

Relational positionality and a learning disposition: Shifting the conversation

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In the complex and diverse region of Oceania, researchers often work across more than one cultural understanding. Thus, a researcher's position with regard to their research requires careful ongoing negotiation because position, when understood through relationality, is fluid. Negotiating position requires acute reflexivity of the researcher but also offers opportunities for ongoing development and agency. In this article, we use the literature of relational positionality and autoethnographic methodology to discuss two researchers' deliberate re-positioning in relation to their field of education, focusing on deliberate self-change and the application of new conceptual learning. The context is Pasifika education, a space which sits between different knowledge systems as the education of Pacific-origin people in Aotearoa New Zealand. The article demonstrates how storying can support new understandings which, in turn, can help negotiate positionality. The argument draws on data from a conference tok stori session that illustrates the potential of storying to expose, re-value and then reweave positionality through relational activity.

Keywords: Relationality; Pacific education; researcher positionality; tok stori; vā

INTRODUCTION

In research, positionality generally involves “the stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study” (Rowe, 2014, p. 628). Thus, by definition, positionality is concerned with relationships. One's position may be understood in a range of ways including by reference to concepts such as insider/outsider. It can also be understood through a wider range of complex intersectional categories such as ethnic and class background, and gender (Vanner, 2015). Like all relational matters, positionality can be fluid and shifting.

We borrow from Emirbayer and Mische (1998), a temporal focus to understand agency as a process of active social engagement that is embedded in the past but which aims to imagine and, therefore, produce a deliberately shaped future. This article seeks to re-value agency in the context of positionality by examining the experiences of two practitioners engaged in education as teachers, learners, and researchers in the inter-cultural space of Pasifika education, the education of students of Pacific origin in Aotearoa New Zealand (Airini, Mila-Schaaf, Coxon, Mara, & Sanga, 2010). We suggest that relational positionality can be negotiated through deliberate strategies such as interpersonal

relational activity and deliberate self-change or self-actualization (Fletcher, 1998). This is especially true when positional closeness is valued in the research/teaching context. While not synonyms, research and teaching are related in terms of positionality since both involve the relational construction of knowledge. Thus, while the article pays attention to research, a wider application to educational contexts is possible, particularly for researcher practitioners.

The term relational positionality has been used to refer to the relational shaping of a researcher's identity (Crossa, 2012). That is, how the researcher is positioned by others. Relational positionality, when understood in this way, is focussed on matters of which the researcher must be aware but over which they have little control. Any reflexive process which a researcher undertakes to imagine their position is likely to be individual, retrospective, category-based, and performed as an ethical background prior to research as a way of accounting for power.

However, ethical cultural references from Oceania extend the demands of positionality beyond flows of power in research. An ongoing ethical obligation to care for research relationships (Airini et al., 2010) is also deemed significant. In this view, an element of researcher positioning is the contribution researchers offer research participants and their communities. This is a product of what the researcher brings to relationships in the research rather than just who they appear to be or the categories they seem to occupy. This ethical approach offers researchers the opportunity to change the way they are received in research through deliberate cultivation of interpersonal relationships, exposure to contexts, ideas, and so on. In many situations in Oceania, research sites are located in the space between elements of two knowledge systems (Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009), for example in Pasifika education. In these circumstances, researchers travel from one world of ideas to another (Mason & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2014) as a research edgewalk (Krebs, 1999). Developing one's ability to edgewalk is a further way a researcher can take steps to satisfy research obligations of relational care.

Positionality is included as an aspect in most accounts of research, sometimes in terms of disposition (a person's inherent characteristics). However, little has been written about acts of deliberate learning to increase a researcher's potential to serve communities by shifting their relational position. This article examines the relationship between position and disposition by taking account of learning. New knowledge, practices, and perspectives that can promote relational closeness between researcher and participants are particularly important to research theorized through a relational lens. Exploring this area contributes to an understanding of relationality by accounting for positionality through the management of the categories a person seems to fit. This article values relationships as sites of learning, and draws attention to relational obligations and expectations as opportunities for researchers to seek agency, particularly over their own development and research contribution.

