

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322510957>

Veivosaki – yaga : a culturally appropriate Indigenous research method in Fiji

Article in *International Journal of Qualitative Studies In Education* · January 2018

DOI: 10.1080/09518398.2017.1422293

CITATIONS

14

READS

773

2 authors, including:



Pam Nilan

The University of Newcastle, Australia

114 PUBLICATIONS 1,516 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE



Veivosaki-yaga: a culturally appropriate Indigenous research method in Fiji

Isimeli Waibuta Tagicakiverata & Pam Nilan

To cite this article: Isimeli Waibuta Tagicakiverata & Pam Nilan (2018): Veivosaki-yaga: a culturally appropriate Indigenous research method in Fiji, International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, DOI: [10.1080/09518398.2017.1422293](https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2017.1422293)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2017.1422293>



Published online: 15 Jan 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 7



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Veivosaki-yaga: a culturally appropriate Indigenous research method in Fiji

Isimeli Waibuta Tagicakiverata^a and Pam Nilan^b

^aDepartment of Technical and Vocational Education, Fiji National University, Suva, Fiji; ^bSchool of Humanities and Social Science, University of Newcastle, Callaghan, Australia

ABSTRACT

This article reports on the development of a new culturally sensitive approach to collecting group discussion data in the Pacific: *veivosaki-yaga*. The new approach was developed during a project on Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) in multicultural Fiji. One challenge was to gain understanding from villages of parental attitudes towards TVET. While focus groups proved to answer the purpose for Indian Fijian parents, they were deemed culturally inappropriate for Indigenous Fijian parents. As a 'de-colonising' Pacific methodology, *veivosaki-yaga* was judged to offer a culturally appropriate framework. Arising from strategic communication conventions in Indigenous Fijian culture, *veivosaki-yaga* means 'worthwhile discussion' – of serious topics. It differs from the now well-known Pacific methodology approach of *talanoa*, which is based on much more informal and free-flowing discussion. This paper does not engage the findings of the original project as such, but seeks to convey the value of a culturally appropriate methodological approach devised therein. It contributes to the currently evolving literature on Pacific methodologies in the field of qualitative educational research.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 21 April 2017
Accepted 15 October 2017

KEYWORDS

Indigenous methodologies;
Fiji; TVET

Introduction

During a doctoral research project in Fiji, a new kind of group discussion approach was developed as a culturally sensitive tool for gathering data in traditional communities. The main findings from that project are readily available (Tagicakiverata, 2012). Here we do not discuss the findings as such, but how we found a way to answer the challenge of conducting serious discussions with Fijian villagers about their children's education and TVET (Technical and Vocational Education).¹ There were three objectives for the original project: (i) identify community attitudes and perceptions about TVET among key stakeholders; (ii) identify and categorise discourses of TVET in the community; and (iii) suggest ways to improve community awareness and participation in TVET in Fiji. Objectives (i) and (ii) encountered the challenge of talking to groups of village parents who speak primarily in Fijian and conform to traditional Fijian culture.²

The first point to be made is that participation in the discussion groups was voluntary. The purpose of the research project on TVET was made clear to village authorities and to villagers themselves. An earlier study (Cavu, Tagicakiverata, Naisilisili, & Rabici, 2009) had indicated that these Fijian villagers were concerned about the prospect of endemic unemployment facing their children, so it was assumed by the

researchers that participants participated willingly because they identified with the educational agenda of the research project. The communicative context of the discussion was clearly established by the first author with the village authorities before meeting with villagers who had volunteered to participate.

In precise terms, the lead researcher and first author is an Indigenous Fijian academic with strong links into grass-roots technical education the country. He gained informed consent orally for the discussion groups from the village authorities and from villagers themselves, in accordance with the Human Ethics Approval granted by the University of Newcastle. He achieved this by reading out the project information statement (in Fijian) and recording their consent. Moreover, since Indigenous protocols are every bit as valid as are technical ones, he also gave the gift of kava root to the village authorities on arrival, and drank kava with the men of the village before leaving. As an Indigenous Fijian he is an 'insider'. He himself he holds the same 'values, perspectives, behaviours, beliefs and knowledge of his/her indigenous/cultural community that is under study' (Greene, 2014, p. 3). He is a tertiary-educated professional, yet he has lived and worked all his life in Fiji and carries both family and kinship responsibilities, so he could certainly achieve 'empathic closeness' (Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2014) with his informants. Nevertheless, his insider status alone was not going to be sufficient to generate productive data on the project topic. We needed to find a cultural format that would suit the research question. *Veivosaki-yaga* (worthwhile discussion) provided a culturally appropriate means of obtaining data from group discussion.

In developing this new approach, it was necessary to look beyond the increasingly normative model of *talanoa* methodology in the Pacific to find a culturally appropriate way of seeking serious answers on a topic of local significance. The resulting paper should not be regarded as a critique of *talanoa* methodology as such, but a proposed extension of de-colonising methodologies in the Pacific into the available range of other traditional discussion formats.

Pacific methodologies

Pacific research is only beginning to find its footing in the world of academic research (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014). Many social science researchers in the Pacific now try to use research methods that reflect the lived realities of indigenous participants, rather than relying on standard western methods of research (see Halapua, 2007; Nabobo-Baba, 2006; Nakhid et al., 2007; Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014; Thaman, 2003; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, 2004; Vaoleti, 2006). Indigenous methods, according to Tuhiwai-Smith (1999), should respect indigenous ethics, maintain explicit research goals and carefully consider the research outcomes for indigenous people. In other words, they should be de-colonising methodologies. For the most part, the field so far has been dominated by Polynesian scholars (Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2014, p. 321). Nabobo-Baba's (2006, 2007, 2008) *vanua* research framework is one of only a few that attempt to map a specifically Fijian Indigenous research methodology.

