HELIAKI
Transforming Literacy in Tonga Through Metaphor

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In this article, we discuss *heliaki*, the use of metaphoric language in Tonga (Kaeppler, 2007), and its relationship to literacy. Viewing *heliaki* through the lens of critical literacy (Freire & Macedo, 2005), we argue that performances of *heliaki* not only represent an indigenous approach to reading and writing the word/world, but may also exist as a culturally relevant strategy for conducting critique. Recent reports on literacy in Tonga (The World Bank Group, 2012) define and assess Tongan students' literacy rates within a framework largely developed outside of indigenous onto-epistemological orientations to literacy, focusing nearly entirely on functional literacy. Acknowledging the cultural importance and critical potential of *heliaki* can nurture the development of pupils' and teachers' creative, critical literacies, and consciousness (Freire, 1985), providing the impetus for enhanced civic participation and greater social inclusion in Tonga and throughout the Pacific.

Over the years, understandings of, and strategies for, literacy have experienced tremendous change in schools, both in "Western" more-developed countries and in the Pacific. In addition to the multiple theories framing literacy development come a number of interpretations of the need for literacy and its impact on people's lives. On a historical scale, contemporary definitions and practices for literacy in Tonga are relatively new, with Western-dominated forms of reading text only being introduced in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. However, as evidenced by the impressive literacy rate of Tonga and the emphasis the Tongan Ministry of Education places on reading and writing in schools, literacy is highly regarded and desired. Approaches to literacy in Tonga can be too focused on functional approaches to reading (Mangubhai, 1995). Gee (2001) purports that literacy "cannot be separated from speaking, listening and interacting, on the one hand, or using language to think about and act on the world, on the other (p. 714)" and so in this paper, we attempt to enlarge conceptualizations and discussions of literacy in Tonga to include *heliaki*, a cultural practice utilising metaphor and simile, as a method for developing critical literacy and new approaches to literacy practices. By using indigenous cultural practices in reappropriating functional inter-

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pretations of literacy, we re-envision *heliaki* and reading as critically informed practices that complement critical investigations of the social, cultural, economic and political contradictions present in the everyday experiences of people living in Tonga. Through a hybrid conceptualization of *heliaki* and critical literacy practices in schools, we hope to demonstrate how teachers and students in Tonga can employ indigenous language practices in reading the/their word/world.

HELIAKI

European missionaries introduced the literary culture to Tonga through Western forms of schooling and training in the early 18th century. The ability to read and write was vital to missionaries' efforts to persuade indigenous people to abandon their beliefs, traditions and religious practices and embrace Christianity. Literacy, and particularly, the ability to read the Bible, was seen as a necessary skill that allowed supposedly uncivilized people to transcend their status as ignorant heathens to that of enlightened disciples of Christ (Latukefu, 2002). Prior to Western interventions, the intergenerational transmission of the realities of the Tongan existence and experience were communicated through the oral tradition. This narrative culture demanded people master oratorical skills. Knowledge of how to navigate the seas, survive what can be at times harsh and inhospitable conditions, farming and fishing was passed down verbally through direct instruction, storytelling and forms of metaphor and simile.

In addition to narratives of the physical realities in Tonga, social relationships and the development and management of social institutions were maintained by language and discursive practices. The complex hierarchy of the various social classes were constructed, maintained and promoted through the oratorical skills of authority figures such as the king, his *matapule* (chiefs) and *punake* (the king's poet). Even after the intervention of Western

missionaries, language remained as an organizational factor in keeping the royal family and their extended relations prominently situated in positions of authority and influence. The king now had a queen, princes and princesses. Some *matapules*, and the extended family and social favorites of the king, became nobles— lords and ladies, modeled somewhat after Georgian and Victorian practices of British society.

