Findings from the study revealed understandings that are in alignment and in agreement with what we also know to be what is lived and practiced in Tongan context. One of the significant findings of the research project was the Tongan conceptualisation of sustainable livelihood in *mo'ui fakapotopoto*, referring to a holistic approach to life that encompasses physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. It was also revealed in the study that "poverty" in the Tongan context is measured by one's behaviour, with *masiva he anga*, lacking the appropriate behaviour, being regarded as the most extreme form of poverty. Another significant finding of the research project was the identification of an emerging framework for Tongan learning style.

However, perhaps most important is the impact of the research study on revising the Tonga Primary school curriculum and the impact on the 40 field researchers who were part of the *Kakala* research framework. The 40 field researchers who took part in this research project are now teachers and have continued to participate in research projects from time to time. Their experiences as field researchers using the *Kakala* research framework have been opportunities for them to refine their thinking about education and their role as teachers in Tonga's education system. Those who participated in the study demonstrated their *mafana* in being part of the study, by giving gifts to the field researchers at the completion of the study. Primary school children are now enjoying new subjects that include design and technology, music, and Tongan culture and customs. The hope is that the new curriculum will encour-

age more children to learn skills that will enable them live sustainably in their island communities.

Today the *Kakala* research framework is being taught at the Tonga Institute of Education with a research manual detailing the *Kakala* research framework available to all teachers in Tonga (Fua, 2010).

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