Nabobo-Baba (2006, p. 155) talks about *vanua* as 'a people, their chief, their defined territory, their waterways or fishing grounds, their environment, their spirituality, their history, their epistemology and culture'. Elsewhere it is stated that while *vanua* connotes land, it incorporates the sense of Fijian identity, of belonging to the land and the clan, and of well-being (Crosby, 2002). *Vanua* implies a person's place in the cosmos (Ravuvu, 1993). In short, *vanua* is a theology of place (Tuwere, 2002). A *vanua* research framework acknowledges the legacy of millennia of oral knowledge. The levels of knowledge in a village have been described by Ratuva (2007, p. 91). First, there is *kila ni vuravura* – which is knowledge about the empirical world. Second, there is *kila ni bula vakaveiwekeni kei na itovo* – knowledge that pertains to the social order and sociocultural relationships. The third level is *kila ni bulavakayalo*, which pertains to knowledge about the cosmos. Our purpose was to access villagers' knowledge at the first level: facts and ideas about education, including TVET.

We aimed to use a culturally suitable methodology that reflected *i valavala vakavanua* (traditional values, protocols and behaviours) as the defining principle of *vanua* research practice (Nabobo-Baba, 2007). Following the concept of *vanua*, another Fijian researcher, Nainoca (2011, p. 326), lists five ethical values required for culturally appropriate research in an Indigenous Fijian community. First there is

veidokai (respect), then *veidolei* (reciprocity), *vosota* (patience), *veimaroroi* (protectiveness). Finally, there must be *veivakatorocaketaki*, which means enhancement. The research must benefit the community. Our aim was to do just that, by finding out what parents would like to get from TVET for their children (see objective (iii) above). In principle, we wholeheartedly endorse the guiding principle of a *vanua* research framework. However, we depart from most Fijian scholars to date by arguing that *talanoa* is not the only approach for ensuring these values are realised in the research process. We contend that the *veivosaki-yaga* approach belongs within a *vanua* framework just as much as the *talanoa* approach.

Talanoa research

In the past 10 years, the idea of *talanoa* research has become popular as a specifically Pacific social science methodology (for example, Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2014; Halapua, 2007; Otsuka, 2006; Otunuku, 2011; Vaoleti, 2006; Vaka, Brannelly, & Huntington, 2016). The idea of *talanoa* spread rapidly as the key de-colonising research methodology for the Pacific, and was taken up enthusiastically by Pacific Islander scholars studying education and health at the University of the South Pacific, and at New Zealand and Australian universities. In a general way, *talanoa* refers to telling stories. It is an ancient oral tradition found in the Polynesian cultures of Maori, Samoa and Tonga, as well as in Fiji. Indigenous Fijian culture is primarily Melanesian but some cultural practices are shared with Polynesia. The idea of *talanoa* as a culturally appropriate Pacific research methodology was originally proposed by Vaoleti (2006) and earlier by Halapua (2000). Vaoleti argued that western methods such as one-on-one interviews were inappropriate and created only anxiety and silence. They were like targeted interrogations of an individual by a stranger. If a researcher – local or not – wanted to find out something, then it had to be through talking in a group, ideally a group configuration that matched everyday practice. Thus, *talanoa* was identified as a time-honoured tradition of group talk in the Pacific that was both commonly accepted and socially relaxed. Here, the researcher could be inside rather than outside the talk. Developing the previous work of Vaoleti, Otsuka (2006, p. 3) affirms that *talanoa* ‘culturally connotes talking about ‘nothing in particular’ and interacting without a rigid framework’. Thereby an open pattern of contribution pertains,

Talanoa does not have a preconceived agenda. It is very open, you can tell your story. Prior to the advent of Western civilization and the coming of the missionaries, Talanoa was how our history was created. Nothing was written. Anybody could tell his or her story about what was important to him or her, what makes him or her feel good, happy and sad. (Halapua, 2007)

Otsuka (2006) maintains that *talanoa* is therefore a culturally appropriate design for group data collection in the Pacific, and directly applied it in Fiji. However, other kinds of productive group discussion also took place in the traditional Pacific, so *talanoa* may not be the most relevant format in all circumstances. In fact, *talanoa* as a methodology is best suited to open kinds of research questions, especially those wanting to know about past practice, cultural understandings and the guiding cultural principles of life.

It did not take long for challenges and issues to emerge, as researchers from different parts of the Pacific attempted to apply *talanoa* as a new method for collecting data from local people for all kinds of studies. It quickly became obvious that there were limitations on the usefulness of the *talanoa* approach, especially for some research questions. It has been acknowledged that while ‘local researchers’ are understandably ‘excited’ by the possibilities that might inhere in ‘pan-Pacific research models or frameworks’ such as *talanoa*, implementation has been ‘fraught with complications’ (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014, p. 332; see also Vallance, 2007). This is further complicated by the fact that the original concept of *talanoa* itself is inscribed in different meanings and practices in the nations of the Southern Pacific. It is complicated yet again by the trend for certain Pacific terms like *talanoa* (as well as *mana* and *tapu*) to be transformed when applied in different contemporary contexts (Teaiwa, 2016, p. 124).

Some examples point to diversity in meanings for *talanoa*. For instance, in the Tongan context, the term *talanoa* comprises two semantic components: *tala* – ‘to inform, tell, relate and command, as well as to ask or apply’, and *noa* – ‘of any kind, ordinary, nothing in particular, purely imaginary or void’

(Vaiotei, 2006, p. 23). In short, it is light-hearted everyday talk constituted in stories and information. Since a similar understanding pertains in Samoa, concerns have been raised about using the *talanoa* approach for some targeted research projects with Samoan people. For example, Samoan researchers have been advised that if they wish to gather information of a serious nature, it would be better to conduct *faafaletui* as a method rather than using a *talanoa* approach (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014, p. 334). Tamasese, Peteru, Waldegrave, and Bush (2005) describe *faafaletui* as 'a methodology of weaving together knowledge from within the houses of relational arrangements'. *Faafaletui* is Samoan group talk about all the different levels of knowledge framing within which an important issue or phenomenon is located. It is not a free-flowing session like *talanoa* in which stories are told, including those of a fanciful nature.