Oratory was and still is important in Tonga as both an art and social practice possessing an aesthetic, political and cultural dynamic. Oratory skills are perfected through apprenticeships in cultural and social activities like funerals, weddings, and other gatherings. The status of these skills is also promoted and confirmed through the structures and institutions that attend to these practices. One of these oral skills is *heliaki*. Kaeppler (2007) defines *heliaki* as a

> means to say one thing but mean another, and it requires skill based on cultural knowledge to carry out. *Heliaki* is manifested in metaphor and layers of meaning and is developed by skirting a subject and approaching it repeatedly from different point of views. Encoding hidden meanings and unravelling them layer by layer until they can be understood requires considerable creative skill and imagination. (p. 65)

Master orators are people with expert knowledge of local histories, families' genealogies and social connections. These commentators have an aplomb for public speaking. The speeches and *heliaki* they employ are methods for reaffirming, reminding and reacquainting people with familial associations, relationships and the hierarchical organization of Tongan society. In social gatherings, such as the formal presentation of gifts in funerals or weddings, there is a shift from the everyday Tongan language to a metaphorical level of communication using *heliaki*. This creates an additional challenge for younger generations and outsiders as the metaphorical language and obscured references can be difficult to inter-

pret and understand. Considerable "insider" knowledge, particularly genealogical and historical knowledge, is required to correctly interpret the *heliaki* used by the orators, and it is doubtful those not familiar with Tongan culture or social practices who listen to or read the English transcripts of these *heliaki* could accurately or appropriately interpret them.

Apart from the Tongan Bible, most Tongan texts available for students are songs and poems by local artists and poets. These texts are full of *heliaki*, and a critical approach to literacy could enable students to examine and challenge the "taken-for-granted" aspects of the narratives organizing their understanding of the contemporary circumstances. The development of critical literacy in Tonga can encourage students to question, critique and challenge the status quo in an effort to redefine social structures, interaction and to reduce social inequality in Tongan society. Shor (1999) maintains that "when we are critically literate, we examine our ongoing development, to reveal the subjective positions from which we make sense of the world and act in it" (para. 4). This is a challenge for literacy training in Tonga because students are taught to read a text, but not necessarily to reason through and read a text critically. Critical literacy is defined by Coffey (2009) as "the ability to read texts in an active, reflective manner in order to better understand power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships" (para. 1). This is the most significant aspect of literacy that is absent from approaches to reading in Tonga. For any particular text, students should be taught to know who the author is, why did s/he write the text, who is the intended audience, whose voice is represented, whose voices are silenced, what issues of power represented, how are women portrayed, what messages are being sent, and other important aspects.

Previous research on *heliaki* has been grounded in modes of performance including dance, singing, recitation and poetry. Virtually every celebratory occasion in Tonga is marked by these performances. Dance is integral to Tongan culture and functions as both a "gift"

to visitors/royalty/God and as a culturally accepted means of portraying with pride the skills of one's own group (Kaeppler, 1993, p. 1). *Heliaki* is not only a method of artistic expression, but also a means for maintaining social structures and institutions and as a strategy for negotiating social and cultural constructs, including managing family and political relationships. For example, Ad and Lucia Linkels maintain that the intent, function and visual presentation of Tongan dance work together to reaffirm Tongans' collective pledge of loyalty to the existing social order (Linkels & Linkels, 1999, p. 41). Research on *heliaki* has primarily been framed in terms of cultural dance and performance, situating it largely as only a cultural practice of aesthetic and artistic expression. Little research exists acknowledging it as a cultural strategy with political implications, and to our knowledge, no one has envisioned the political character of this practice as a potentially transformative tool in the development of critical literacy and real social change in Tonga. We affirm a critical pedagogy of *heliaki* represents:

> an effort to work within educational institutions and other media to raise questions about inequalities of power, about the false myths of opportunity and merit for many students, and about the way belief systems become internalized to the point where individuals and groups abandon the very aspiration to question or change their lot in life. (Burbules & Berk, 1999)

Critical pedagogies are needed to challenge the assumptions, practices, and outcomes taken for granted in dominant cultures and in conventional education (Gruenewald, 2003). *Heliaki* is one such practice that incorporates a variety of language games that organize power relations and social hierarchy in Tonga. For example, Freire once argued that self-deprecation is an element of a pedagogy of oppression (2006). Typically in Tonga, when the *kakai*, or common people, confront those of a higher social rank, they refer to themselves as unworthy or insignificant beings. Through *heliaki*,