PARAMETERS OF RELATIONAL POSITIONALITY

In this section, we review literature which discusses positionality in relational terms in the context of inter-cultural spaces. Merriam et al. (2001) discuss the dynamics of research in multi-cultural societies using the category of insider-outsider. This refers to the way a researcher may or may not be seen to "belong". In their view, positionality is multileveled, unstable over time, and relational. They see a balance between various

categorical markers, such as sex and age, as that which constructs a researcher's position in their participants' minds. They suggest that because power in research is negotiated, researchers have an element of agency over positionality, exercised during research by performing actions that are valued in the research context, such as visiting key community locations.

A discussion of positionality as a reciprocal relational status is staged in Carling, Erdal, and Ezzati (2014). They describe three intersecting elements. Firstly, there is an "infinite number of social categories" (p. 6) held in the minds of those involved. Second is the perceived position of the research itself: who is seen to fund it and why. Finally, the researcher's personal characteristics or disposition is significant. Disposition is important when evident during research if the researcher shows they know and understand aspects of the relevant community. Although often used for describing a researcher's position in research, categorical ideas of positionality can become simplistic and may tend towards essentialisation. Whereas concepts such as superdiversity and intersectionality provide less disturbance to simplicity than understanding that positionality is relational and reciprocal (Carling et al., 2014).

Crossa (2012) says that relational positionality can also "consider how researchers' identities are shaped by multiple mobile and flexible relations and how that makes a difference to the research process" (p. 110). Interrelations between categories that inform a researcher's multiple identities can affect a researcher's position. However, fluid positionality can also be produced by changes in contextual and interpersonal relationships during research. Crossa points out that writers have depicted relationships between researcher and collaborators variously as a gap (Moss, 1995) or as a state of betweenness (Nast, 1994). The latter implies a fluid negotiation in which changes in researcher position are made through researcher actions but can also be made by other people in the context. When a researcher's position changes during research, a researchers' theoretical framework might also shift, suggesting a circular (Carling et al., 2014) reciprocal relationship between positionality and other research elements.

Relational positionality can be understood through Oceanic ideas. In the Tongan relational concept of *vā*, a spatial metaphor, relationships are a "sociospatial connection" (Ka'ili, 2005, p. 89) which "relates and connects individuals and groups to one another" (p. 90). The Samoan writer, Wendt (1999) says, "Va¹ is the space between . . . the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships/the contexts change" (p. 402). Airini et al. (2010) offer ethical guidance in the inter-cultural space of Pasifika education through the Samoan reference *teu le va*. This "focuses on secular and sacred commitments, guiding reciprocal 'acting in' and respect for relational spaces" (Anae, 2016, p. 117) such as the *va* of research relationships. Relational elements of research such as positionality involve an obligation "to 'tidy up' the physical, spiritual, cultural, social, psychological and tapu 'spaces' of human relationships" (Airini et al., 2010, pp. 11,12). In this way, *teu le va* in Pasifika education "gives recognition to the centrality of context as a holistic environment" (p. 17). This involves understanding position in relation to complex multi-level culturally fluid and diverse communities. In turn, nuanced obligations of relational care are placed on researchers.

¹ Editor's note: The authors use 'Va' with, and sometimes without, a macro over the 'a' to specify its Samoan use (without macron) and Tongan (with macron). The authors have varied its use according to the reference under discussion.

This section has illustrated a variety of ways in which positionality has been relationally understood; as a balance of categorical items; as reciprocal and shifting; as subject to agency during research; and made intelligible in Pacific thinking through *vā* or *va*, appropriate in the field of Pasifika education. Because we seek to pay attention to our own experiences of agency in positionality, we now turn to a consideration of autoethnography as methodology.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY

In the autoethnographic process “authors scrutinize, publicize, and reflexively rework their own self-understandings as a way to shape understandings of and in the wider world” (Butz & Besio, 2009, p. 1660). In autoethnography, the concept of position is often present. For example, summarizing Goffman (1998), Meo-Sewabu (2014) describes ethnographic research as being “about getting into place and making yourself (and your culture) vulnerable” (p. 353). Hamilton, Smith, and Worthington (2008) say ethnography includes “cultural elements of personal experience” in which the researcher may “situate themselves, contesting and resisting what they see” (p. 22).