The meaning of *talanoa* in the Fijian context is different again. Nabobo-Baba (2007) offers a Fijian definition, interpreting *tala* as 'to offload'. In Fijian, the term *noa* is often used with the prefix *na*, thus creating *na noa* – 'yesterday'. In that sense, Nabobo-Baba argues that *talanoa* in Fiji means offloading stories about recent events. Meo-Sewabu (2014) refines the Fijian concept of *talanoa* even further, pointing out that when Fijians are called to participate in a *talanoa* session, the very wording of the request signals if it will be a formal or informal discussion. For example, the prefix *vei* implies relating current events to try and resolve something through formal discussion, such as the wording *tou mai vei talanoa mada*. On the other hand, a statement like *tou mai talanoa tu ga* means 'we will just talk'. 'The addition of the 'tu ga' (just) at the end means it will be informal' (Meo-Suwabu, 2014, p. 347). Tagicakiverata (2012) describes a further Fijian variant: *muritalanoa* – loosely translated as 'following a story'. It refers to people listening in on village or peer storytelling sessions and taking action as a consequence. However, in *muritalanoa*, participants are perceived as receivers rather than communicators in their own right. In *muritalanoa* most people present are listening to the dominant person in the group express views, so they do not express their own.

The varied examples above point to the cultural challenges of applying *talanoa* as a de-colonising methodological norm that in principle should fit everywhere in the Pacific for all kinds of research question. When it does not fit easily, difficulties arise. For example, Fa'avae, Jones, and Manu'atu (2016) describe in detail the practical difficulties encountered by a novice Samoan researcher trying to apply *talanoa* for data collection in Samoa. Considerable compromises and adjustments had to be made, and in the end the method was not much like the ordinary cultural practice of *talanoa* for Samoans. Elsewhere, Fijian researcher Nainoca (2011, p. 36) is a strong advocate of *talanoa* as a culturally appropriate research methodology. She argues that it allows 'a dialogue to negotiate for new understandings' in Fiji. Yet in her description of *talanoa* method she describes how she asked long probing questions such as '*talanoa taka mada vei au na...* (tell me a story about...'). Since probing and directive questions are not normally part of free-flowing *talanoa* talk, it is evident that Nainoca too modified the concept of *talanoa* to gain data that suited her research question. In other words, as Teaiwa (2016) points out, certain Pacific terms – like *talanoa* in this case – become transformed when applied in different contemporary contexts. *Talanoa* now does not have the same meaning of unstructured informal talk that it had before it was modified to become a research method. In summary, we suggest that while the Pacific methodology idea of *talanoa* broke new epistemological ground early in the new century, it fails to serve a purpose if it becomes a rigid methodological orthodoxy in the long term, or if it must be considerably modified beyond the original cultural form to fit a research question.

Building on the useful criticisms that have emerged from recent academic discussion of *talanoa* research, we argue in this paper that there are other ways of group talking in Pacific cultures that can be productively adapted and fine-tuned for different research purposes, especially those that demand a focused concentration on a serious topic. As indicated above, the *faafaletui* approach (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014, p. 334) demonstrates this very strategy. In Samoan, *faafaletui*, by its semantic origins, 'tends to involve closed group discussions of a serious nature'. Below we critically reflect on the culturally similar purposeful approach of *veivosaki-yaga*, a form of strategic group discussion in Fiji that can in principle culturally replace the western form of a targeted focus group discussion (FGD).

Methodological considerations

Focus group discussions (FGDs)

We developed the concept of *veivosaki-yaga* methodology while the first author was conducting multi-faceted doctoral research on TVET education in Fiji. We wanted to obtain data about the value of TVET (for youth) from rural and semi-rural Indigenous Fijian parents and village elders. We first turned to focus group methodology (Wilson, 1997), which is often used in educational research to collect data from people who share some kind of common experience or status, such as educational stakeholders. Focus groups have been defined as follows:

Focus groups are small, structured groups with selected participants, normally led by a moderator. They are set up in order to explore specific topics, and individuals' views and experiences, through group interaction. (Litosseliti, 2003, p. 1)

The focus group approach was certainly appealing, given the topic and the constituents. As a format it did seem to suit the group data collection from bilingual Indian Fijian parents and urban community leaders, and they gave plenty of information, in English. However, it seemed to us that a standard FGD format was unlikely to yield a similar volume of data from Indigenous Fijian parents in villages where English is only rarely spoken. The villages in question are peri-urban, enabling some villagers with skills to gain jobs in the nearby city. In that sense they maintain both a territorial/land/vanua-based, and a cash-based, worldview. Keen on enabling local prosperity, they recognise that externally motivated/instigated economic skills developed through western educational systems will benefit their community. Yet at the same time, the villages were run traditionally, with strong emphasis on respect for vanua.

In theory, FGD questions could have been posed in the Fijian language. However, the issue was not just one of language. Earlier educational research experience of both authors in Fiji had previously identified that even urban Indigenous Fijians are very reluctant to speak in any kind of questioning situation (Nilan, 2009; Tagicakiverata, 2012), regardless of the language used. As Tuiwai-Smith (2006, p. 551) points out 'the issue of diversity is not just about people who eat differently and speak another language; it is about people who think differently and who know differently'. Fijian culture is related to other Pacific cultures but is unique in itself. From an insider perspective, Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba (2014, p. 324) point out that 'Indigenous Fijian "selves" are commonly understood as more socio-centric than egocentric due to the epistemological and ontological connectivities inherent in the vanua concept as a framework for knowing and living'.

For example, as they grow up, Indigenous Fijian youth are actively socialised to show deferential respect for elders and for symbolic cultural space – *vanua* – through humble, often silent, self-effacing behaviour (see Qalo, 1997). For example, the cultural norm of *ma~dua~* connotes maintaining respectful humility through appropriate bodily comportment, *silence*, honouring one's elders and being polite and deferential to other members of the *vanua* (Williksen-Bakker, 2004, p. 198; *our emphasis*). Following this logic, younger people tend to be silent in the presence of older people, women tend to be silent in the presence of men, commoners tend to be silent in the presence of members of chiefly clans, and so on. Moreover, traditional Fijian culture is a powerful inhibitor on overt conflict. It therefore restrains participants from appearing in anyway contradictory or confrontational in a discussion setting (Cavu et al., 2009), even those matched in terms of age, sex and status. Given these complex cultural considerations, it seemed unlikely that the standard western FGD approach would be effective for obtaining information on the varied perspectives of village parents on TVET. On the other hand, the free-flowing, story-oriented *talanoa* approach, even though a recognised Pacific methodology, did not fit the research question, which pertains to an issue of serious concern – education of the young, now and in the future.