the dehumanization of the individual occurs with commoners often presenting their children as *'uhuki*, or the small offspring of animals to the noble or other higher status individuals. Here, the wider the differences of social rank the more intensely self-deprecation is projected and portrayed. Self-deprecation is an integral characteristic of *heliaki*, where the common people have internalized and accepted the social structure as predetermined, a priori, God-given and God-willed. These designations are reinforced through the powerful, metaphoric rhetoric of politicians, nobles, *matapule* and *feifakau* (preachers), who use *heliaki* with enormous affect, creating persuasive, organizational discourses that operate as regimes of truth (Foucault, 1995) that resist unsophisticated analysis and interpretation. Scholars, activists and politicians, such as Futa Helu and Epeli Hau'ofa, have resisted and struggled against these organizational factors. However, many Tongans seem to accept whatever fortunes or misfortunes they experience because they have been presented with certain discourses—some exercised through the obfuscating practice of *heliaki*, that promote a commonsensical, assumptive worldview that interprets figures and institutions as fixed realities reflecting the absolute and inflexible nature of the world. This continues because, through a multiplicity of social and cultural practices, many have not had opportunities to develop robust, complex and nuanced approaches to literacy and exercises in critical thinking, especially within the context of schooling and literacy training.

The art and practice of *heliaki* remains a central fixture in Tongan culture as both an aesthetically organized expression of Tongan culture and as a symbolically infused ritual for representing and affirming social relationships and interactions. Tonga continues to be one of the most socially stratified cultures in Oceania, and inasmuch as *heliaki* can serve as an effective pedagogy for maintaining the status quo, we also argue for a counterpedagogy in which individuals are armed with the critical acumen necessary to not only reveal the oppressive power exercised through metaphor, but to challenge its existence and strengthen their own interpretation and exercise of the practice.

FORMS OF LITERACY

Perhaps the most influential concept of literacy in schools was developed in the early 1970s. "Functional literacy" assumed literacy existed as an objective set of skills that could be transferred into any social, economic or cultural environment. It also promoted a singular understanding of literacy and the teaching techniques necessary for learners to become literate. However, scholars also argued that literacy practices varied among social and cultural contexts, allowing for a reconceptualization of literacy as a social/cultural practice rather than a technical or functional skill embedded within social settings and framed by cultural practices (Barton, 2001; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1999; Street, 1988, 2000, 2001). With the acknowledgment of these dimensions of literacy, new interpretations sought to include literacy events and practices in the everyday life of people, meaning that individuals experience and negotiate literacy events and practices throughout their everyday lives by mobilizing multiple forms of literacy (Doronilla, 1996) including oral, ecological, political and social literacies. While literacy practices provided a more diversified approach to understanding literacy, some scholars argued an emphasis on local contexts generated a divide between local and global contexts, and that this divide failed to acknowledge factors that contributed to the generation and promulgation of circumstances within the local context (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). In a Pacific setting, these factors include a wide variety of sources including current and postcolonial administrations, religious organizations, and relationships with donor agencies, multinational corporations, global media and technological influences (Collins & Blot, 2003).

Functional interpretations of literacy, and even the inclusion of literacy practices that acknowledge the events and practices of a Tongan social and cultural context, do not take into consideration the need for fluency in understanding the political, social, cultural and economic contradictions Tongan teachers and students face. For example, pupils in Tonga are encouraged to attend school to enhance their economic mobility and self-reliance. Yet many high school, college and even university graduates struggle to find steady, reasonable employment. While teachers may discuss economic conditions with their pupils, few engage in critical discussions of the sociological factors contributing to high rates of unemployment. This may be due to a number of reasons including an absence of critical perspectives in teacher training, resistance to critique within the school setting stemming from cultural attitudes toward critical perspectives, and the complex, cultural practices that frame social interaction in Tonga, such as *faka'apa'apa*, which is the expressing of respect that is "fundamentally about honoring and protecting the dignity of the other" (Johansson-Fua, 2007, p. 677). This practice is promoted through a relational discourse focusing on the "collective good over the individual" (Johansson-Fua, 2007, p. 769). Framed within a discourse of social cohesion, *faka'apa'apa* promotes the exercise of deference and respect. These practices organize the performance of relationships of authority between students and teachers, schools and government institutions, and government offices and development partners, with the organisational outcome often leading to a paralysis of dialectical discussions and critique.

In regard to specific texts provided for students, literacy approaches in Tongan schools fail to accommodate considerations of the interests of the authors, the representations of the characters, places and events or the position and circumstances of the readers.

