

Whippy, K. (2010, November 22-24). *An exploration of the Indigenous Fijian perspectives on “sciencing” in the early years: preliminary thoughts*. Teacher Education Conference. Fiji National University (FNU) campus: Lautoka, Fiji.

### Abstract

This paper explores Indigenous iTaukei Fijian perspectives on “sciencing” in the early years, with particular attention to the concept of *Vakatatalo* as a culturally grounded pedagogy for children’s learning and meaning-making. Rather than viewing science as a fixed body of Western knowledge, “sciencing” is understood as an active process of observing, questioning, exploring, testing ideas, and learning through lived experience.<sup>1</sup> Within Indigenous Fijian contexts, young children engage in sciencing through everyday participation in village and family life such as fishing, planting, food preparation, weather reading, storytelling, and caring for land and sea. These experiences reflect the principles of *Vakatatalo*, where learning occurs through relationships, shared participation, careful observation, imitation, dialogue, and collective responsibility. Moreso, the paper argues that *Vakatatalo* provides an important lens for understanding how Indigenous Fijian children develop scientific thinking in ways that are holistic, relational, and culturally meaningful. Through this framework, children learn to notice patterns in nature, solve practical problems, predict outcomes, and understand the interconnectedness of people, environment, spirituality, and community wellbeing. Such perspectives challenge narrow classroom-based notions of early science education and reposition Indigenous knowledge systems as valid and valuable foundations for learning. The paper further suggests that early childhood curricula in Fiji should move beyond imported models by embedding *Vakatatalo*, Indigenous language, and community knowledge into science learning experiences. As a preliminary exploration, this discussion opens pathways for further research into how Indigenous pedagogies can enrich contemporary understandings of sciencing in the early years.

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<sup>1</sup> National Research Council. (1996). *National Science Education Standards*. National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/4962>