As an insider himself to Indigenous Fijian culture, the first author had some 'empathic' capacity (see Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2014, p. 320) to remind villagers of the importance of children's education, yet he also needed to develop a culturally suitable discussion format in which they could be invited to express their concerns. Using the *veivosaki-yaga* approach meant that not only were the villagers cued to respond appropriately, but he himself was more culturally attuned. This advantage of a culturally

matched approach for insider researchers was also noted by Suaalii-Sauni and Fulu-Aiolupotea (2014), 'we seemed to be able to better keep on top of our minds the Pacific values (...) codes of respect, the need for turn sharing when speaking, the need for symbolic gestures of reciprocity and gratitude, and so on'. In our case, we certainly needed a culturally sensitive data collection tool, but *talanoa* was not adequate as a cultural fit.

In specific terms, the everyday Fijian contextual meaning attached to *talanoa* is storytelling. This understanding is not limited to Indigenous Fijians but extends to Indian Fijian culture and other Pacific communities living there. As a methodological approach, there would be a risk in Fiji of reducing serious discussion to mere story-sharing through selecting *talanoa* as the means of communication. This might even be considered an insult to Indigenous Fijian culture, because *talanoa* has previously proved ineffective for resolving serious matters. For example, five *talanoa* sessions were initiated after Fiji's military coup in 2000. They were intended to encourage productive dialogue among political and community leaders in Fiji (Halapua, 2000). Yet there was no real resolution achieved by the end of the last *talanoa* session in 2002. In Fiji, the most obvious reason cited for failure was because the talking sessions were conducted as *talanoa*, and a *talanoa* session is not to be taken seriously. Politicians could say anything they wanted, without any real commitment. The casual, free-flowing character of *talanoa* means there is difficulty in exercising control over the direction of the narratives for an information-sharing or information-gathering forum (Halapua, 2007). As in any ordinary storytelling session among peers, topics and themes change rapidly depending on the spontaneous contributions of participants.

Moreover, for most Indigenous Fijians, *talanoa* is ad hoc talk that people engage in when drinking *kava*, meeting casually in a supermarket, on the streets or at large gatherings. When we asked ordinary people in 2012 about their understanding and perception of *talanoa*, they were suspicious of claims to accuracy. One said '*E sega ni rawa ni da vakabauta na talanoa baleta ni da dau talanoa kece*' (You cannot really believe a (*talanoa*) story because we can all tell stories) (Cakau, April 2012). Another added that '*Au na vakabauta ga na talanoa kevaka au kilai koya talanoa tiko*' (I would only believe a (*talanoa*) story if I am familiar with the storyteller) (O'Connor, April 2012).

Finally, at the grass-roots level, *talanoa* is sometimes used in reference to gossip (*kakase*), which has a negative derogatory meaning. The meaning of *kakase* piggybacks on *talanoa*, which makes sense because storytelling among friends often ends in gossip, such as, '*cava na talanoa baleti Ana?*' (what is the story with Ana?). Moreover, *talanoa* can be a joking form of communication (*veiwali*) whereby people make sarcastic remarks, jokes or flirt. In summary, the notion of *talanoa*, its interpretation, usage and meaning in the Indigenous Fijian communal context, lacked the gravity needed for a data gathering exercise in villages on a serious topic.

In search of a culturally appropriate method for successfully collecting data on the serious topic of education from groups of villagers, we reviewed a number of Pacific-based approaches to research. The insights of Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) on de-colonising methodologies proved useful, where the idea of 'decolonizing' generates a critical understanding of the underlying cultural assumptions that inform western-derived research practices. From the 'de-colonizing' critical perspective, the standard FGD approach does assume a western cultural norm of active engagement, debate and even disagreement. Indeed, established wisdom in the field recommends as follows: 'focus group researchers encourage participants to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes, and commenting on each others' experiences and points of view' (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999, p. 4). However, this is the cultural expectation of someone accustomed to western norms of social interaction. Where there are other norms of social interaction, such as routine shyness to speak, and hierarchical turn-taking conventions, the expectations of the focus group researcher are unlikely to be met. From that point we embarked on a journey between western and indigenous research paradigms (Getty, 2010). As a cultural insider, the first author adopted the group discussion framework of *veivosaki-yaga*.

Veivosaki-yaga – worthwhile discussion

Veivosaki-yaga in the Fijian language means worthwhile discussion or conversation. *Veivosaki-yaga* is still used in Fiji today in traditional community decision-making, especially in villages contemplating change. It is derived from time-honoured practices for generating strategic knowledge (Cavu et al., 2009), such as planning during a tribal war. The first term *veivosaki* connotes a neutral sense of conversation and dialogue rather than storytelling. The second term *yaga* literally means useful or worthwhile. When invited to engage in *veivosaki-yaga*, Indigenous Fijian participants are culturally tuned in to a form of communal dialogue that demands their serious consideration and response.

Furthermore, some of the structural features of *veivosaki-yaga* mirror the custom of *bose-vanua*, which is a formal village meeting chaired by a Chief or village head-man. Here ordinary people of all kinds are specifically invited in a respectful way to speak in sequence on aspects of a serious matter at hand, so as to canvas a range of viewpoints. Similarly, in *veivosaki-yaga* methodology, the researcher embodies the chairing role of the Chief or head-man. As the chairperson, he or she initiates, controls and mediates the discussions, bringing participants into dialogue on important issues. Yet while *veivosaki-yaga* is much more formally organised than *talanoa*, it still carries a certain measure of relaxed informality (such as occasional jokes) that ordinary people would find conducive and participatory. For our study, the *veivosaki-yaga* approach was successful in encouraging participants to speak openly, but with a sense of addressing a serious topic. We concluded that the formal elements incorporated in *veivosaki-yaga* are similar to those which bring order to a focus group session in the western tradition. Yet the language used, the order of things, the politeness conventions, the cultural familiarity for participants; all encouraged meaningful contributions from the villagers as parents.