In Tonga, literacy is strongly associated with personal economic mobility and security, as well as an aspect of national pride. We argue

the power of literacy lies not only in the ability to read and write, but also in the process of analysis, interpretation and reflection that informs one's ontological position and relationship to the organizational practices and discourses that permeate the social reality of everyday life. In many cases, the circumstances of literate individuals may improve through mastering existing forms of literacy taught in Tongan schools, but the amelioration of these circumstances is circumscribed by commonsensical assumptions of the world that are institutionalized by prevalent discourses that obfuscate certain social, political and cultural contradictions at work in people's lives. Enlarging concepts of literacy in Tonga to include critical literacy, or the reading of the word/world (Freire & Macedo, 2005), can engage individuals in the exercise of a critical consciousness (Freire, 2006), a process in which one seeks to reveal and understand:

> the contradictions that exist between the way people make meaning of their world and the way the world is materially organ through the structures and institutions and codes of social life and a desire to take action that brings about greater levels of human emancipation and enhanced social inclusion. (Quantz, 2009, p. 2)

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND LITERACY

In his work in adult literacy, Freire countered the assumed efficacy of certain literacy campaigns with a critique that revealed the "authoritarian nature of most attempts to provide a literacy called 'basic' or 'functional'" (Freire & Macedo, 2005), but this critique does not appear to have traveled fully intact to the shores of Pacific island countries. Development partners who continue to mount literacy campaigns in the Pacific fail to embrace Freire's mandate that literacy must engage the reality of people's lives and reflect the social, cultural, economic and politic elements of their lived circumstances. The latest reading

materials in the curriculum developed by the Tongan Curriculum Development Unit in conjunction with New Zealand Aid now include representations of Tongan people and culture rather than Eurocentric actors and events. For example, students can read about Kolomitoni and Siofilisi as they harvest *'ufi* (yam) in the bush, or Hingano and Hengihengi as they prepare to attend the *putu* (funeral) of their uncle. Such episodes reflect a representation of the people and activities of Tongan culture, but do not necessarily allow Tongan students to critically engage the representations presented in the written word set against the realities of their lived world. As with all narratives, each of the episodes included in reading materials in Tongan schools contain representations of Tongan people and settings constructed from particular orientations to Tongan-ness. These materials contain ideological factors and assumptions of what it means to be Tongan and to live in Tongan society. Functional orientations to literacy fail to accommodate teachers' and pupils' ability to critically investigate these representations and consider the discourses that shape the structure of Tongan social relations and their concomitant inequities.

Reading curricula in Tonga are still situated within the domain of the instructor. Teachers are provided with materials, methods and exercises that stipulate specific steps for students for students to follow when confronted with a text (The World Bank Group, 2012), a text that contains commonly understood elements and representations of Tongan culture, but without the express call to engage a text critically, literacy training fails to encourage a (a) dialogic relationship between teacher and student comprised of reading, sharing, interpreting and constructing meaning of the text and (b) discussions incorporating traditional approaches to negotiating language, power and social relationships in Tonga. Current relationships with donor agencies developing "new" reading initiatives seem to only recycle technical treatments of literacy developed within the discourse of hyperstandardized and exam-

driven environments of further-developed countries like the United States and United Kingdom. These discourses are then exported along with these programs to developing countries as educational panaceas. However, these "new" approaches do not fully encompass the potential of critical literacy in the lives of Tongan students.

> In the epistemologically mechanistic, test-driven, standardized, and scripted classrooms of the present era students learn that school is not connected to the world around them. They learn that there is nothing complex or problematic about knowledge—it is produced by faceless experts and it is our job as students to learn it. (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 12)

What is needed is the transformation of concepts of literacy in Tonga. This transformation must accommodate critical perspectives situated within the reality of Tongan students' and teachers' lived circumstances that utilize culturally relevant methods of exploration and indigenously appropriate forms of analysis and interpretation, while still considering the realization of local and global interests. In other words, not only must a conceptualization of literacy in Tonga shift from functional approaches to new literacy practices, but those practices must shift from being socially situated to becoming socially oriented work (Gee, 2000).

Much of Freire's work continues to cause educators and policy makers to reexamine definitions of literacy and how the concept is politicized and mobilized in schools. His work inspires teachers who adopt a critical perspective to question how we understand literacy, what we ask students to do in the name of literacy and why it matters. Most important, Freire challenged approaches to literacy that remained unquestioned and were assumed to address the notion of literacy in its entirety, "The notion that literacy is a matter of learning the standard language still informs the vast majority of literacy programs and manifests its logic in the renewed emphasis on technical reading and writing skills" (Freire & Macedo,

2005, p. 98). His distinctive understanding of the political nature of literacy and literacy policies informed his unique reconceptualization of literacy that expanded concepts of reading far beyond the limits of traditionalized, mechanistic approaches to interpreting texts.