An essential tool is an autoethnographic sensibility. This means “recognizing that clear-cut distinctions among researchers, research subjects and the objects of research are illusory, and that what we call the research field occupies a space between these overlapping categories” (Butz & Besio, 2009, p. 1664). The apparent boundaries of the positioned self and concepts of relational positionality are questioned by an autoethnographic sensibility. This questioning is a consequence of embracing a holistic relational view of the world. Autoethnography can be collaborative (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2016; MacDonald & Reynolds, 2017) as in this study.

Autoethnography is primarily a textual interrogation (Jones, 2007). As an exercise in self-reflexivity (Crossa, 2012), it takes into account how “text” is shaped by ideological and epistemological assumptions as well as subjective and normative claims (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002). Although text is generally written, oral performance is text. *Tok stori*, as a relationally-focussed forum, can produce an interactive text focussed on the relational aspects of experience and learning.

TOK STORI AS METHOD

Tok stori is a practice of Melanesian origins (Sanga, Reynolds, Paulsen, Spratt, & Maneipuri, 2018). It involves people meeting and storying their experiences as experts in their own lives. *Tok stori* in the academy offers “opportunities for researchers and others to follow a relational path in their investigations, one which recognises the connectedness of humanity” (p. 5). It challenges lecture-style conference presentations that deliberately divide presenter and listeners through space and power.

Tok stori can be understood as a relational ontology (Sanga & Reynolds, 2019). The act of storying contributes to relational closeness (Sanga & Reynolds, 2019) because, through story, a shared reality is constructed. As a method within that ontology, *tok stori* affects the kinds of data produced and is helpful in developing data which values the whole person. The *tok stori* space values vulnerability, emotionality, personal experiences, relational encounters, and narrative intersections.

A conference call to *tok stori* or *talanoa* invites participants to a trust-based relational space in which to listen well, contribute deeply and expect to be changed through joint knowledge creation. Although some writers have contextually used *tok stori* and *talanoa* as synonyms (Houma, 2011; Nanau, 2011) to acknowledge this research as edgewalking and despite one of the authors of this paper, Tali's, familiarity with *talanoa*, we retain the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society (OCIES) conference term *tok stori* to draw attention to the relational space as one to which we both intentionally step.

CONTEXT

The data in this study was primarily drawn from an OCIES conference *tok stori* focussed on a number of *tok stori* previously shared by us (the authors, Tali and Martyn). *Tok stori* in the conference space offers an opportunity to decolonize proceedings despite the constraints of time and space. Here the lecture room required re-formatting into a circle at the start and back into rows at the end of the session, a symbolic reminder of the dominance of conference approaches which shape relationality through distance at the expense of connection. The session aim was to engage with a wider circle of people regarding our stories, including how one researcher's storying had affected the other. We hoped that other people's experiences and understandings would intersect with ours, helping us to re-understand our stories with enhanced depth and resonance. The session was facilitated by an expert practitioner. Ethical clearance was given by participants for their contributions to be used as research data. The session of around 60 minutes, timed to fit a double conference time allocation, involved approximately 20 participants. A mobile phone recorded the session which was subsequently transcribed.

INFORMED GROUNDED THEORY ANALYSIS

A grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) analytical approach (GT) is inductive and prioritizes understandings developed from data over those embedded in pre-existing frameworks. GT advocates coding through interaction between researcher(s) and data using a process of questioning without presumption (Charmaz, 1999). Concrete open codes (Charmaz, 1999) are established early by line-by-line coding, followed by axial codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) of more abstract patterns. This dual process is useful in autoethnographic endeavour for understanding relationships between individual experiences and global patterns

Despite seeking to avoid pre-supposition, GT recognizes everyone comes to data with assumptions. Thornberg (2012), who developed informed grounded theory (IGT), extends this recognition, claiming it is unwise not to take "advantage of the literature when collecting and analysing data" (p. 243). Thornberg suggests that adding sensitising concepts derived from literature to coding provides a tentative but viable way to navigate through data. An IGT approach is particularly valuable in research which seeks to understand relationality because it allows a literature-driven relational lens to inform coding as a way of understanding the relational configuration of apparently individual experiences. We conducted an IGT analysis of the data from the *tok stori* using sensitising concepts including agency, positionality, and relationship.