Examples of *veivosaki-yaga* producing useful data

Using the methodological principle of *veivosaki-yaga*, the first author formally convened talk sessions with 15 Indigenous Fijian peri-urban villagers from Labasa (Vanua Levu) and Nausori (Viti Levu). They all had school age children. At first, parents tended to concur that TVET is preparation for low status blue-collar work; suitable for academically weaker students. For example, one father said,

The type of career that any child can get mainly depends on their own effort in school. If they are smart and work hard, they may get a good job such as being a teacher, nurse, doctor or lawyer. If they are weak then they might have to try something else such as carpentry and joinery.³ (Parents Group 2, Participant 3, Labasa, 2009)

However, as the *veivosaki-yaga* session continued, more nuanced viewpoints were expressed. For example, one father acknowledged that,

Sometimes it is our ignorance (lack of awareness and lack of education) as parents that affects the educational progress and success of our children Perhaps it is wise for us to consult teachers or other successful people in our villages or neighbourhood on these matters⁴ so na gauna na noda lecaika na itubutubu e vakaleqa na nodra toso vinaka na noda gone E daumaka me da dau kere ivakasala vei ira na qasenivuli, kei ira era cakacaka vinaka ena noda koro se itikotiko vakavalagi. (Parents Group 1, Participant 2, Nausori February 2009)

In other words, parents in the village are aware of the responsibility they have and that they ought to perhaps overcome traditional cultural barriers to TVET for the benefit of their children.

Many Indigenous Fijian families today, especially in villages, still hold resentful views about TVET as a second-class education option purposefully created for the 'natives' during the period of British colonial rule. Early on, people from the Indian sub-continent were brought into Fiji by the British Government to work on plantations. They were not permitted to own land, so the future for their children lay in getting a job. Thus education became to Indian Fijians, what land is to Indigenous Fijians (FIEC, 2000). Indian philanthropic foundations in colonial Fiji quickly started schools for their children to attend. Indian-run commercial enterprises and small businesses quickly developed. In contrast, public formal education for the 'natives' first favoured the creation of a small elite of clerical officers to assist the British administration. Pupils came from the families of Chiefs. Only later was public education extended to ordinary Indigenous Fijians, and the emphasis there was on low-level technical skills and crafts. It is

not surprising then that since independence, Indian Fijian students have consistently performed better than Indigenous Fijian students in national academic examinations and continue to do so (Puamau, 2005). This has been identified as a twist in the narrative of post-colonial and post-independence in Fiji. Indian Fijians by and large are far more successful compared to Indigenous Fijians in the fields of education and business (Fraenkel, Lal, & Firth, 2009). Puamau (2002, pp. 67–68) argues that ‘Fijian under-achievement in schooling can be attributed in large part to the inherited structures from our colonial past’. The early model of education for Indigenous Fijian children was one designed to ‘prepare a workforce that would occupy subordinate positions’ (Tuinamuana, 2007, p. 116). There is a legacy of resentment that colours attitudes to TVET.

A mother in the *veivosaki-yaga* session held at Nausori inflected the commentary in a slightly different direction again, stating that,

I believe that our children should be given the freedom to decide and to choose the career of their choice. But as parents, we should not falter in our efforts to provide all the support they need. It is also important that we advise our academically weaker children that there are other avenues such as TVET where they are more likely to succeed.⁵ (Parents Group 1, Participant 4, Nausori, February 2009)

In other words, she puts a priority on building the confidence of children as learners. She is gently implying that children can choose their own careers, that they should be supported, and that success in one field or another is important for their self-esteem.

A father at Nausori expressed more or less the same sentiment,

The success of our children’s education depends on our concerted effort as parents in carrying out our responsibilities.⁶ (Parents Group 1, Participant 1, Nausori, February 2009)

In just these few examples, we can glimpse the serious reflective quality of comments that were expressed during *veivosaki-yaga* sessions. We concluded that the villagers’ comments represented some critical contemporary thinking on their part given the legacy of educational inequalities in Fiji. If it is possible to imagine, a *talanoa* approach to gathering information from the same parents might well have generated a range of stories and anecdotes, perhaps about colonial times, which would not have suitably engaged the objectives of the research project.

Overall, we established that the parents had white collar aspirations for their children and high expectations for their future. However, they were certainly willing to consider other ideas for the future. For example, one female parent said that she would be happy if her child could just get a job, any job at all. Others wanted their children to be successful, no matter how that was achieved. These relatively open attitudes demonstrated a practical understanding that points to potential for some productive interventions to encourage wider thinking about TVET in Fijian villages. Only 3 of the 15 participants mentioned that they talked about careers with their children. They implied that there were others such as relatives, neighbours and kinsmen in their communities that their children could emulate and talk to. So any interventions to encourage TVET enrolment would have to be broadly aimed at the community.

Discussion

In the conduct of *veivosaki-yaga* sessions for this project, we believe we followed the concept of *vanua* research (Nabobo-Baba (2006, 2007, 2008)). Moreover, the process of the *veivosaki-yaga* sessions fulfilled the five ethical values of culturally appropriate research in an Indigenous Fijian community (Nainoca, 2011, p. 326). As the Indigenous Fijian chairperson of the *veivosaki-yaga* sessions, the first author demonstrated *veidokai* (respect), firstly by carefully selecting a culturally appropriate format, and secondly by chairing the sessions in Fijian and in an appropriately Fijian way. The value of *veidolei* (reciprocity) was evidenced in all expected ritual aspects of his conduct as a visitor to the village. He demonstrated *vosota* (patience) in encouraging the women in the group to speak and by waiting for parental responses to become more finely nuanced. He also conveyed *veimaroroi* (protectiveness), both in his concern for their children’s futures and for the enriched viability of their village. Finally, the overwhelming concern was *veivakatorocaketaki* (enhancement). Our research was explicitly intended to benefit the community.