> For the notion of literacy to become meaningful it has to be situated within a theory of cultural production and viewed as an integral part of the way in which people produce, transform, and reproduce meaning. Literacy must be seen as a medium that constitutes and affirms the historical and existential moments of lived experience that produce a subordinate or a lived culture. (Freire & Macedo, 2005. p. 98)

In developing emancipative literacy, Freire and Macedo (2005) renounced literacy as a teacher-mandated process of interpreting written symbols on a page that presented an official representation of what was worth reading and worth knowing. Instead, they introduced a theory of literacy that not only enabled readers to develop functional skills in reading, but also provided them with theoretical spaces in which they could engage in the development of their political literacy and engagement of a critical consciousness. When understood from this perspective,

> literacy becomes a meaningful construct to the degree that it is viewed as a set of practices that functions to either empower or disempower people. In the larger sense, literacy is analysed according to whether it serves to reproduce existing social formations or serves as a set of cultural practices that promotes democratic and emancipatory change. (Freire & Macedo, 2005, p. 98)

This concept of critical literacy emerged from the practices of a caring, critical pedagogue working with the "peasants" of Brazil through a dialogic approach featuring the acknowledgment, engagement and critique of their existential realities. In short, critical literacy emerged as a process for developing a critical consciousness that interrogates students' lived

experiences and the discourses offering representations of, and orientations to, the learner's world (Freire & Macedo, 2005). Critics have addressed Freire's work with the Brazilian "peasantry," particularly in regard to his assumptions of their knowledge (Berger, 1974), claims of their alleged lack of critical perspectives (Epstein & Erwin, 1972) and Freire's abstract and male-oriented, elitist reporting of his work (Fetterman, 1986), but these critiques do not undermine a critical pedagogy. Rather, they can serve as the means through which critical pedagogy is better theorized, performed and evaluated. They provide opportunities for clarification of the conceptualisation and development of critical literacy, rather than an excoriation or nullification of the potential in Freire's work or critical pedagogy as a whole.

Discussions regarding the need for adolescents to develop their capacity as critical consumers and producers of texts continue to emerge from research into reconceptualizing literacy (Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000; Smith, 2014a). However, even with the increasing exposure to texts (and other forms of media) through the expansion of Internet access, new approaches to literacy for students in the Pacific is lacking. Further complicating this scenario is the understanding that classrooms, no matter how they are organized or negotiated, are sites of contestation and conflict. Epistemological claims, the clashing of perspectives, ideas and beliefs about what knowledge is, why and how it should be known and—who makes these decisions, are ever-present elements of curriculum and schooling. Current methods of instruction in Tonga, emerging from histories of postcolonial administration, organized by *faka'-apa'apa* and relying on authoritarian control, seek to diffuse and neutralize such conflict.

A critical pedagogy for literacy in Tonga adopts an understanding of teaching and learning that holds classrooms as epistemologically heterogeneous, possessing a variety of approaches to knowing and being known. The diversity of knowing and how such knowledge

is gained (denied), expressed (oppressed) and revealed (obscured) is central to conducting a critical pedagogy. To this point we close this section with the reminder that a critical pedagogy must "appreciate a variety of perspectives on the way knowledge is produced and deployed" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 10)—a view that is sympathetic to Tongan cultural discourses of *faka'apa'apa* (authoritative respect), *lototō* (humility), *mamahi'i me'a* (loyalty) and *tauhi vā* (reciprocity). From this perspective, we argue a critical pedagogy of *heliaki* can be used as an appropriate and potentially powerful practice for knowing and being known in Tonga.