In Fiji today, technical jobs are certainly available in cities and towns, with crucial shortages of skilled workers in some fields, but there is still a general lack of interest by Indigenous Fijian school pupils and their parents in TVET. Given the historical association of high income and status with white-collar work, the problem can be pinned down to the doubtful attitude of young people, parents and teachers towards any form of TVET. One long-term solution is community outreach to encourage TVET choices. Not only are jobs more readily available in fields like tourism, construction and commercial agriculture processing, but the skills themselves can directly improve people's lives in traditional communities.

Talking to Indigenous Fijian parents using *veivosaki-yaga* permitted us to identify obstacles to TVET such as lack of educational status and perceived irrelevance to village life, as well as the enduring colonial legacy. The point here about encouraging TVET would not be forcing anybody to do something, but opening up choices for young people who are now very much in touch with the world through increasingly easy access to mobile phone technology, social media and video-gaming (Hutak & Thomson, 2010; Internetworldstats, 2015)⁷.

In terms of benefit, the results of our project on TVET in Fiji were fed back through the first author into the Pacific Association of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (PATVET). This organisation recognises the need to build awareness of the potential of information and communication technology (ICT) and open and distance learning (ODL) to support TVET in remote locations. In 2014, the Fijian Government declared education a national priority, implementing fee-free primary and secondary education and a large number of new technical schools and colleges, including some in remote and rural regions. Since that time, careful labour market analyses have led to TVET curricula becoming more demand-driven and competency-based (UNESCO, 2016, p. 21) which will favour increased participation of Indigenous Fijian pupils in TVET and in the labour market. Furthermore, the Fiji Government has opened Tele Centres in rural and remote schools to assist TVET institutions and local communities to access the internet. This initiative has improved TVET knowledge, access and equity (UNESCO, 2016, p. 39). Targeted TVET programs now run in many villages on a rostered basis, offering training not only to young people, but to adults.

Turning again to the issue of culturally appropriate research methodologies in the Pacific, we wish to emphasise the importance of turning to more serious frameworks than *talanoa* for meaningful data-gathering. A perhaps unforeseen weakness in both Otsuka's (2006) and Vaoletti's (2006) *talanoa* concept is that they stretched the literal meaning of the term beyond its contextual cultural relevance. This potentially causes implementation problems in the areas described in the earlier sections of discussion above. For example, a problem encountered by Otsuka (2006) in his report on *talanoa* fieldwork in Fiji was that some participants were not honest in their accounts. However, it can be argued that the expectation of honesty is not within the semantic boundaries of typical Fijian *talanoa* talk. On the contrary, exaggeration is expected and hyperboles are plentiful. Participants in a Fijian *talanoa* are not bound by any rules or obligations other than their own interest in expressing themselves, sometimes resulting in fantastical constructions. *Veivosaki-yaga* does not necessarily guarantee that honesty will prevail in participant comments either. Yet in contrast to *talanoa*, *veivosaki-yaga* is a cultural context in which serious reflective comments are expected, so it is more likely that participants will want to be seen as contributing honest commentary by their fellow villagers.

In summary, the current overemphasis on *talanoa* research in the Pacific may lie in lack of recognition for the existence of more contextually relevant forms of group discourse. We propose that *veivosaki-yaga* as a group data collection methodology breaks new ground beyond Pacific-oriented *talanoa* research and also beyond the standard focus group procedure used in western educational research.

Conclusion

Through efforts to work effectively with 'grass-roots' Indigenous Fijian community members on TVET attitudes, the original project developed a new culturally appropriate methodology of *veivosaki-yaga* to replace focus group interviews. *Veivosaki-yaga* was found to be an appropriate cultural approach to

group talking on a serious issue in peri-urban Fijian villages. It resulted in a smooth exchange of ideas and information between participants and the researcher.

We set out in this paper to report on this new culturally sensitive approach to collecting group discussion data as a new Pacific methodology. Yet since it was developed in the course of a doctoral research project (Tagicakiverata, 2012), we have mentioned some of our findings to indicate the value of *veivosaki-yaga* as an effective framework in the context of Indigenous Fijian culture. We used those findings to critically consider *veivosaki-yaga* as a de-colonising methodology for Fiji, one which runs parallel to the new elevation of *faafaletui* as a method in Samoan-based research (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014). Both these recently framed Indigenous approaches seek to address the need for culturally appropriate research methodologies in the Pacific. Such endeavours imply that *talanoa* has become something of a methodological orthodoxy in the Pacific, yet does not suit all research questions or all cultural contexts.

Conducted by an Indigenous Fijian researcher, *veivosaki-yaga* offered a culturally appropriate framework for worthwhile discussion on a topic of serious concern for the country and for local communities faced with future youth unemployment. We believe that as a framework it has a lot to offer in the practical sense. For example, *veivosaki-yaga* could serve as a productive means of formal community consultation around other matters of education and perhaps health in Fiji. This would be useful because Indigenous people in Fijian villages may be hesitant about informally consulting more knowledgeable people in the community. This lack of desire to initiate an unsolicited request for advice may be construed as a cultural barrier because it is not normally deemed appropriate to talk openly about family issues and problems, even for children's educational choices. This is especially, so if someone is required to share personal details with relative strangers such as teachers or non-kin.

Through the use of *veivosaki-yaga* we were able to establish in a non-threatening atmosphere that parents were wary about TVET for their children but acknowledged that they did not have the answer to extensive local youth unemployment. They talked about their dreams for their children such as having good job, owning a house and a car. Yet they were not unrealistic. They readily acknowledged the difficulty of their children getting a white-collar job. They felt more community and public awareness about TVET was needed in rural communities. In short, *veivosaki-yaga* gave us the means to find out that they were more open to new possibilities of TVET than we anticipated, given the colonial and post-colonial history of education for Indigenous Fijians.

Notes

1. (Tagicakiverata, 2012).
2. Since October 2011 the term *iTaukei* has been introduced in government and public sphere discourse to describe the indigenous people of the Fiji Islands. The term Indians is to be used to describe inhabitants of Fiji who can trace their origins to India. However, there is still avid debate in Fiji regarding the use of the term *iTaukei* instead of Indigenous Fijians, and Indians instead of Indo-Fijians. In this paper we use the term Indigenous Fijians and Indian Fijians because we are comfortable with these terms.
3. *Na cakacaka e vakatau saraga vei ira na gone ena nodra sasaga. Kevaka era ulu kaukauwa era na rawa ni cakacaka vinaka me vaka na qasenivuli, nasi, vuniwai se loya. ia ke sega e dodonu me ra saga tale eso na ka me vaka na vuli matai. O keda ga na itubutubu me tu vakarau me da qarava na nodra sasaga na luveda.*
5. *Au vakabauta me da solia vei ira na luveda na galala me ra digitaka na cakacaka era gadreva, ia me da kua ni vakawelewele na itubutubu ka me da vukei ira ena nodra sasaga. E bibi me da vakamacalataka vei ira na gone ni kevaka era ulu malumalumu e tu tale eso na tabana ni vuli me vakana TVET e rawa ni ra rawaka kina.*
6. *Na toso vinaka ni nodra vuli na luveda e vakatau saraga ena noda qarava vinaka na noda itavi na itubutubu.*
7. Fiji now has mobile phone access for 93% of the population (PRIF, 2015, p. 6). Internet users were 41.8% of the population in 2015 (Internetworldstats, 2015). Eighty per cent of Facebook users use the app on their mobile phones (Nauwakarawa, 2015). The impact on young people is indicated by a new government edict which states that mobile phones are not allowed to be carried by students in Fiji schools unless given parental consent (Ahmed & Susu, 2015).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Isimeli Waibuta Tagicakiverata, PhD, is the director of the National Training & Productivity Centre at the Fiji National University. He has published widely on the challenges of making Technical and Vocational Training widely available and culturally accepted in the Pacific.

Pam Nilan, PhD, is a professor of Sociology at the University of Newcastle in Australia. She has published extensively in the area of youth, gender and school to work transition in Indonesia, Fiji and Australia.

References

- Ahmed, F., & Susu, A. (2015). Mobile phone rules. *The Fiji Sun Online*. Retrieved September 9, 2016, from <http://fjijun.com/fj/2015/04/03/mobile-phone-rules/>
- Cavu, P., Tagicakiverata, I., Naisilisili, S., & Rabici, V. (2009). Education and training needs of rural communities: A situational analysis of selected communities in the 14 provinces in Fiji. In R. Maclean & D. Wilson (Eds.), *International handbook of education for the changing world of work: Bridging academic and vocational learning* (pp. 609–618). Berlin: Springer.
- Crosby, A. (2002). Archaeology and vanua development in Fiji. *World Archaeology*, 34(2), 363–378. doi:10.1080/0043824022000007152
- Fa'avae, D., Jones, A., & Manu'atu, L. (2016). *Talanoa'i 'a e talanoa* – Talking about talanoa: Some dilemmas of a novice researcher. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 12(2). Retrieved from <http://www.content.alternative.ac.nz/index.php/alternative/article/view/463>
- Farrelly, T., & Nabobo-Baba, U. (2014). Talanoa as empathic apprenticeship. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 55(3), 319–330. doi:10.1111/apv.12060
- FIEC. (2000). *Learning together: Directions for education in the Fiji Islands*. Fiji Islands Education Commission. Suva: Fiji Government.
- Fraenkel, J., Lal, B., & Firth, S. (Eds.). (2009). *The 2006 military takeover in Fiji: A coup to end all coups?* Canberra: ANU E Press.
- Getty, G. A. (2010). The journey between western and Indigenous research paradigms. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 21(1), 5–14. doi:10.1177/1043659609349062
- Greene, M. (2014). On the inside looking in: Methodological insights and challenges in conducting qualitative insider research. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(15), 1–13. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR19/greene15.pdf>
- Halapua, S. (2000). *Talanoa process: The case of Fiji*. Hawaii: East-West Centre.
- Halapua, S. (2007, January). Talanoa: Talking from the heart. *SGI Quarterly: A Buddhist Forum for Peace, Culture and Education*, 1–2. Retrieved September 5, 2016, from <http://www.sgiquarterly.org/feature2007Jan-4.html>
- Hutak, M., & Thomson, I. (2010). The role of ICTs in teaching and learning: Best practice in Pacific education. In P. Puamau & B. Hau'ofa (Eds.), *Pacific education series no. 9. Best practice in Pacific education: Learning with PRIDE*. Suva: Institute of Education, USP.
- Internetworldstats. (2015). *Fiji: Internet usage, broadband and telecommunications report*. Retrieved September 9, 2016, from <http://www.internetworldstats.com/sp/fj.htm>
- Kitzinger, J., & Barbour, R. (1999). *Developing focus group research: Politics, theory and practice*. London: Sage.
- Litosseliti, L. (2003). *Using focus groups in research*. London: Continuum Books.
- Meo-Sewabu, L. (2014). Cultural discernment as an ethics framework: An indigenous Fijian approach. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 55(3), 345–354.
- Nabobo-Baba, U. (2006). *Knowing learning: An indigenous Fijian approach*. Suva: IPS Publications.
- Nabobo-Baba, U. (2007). Vanua research framework. In *Paper presented to the sustainable livelihood and education in the pacific project*. Suva: Institute of Education, USP.
- Nabobo-Baba, U. (2008). Decolonising framings in pacific research: Indigenous Fijian vanua research framework as an organic response. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 4(2), 140–154. <http://www.content.alternative.ac.nz/index.php/alternative/article/view/50>
- Nainoca, W. U. (2011). The influence of the Fijian way of life (*bula vakavanua*) on community-based marine conservation (CBMC) in Fiji, with a focus on social capital and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) (Unpublished doctoral thesis). Massey University, New Zealand. Retrieved from <http://mro.massey.ac.nz/handle/10179/2670>
- Nakhid, C., Fa'alogo, J. P., Faiva, M., Pilisi, S., Senio, J., Taylor, S., ... Thomas, L. (2007). *Au'ai i le galuega: A Pasifika research design ensuring ownership and autonomy*. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, 32, 106–125. <http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/journals-and-magazines/social-policy-journal/>
- Nauwakarawa, K. (2015). Fiji among Pacific nations with 93pc average mobile coverage. *The Fiji Times Online*. Retrieved September 9, 2016, from <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=321389>
- Nilan, P. (2009). Indigenous Fijian female pupils and career choice: Explaining generational gender reproduction. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 29(1), 29–43. doi:10.1080/02188790802655031