APPROACHES TO LITERACY IN TONGA

Literacy is a contested term, particularly in the Pacific where it not only encapsulates an ability to read and comprehend written texts, but also students becoming "well versed in the ins and outs of their indigenous/local cultures and languages" (Puamau & Pene, 2007, p. xiv). In Tonga an emphasis on reading, especially in the Tongan language, is on the increase yet a great number of students continue to have little access to books or written materials either in Tongan or English outside of their schooling experience. While access to the written word via the Internet has improved, current approaches to literacy in the Tongan language depend on written materials and texts produced by donor agencies, the Curriculum Development Unit (which receives considerable funding from donor agencies) and teachers rather than student-generated texts or "unofficial" texts existing outside of the school curriculum. The prominence of officially produced texts in reading instruction reflects the overall conceptualization of literacy in Tonga as a technical problem that can be solved through a limited, functional approach to reading and writing.

Over the years, Pacific scholars have drawn attention to concerns regarding traditional knowledge and practices in education by calling for a "reenvisioning" of education in the Pacific consisting of strategies situating indigenous philosophies, ontoepistemological elements and research frameworks at the heart of the development of culturally relevant and responsible curricula, including concepts of educational leadership and contextually grounded strategies for organizing and delivering education (Helu, 1999; Johansson-Fua, 2007, 2009; Manu'atu & Kepa, 2002, 2003, 2008; L. Smith, 1999; K. Smith, 2013a; Thaman, 1995, 1998, 2003). In response, Pacific educators have engaged in work to promote and support indigenous content and perspectives in the development of curriculum, with much of this work promoting an emphasis on curriculum content, methods of teaching, and bilingual and Tongan medium instruction (Taufe'ulungaki, 2005). These are important components of curriculum development, with the expectation being that students will positively respond to these components in ways that affirm the distinctiveness and relevancy of a particular identity and place, and resist the further marginalization of their respective cultures (Smith, 2014b).

However, even with these new perspectives on education as a whole, approaches to literacy in Tonga remain squarely within the domain of donor agencies and the practices exercised and deployed by members of the Tonga Ministry of Education. Of course, Tongan educators and policy makers possess their own orientation to literacy and their interests can be represented by the donor agencies. However, in order for Tonga to receive the resources necessary to address literacy, it must accept certain provisions established by the donor agencies that provide funding and supposed "expert knowledge." Local government and ministry officials remain active in seeking to promote Tongan culture and knowledge, and these interventions encourage donors to consider the lives of Pacific people in the instructional and reading materials they develop, but these actions still do not construct a fully developed or robust orientation to literacy within a Ton-

gan context. Nor do they guarantee nuanced understandings of the social, cultural, and political circumstances of Tongan society, circumstances that can respond in various and even unexpected ways to particular conceptions of literacy and literacy practices. Collaborations between the Tonga Ministry of Education and various agency partners bring about new questions regarding the representation of Pacific people, culture and knowledge, as well as who decides how these elements are produced and distributed. Just as important, questions arise as to how methods and instructional practices in Tongan schools are developed and implemented, and whether these practices accommodate indigenous philosophies of education and the ontological and epistemological distinctiveness that undergird them.

Challenges to the development of culturally relevant educational experiences for pupils in Tonga exist in material forms, such as a lack of funding and academic resources, inadequate school infrastructure and maintenance, and structural and institutional practices within Tongan culture and society. Again, problems emerge from performances of *faka'apa'apa* as culturally significant institutions, such as religious bodies, the aristocracy and even schools, interpret *faka'apa'apa* from an authoritarian, rather than authoritative, perspective. When this occurs, instruction that may lead some to question the power and influence of these institutions may be interpreted as an affront to *faka'apa'apa* and a disruption to the collective good. Equally important is the respect shown to non-Tongans, especially from donor agencies. In these cases, Tongans working with 'outsiders' may feel constrained by *faka'apa'apa* and allow irrelevant or less-impactful policies and practices to be established in schools because a critique disrespects the "outsider" and by association, the Tongan.

In this article, we suggest Tongan education faces a particular challenge in that its approach to schooling, and especially concepts and practices for developing literacy, fail to enable pupils (and teachers) to engage in critical investigations of the circumstances of life in schools and Tongan society in general. While the ability to interpret letters on a page is a crucial skill, the ability to understand the discourses and practices that organize the material aspects of Tongan society—an ability developed through critical literacy, can transform concepts of literacy (and schooling in general) and have the potential to prepare people for critically informed civic action. In short, Tongan literacy programs are primarily concerned with reading and writing officially produced texts in the anticipation that students will gain fluency in Tongan or English, with the greatest expectation being that their technical proficiency in reading will bring about gainful employment and enhanced social mobility without a viable consideration of the potential enhancement of pupils' social and political participation. This technical approach to literacy is incomplete and suggests a narrowly focused, means-ends approach to literacy training. As Freire warns, "Only someone with a mechanistic mentality … could reduce adult literacy learning to a purely technical action" (Freire, 1985, p. 44), and it is the technically dominated concept of literacy that permeates conversations of literacy in Tongan education.

CRITICAL LITERACY AND HELIAKI

Acknowledging Freire's (1970, 1985) and Shor's (1992) work with "generative themes," we discuss the concept of *heliaki* in a similar tone, and engage it as a supportive practice or framework for learning rather than a topic to be learned. It serves as the medium through which generative themes can be discussed. In this paper, we suggest *heliaki* is a culturally appropriate vehicle for teachers and students to discuss generative themes, and that through this multilayered practice of iterative representations, indirection and innuendo, participants can be provided with opportunities to consider, construct and create critically informed visions of their reality and possible future realities.

Heliaki is conducive to envisagement. Although the use of metaphor and simile are common elements of human language practice, *heliaki* is a Tongan-centric process that informs envisagement and provides one with multiple names, readings and interpretations of the world within a Tongan context utilizing indigenous means of communication, interpretation and reflection.

Metaphor is simply naming something with the name of something else, but this process does not destroy either name. In regular practice, channels of power shape the ways in which *heliaki* is employed and understood, but in a critical pedagogy of *heliaki*, we confront such language games by drawing upon our known names for objects, people and events and rename them in contrast to the discursively constructed forms and interpretations of our original perspective. This renaming does not eliminate the previous name, but brings a new name into proximity with existing names and knowledge. As a result, a new dimension is added to our interpretation, and ultimately, the meaning we derive as we ontologically and epistemologically reconcile variations in the representation of the items named and the acknowledgment of the commonalities and disparities brought into our focus. This process can elucidate our understanding of the aggregated meanings we collect, reject and adopt through our critical investigations.

This process falls in line with concepts of recognition and reinvention. Berthoff, in the forward to Literacy: Reading the word and the World, summarizes Freire's concept of recognition as that which "entails an active critical consciousness by means of which analogies and dysanalogies are apprehended and all other acts of mind are carried out, those acts of naming and defining by means of which we make meaning" (Berthoff, 2005, p. xv). Futhermore, *heliaki* can act as a linguistic variation of the codifications Freire used in his culture circles. Freire writes, "Codification represents a given dimension of reality as individuals live it, and this dimension is proposed for their analysis in a context other than that in which they live it" (Freire, 1985, p. 52). The power behind codification, and in-kind by *heliaki*, is that the real world is presented to the learner not as a list of set criteria or given fact, but rather as an opportunity in which learners analyze "aspects of their own existential experiences represented in the codification" (Freire, 1985, p. 52) or in this case, the metaphor. Alternative representations of objects already named can provide the cognitive distance necessary for learners to "achieve some distance from their world" and then begin to recognize it. This is the counterpart to reinvention, which Freire states "requires from the reinventing subject a critical approach toward the practice and experience to be reinvented" (Freire & Macedo, 2005, p. xvi).

A precise and comprehensive detailing of how critical literacy can be promoted and developed in schools in Tonga is outside of the scope of this paper. However, we will address, in very succinct terms, how *heliaki* — as part of a committed and robustly developed critical pedagogy, is appropriate to Tongan cultural contexts and honors indigenous knowledge and practices. As noted above, this strategy takes cues from Freire and other educators who incorporate narrative, dialogical, and dialectical, approaches to teaching and learning. Enciso (2011), discusses her use of engaging immigrant and nonimmigrant students in storytelling as part of a critical pedagogy that privileged students' voices as they negotiated "systems of meaning-making instantiated in their school and society that reproduce how and when someone is seen and heard" (p. 22). From this example, we situate *heliaki* as the narrative vehicle for negotiating 'systems of meaning-making' and recommend students, with their teachers, to examine historical and contemporary uses of *heliaki*, with the purpose of this examination being that they bring to bear as part of their analysis considerations of context, motivation, consequences and power. In terms of method, this process could be exercised as a type of critical discourse analysis where they examine the expressive, experiential and relational values of the words and

images the metaphoric language uses in representing and renaming objects, characters and actions.