- Otsuka, S. (2006). Talanoa: Culturally appropriate research design in Fiji. *Proceedings of the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) Conference 2005*. Melbourne, Australia. Retrieved September 22, 2016, from <http://www.aare.edu.au/publications-database.php/4821/talanoa-research-culturally-appropriate-research-design-in-fiji>
- Otunuku, M. (2011). Talanoa: How can it be used effectively as an indigenous research methodology with Tongan people. *Pacific-Asia Education*, 23(2), 43–52. Retrieved from <http://pacificcircleconsortium.org/PAEJournal.html>
- PRIF. (2015). *Economic and social impact of ICT in the Pacific*. Sydney: Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility, ADB.
- Puamau, P. (2002). Cultural indigenisation. In F. Pene, A. M. Taufē'ulungaki, & C. J. Benson (Eds.), *Tree of opportunity: Re-thinking Pacific education* (pp. 60–71). Suva: University of the South Pacific.
- Puamau, P. (2005). Rethinking educational reform: A Pacific perspective. In *Paper presented at Conference on Redesigning pedagogy: Research, policy, practice*. Singapore: Nanyang Technological University.
- Qalo, R. (1997). *Small business: A study of a Fijian family – The Mucunabitu iron works contractor cooperative society*. Suva: Star Printery.
- Ratuva, S. (2007). *Na kilaka a vaka-Viti ni veikabula*: Indigenous knowledge and the Fijian cosmos: Implications on bio-prospecting. In A. T. P. Mead & S. Ratuva (Eds.), *Pacific genes and life patents: Pacific indigenous experience & analysis of commodification & ownership of life* (pp. 90–101). Wellington and Yokohama: Call of the Earth Llamado de la Tierra and United Nations University of Advanced Studies.
- Ravuvu, A. (1993). *Vaka i taukei: The Fijian way of life*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies.
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2006). Introduction. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 19(5), 549–552. doi:10.1080/09518390600886197
- Suaalii-Sauni, T., & Fulu-Aiolupotea, S. Ma (2014). Decolonising Pacific research, building Pacific research communities and developing Pacific research tools: The case of the *talanoa* and the *faafaletui* in Samoa. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 55(3), 331–344. doi:10.1111/apv.12061
- Tagicakiverata, I. (2012). *TVET in Fiji: Attitudes and perceptions of junior secondary school students* (PhD Thesis). University of Newcastle, Australia.
- Tamasese, K., Peteru, C., Waldegrave, C., & Bush, A. (2005). Ole Taeao Afua, the new morning: A qualitative investigation into Samoan perspectives on mental health and culturally appropriate services. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 39, 300–309.
- Teaiwa, K. M. (2016). *Niu mana*, sport, media and the Australian diaspora. In M. Tomlinson & T. P. Kāwika Tengan (Eds.), *New mana: Transformations of a classic concept in Pacific languages and cultures* (pp. 107–130). Canberra: ANU Press.
- Thaman, K. H. (2003). Re-presenting and re-searching Oceania: A suggestion for synthesis. *Pacific Health Dialog*, 10(2), 163–170. Retrieved from http://pacifichealthdialog.org.fj/index_option_com_content_view_article_id_81.html
- Tuhiwai-Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London: Zed Books.
- Tuhiwai-Smith, L. (2004). Building research capability in the Pacific, for the Pacific and by Pacific peoples. In T. L. Baba, O. Mahina, N. Williams, & U. Nabobo-Baba (Eds.), *Researching Pacific and indigenous peoples: Issues and perspectives* (pp. 4–16). Auckland: Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Auckland.
- Tuinamuana, K. (2007). Reconstructing dominant paradigms of teacher education: Possibilities for pedagogical transformation in Fiji. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(2), 111–127. doi:10.1080/13598660701268544
- Tuwere, I. S. (2002). *Vanua. Towards a Fijian theology of place*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies.
- UNESCO. (2016). *Enhancing relevance in TVET: Review of progress in the Asia-Pacific since 2012*. Retrieved June 30, 2016, from <http://www.unescobkk.org/resources/e-library/publications/article/enhancing-relevance-in-tvet-review-of-progress-in-the-asia-pacific-since-2012/>
- Vaioleti, T. (2006). Talanoa research methodology: A developing position on Pacific research. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 12, 23–31. Retrieved from <http://whanauoraesearch.co.nz/files/formidable/Vaioleti-Talanoa.pdf>
- Vaka, S., Brannelly, T., & Huntington, A. (2016). Getting to the heart of the story: Using talanoa to explore Pacific mental health. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 37(8), 537–544. doi:10.1080/01612840.2016.1186253
- Vallance, R. J. (2007). Is there a Melanesian research methodology? *Contemporary PNG Studies*, 7, 1–15. Retrieved from http://www.dwu.ac.pg/en/images/Research_Journal/2007_Vol_7/1_Vallance_Melanesian_Research_Methodology.pdf
- Williksen-Bakker, S. (2004). Can a silent person be a business person? The concept of ma'dua in Fijian culture. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 15(2), 198–212. doi:10.1111/j.1835-9310.2004.tb00252.x
- Wilson, V. (1997). Focus groups: A useful qualitative method for educational research? *British Educational Research Journal*, 23(2), 209–224. doi:10.1080/0141192970230207