In addition to analyzing existing uses of *heliaki*, students and teachers could also create their own versions of *heliaki*, perhaps even as part of a critical performance pedagogy wherein the construction, performance and interpretation of *heliaki* privileges "the doing"—the performativity of knowing and learning gained through performance (Smith, 2014a). In this manner, *heliaki* is similar to what Park (2012, p. 9) calls visualization, which acts as a "as a way to bridge reading, comprehension and critical literacy." In this study, Park documented adolescent readers' visualizations of texts (and also visualizations that did not directly relate to the texts in the study). Park concluded "that visualization supported students' awareness of others and informed discussions of "literary characters" social and cultural identities" (Park, 2012, p. 9). The descriptive, narrative power of the rhetoric and tropes utilized through metaphor parallel the creative and performative strength of envisagement and visualization. Students and teachers not only visualize and envision an event or interaction, but they also reinterpret the scene through language that reorganizes and even veils the intersections of power, social action and the motivations of the actors and institutions represented in the use of *heliaki*. More important, however, is pupils must know and understand these motivations prior to and as part of their development and performance of *heliaki*. When this is done purposefully, with the intent to not simply obfuscate power and ideology as they are enacted through social practice, but rather, through replicating a similar process of misdirection and obscurement, demonstrate how the process is strategized and performed, *heliaki* becomes an exercise in critical text production.

However, the replication of metaphor and language games is not the most significant aspect of a critical pedagogy of *heliaki*, rather it is found in the resulting discussion and deconstruction of the metaphoric language

performed by students and teachers as they work together in deciphering the realities (and alternative realities) now obscured through metaphor. Here, in this space, text producers and text consumers work together in the critical process of considering the real situations described through tropes and rhetoric, through colorful metaphor and the performative value of the performance. They ponder alternative meanings and possible outcomes. Perhaps, they work together in resituating actors and events; renaming processes and places, with the ultimate, overarching goal of each iterative step of analysis and interpretation bringing them one step closer to comprehending the cultural, social, political and economic contradictions currently at play in their everyday lives (Freire, 2006). In this manner, a critical pedagogy of *heliaki* embraces critical textual production, as texts that "serve as the manifestation of an alternate reality or a not-yet-realized present that only enters into the imagination through the interaction with new and authentically liberating words that are created by writers as cultural workers" (Enciso, 2011, p. 115). Not only can student and teacher produced *heliaki* demonstrate how power and ideology are veiled, but perhaps they can also be used to demonstrate the power of hope, critically informed action and the belief in the reality of transforming unjust and socially exclusive circumstances. Like visualization and envisagement, *heliaki* enters the imagination through an interaction with new representations and renamings of time, events and the social practices of actors and the institutions in which they are affiliated, as well as the potential to describe the means through which the circumstances in which the limiting practices of unjust social elements can no longer exist.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we intended to uproot *heliaki* from its traditional use in Tonga and position it as a strategy through which critique can be conducted in spaces, similar to Pacific con-

texts, where critique is deemed as an affront to social coherency and is actively discouraged. We draw upon the work of Freire and Macedo in invoking the critical potential of envisagement and the power of language as tools to not only name and know, but to rename, "re-know" and "know-anew"; to examine and reveal the practical and ideological, the contradictions and commonsensical assumptions that organize our daily view and present us with limited situations that paralyze our critical faculties and rob us of meaningful, transformative action in everyday life.

We echo the claim that language "assures the power of envisagement: because we can name the world and thus hold it in mind, we can reflect on its meaning and imagine a changed world" (Berthoff, 2005, p. xiv), and reinterpret the power of envisagement through the use of *heliaki*. If liberation only comes "when people reclaim their language and, with it, the power of envisagement" (Berthoff, p. xiv.), then we put forward that *heliaki* is an indigenous, orally oriented interpretation of envisagement. As a practice of critical text production, and similar to the power of envisagement, *heliaki* allows us to reflect on meanings implied and to recreate new metaphors describing how meaning is obscured. Through this process better understandings for how our reality is shaped and how we are oriented to it can also emerge. Just as important, and in more grandiose terms, it can act as a vehicle in which we engage in a liberating means of renaming and describing that empowers a hopeful perspective, illuminating possible solutions and arming us with the courage and desire from which we can meaningfully engage in the transformative nature of our world.

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