An iterative line-by-line IGT analysis produces insight by creating distance between researcher and data, valuable in supporting an autoethnography sensibility. However,

here we opt to reconstitute the data post-analysis as story in order to honour its origin and nature. Analysis is threaded through the data of the stories as told. We deal first with Tali's and then Martyn's story, linked as an edgewalk started on "different sides" of Pasifika education. Then we present contributions within the *tok stori* session from others to widen the focus to the potential of *tok stori* before discussing implications.

THE TOK STORI: DATA AND ANALYSIS

Tali's story

Initial position. Tali's story accounts for his initial position in Pasifika education by reference to the stereotype of Pacific Islanders as sport stars (Hokowhitu, 2004; Schaaf, 2006). In this, Pacific Islanders seek success in education through physical rather than other ways. Accepting this imposed category-derived position was not devoid of agency on Tali's part. As his context changed through migration, Tali valued prior Island experience.

Being a Samoan born as well, sports was always gonna be the ticket out, ticket to success, as any Polynesian you would talk to, I guess it's the easier option, because we are so conformed into the hard labour and so this is just the way it is for me.

Tali's positioning within the sporting stereotype involved limits, perhaps a consequence of exclusionary choices constructed for Pasifika (and other) students in education (Hokowhitu, 2004). He recounted that, as a result of positioning himself in education through sport,

I never paid attention to my [academic] education in the younger years.

A critical incident. At this point, a critical incident, an injury, made Tali's stereotypically informed position untenable. The cost of his distant relationship with academic education became visible. As a consequence, he deliberately re-imagined himself through a process of inquiry.

[S]ports was no longer the main focus. And so for me I guess for me I had to re-orientate the thinking, and asked, what is next for me? So I turned to education . . . I used all the learning that I put into sports; for example, I persevered through hard trainings through sports, and decided that I was gonna apply it to my education.

This description provides a further example of the agentic recycling of strengths in a new context; perseverance in sport became the ground for persistence in education. Realizing he was poorly equipped for further education, Tali deliberately turned to learning.

Deliberate learning. Tali's account of learning strategies suggests a developed level of self-knowledge that prompted remedial strategies in the face of educational inadequacy

[I]n University, while everyone else is out partying and enjoying life, I was stuck in front of the mirror trying to learn how to pronounce words.

This strategy combined with a cultural strength: conversational spaces as an expression of Pacific relationality. Storying offered Tali an alternative, comfortable opportunity to learn how to benefit from education.

None of the lectures I went to, I would understand what they are talking about . . . Pasifika people . . . love to talk and half of the time we are discussing just things that are not important. [H]ow I could change that conversation to become more meaningful? . . . the environment was less formal like there's no one telling you what to do in the front . . . I was able to ask questions.

By deliberate action, Tali sought to transform storying beyond a phatic and into a pedagogic activity as a step towards self-actualization in education, seeking fulfilment and the development of his potential. Tali's story also recalls the catalytic effect of his curiosity on others in the familiar storying environment.

So I asked the questions and I was curious about the answers . . . while they are answering the questions they were debating issues as well . . . Therefore for me, not only learning from them but they were also learning from each other and the conversation as well.

Re-positioning. The narrative indicates that when Tali returned to Pasifika education as a teacher, he had re-positioned himself. Initially, he had failed to engage in education. Recognizing himself in his students, Tali's story became that of a leader-as-servant, continuing to be deliberate in his engagement with education for the sake of others:

[T]here were a lot of me in the schools I taught at, students who are in there and not knowing what to do . . . So I asked the question to myself, how can I be of service to these kids, I decided to come back [to tertiary education] . . . and through this Masters journeys I have learnt more than what I have experienced with the hope to help.

Tali's continued learning journey produced an iterative sense of inadequacy which required him to develop himself further. It was at this point in his storying that Tali told of meeting Martyn.

Martyn's story

Initial positioning. Martyn's initial position in relation to Pasifika education was of ignorance a result of geographical movement, first from the UK to New Zealand. On coming to Wellington, this ignorance became significant.

When I got to Wellington, I had no real experience of Pacific people in education and then I walked into my classroom and there were a lot of Pasifika students . . . that presented me with a bit of a problem because my knowledge was zero.

This was compounded by Martyn's consciousness of stereotypical narratives told about Pasifika education of boys who were:

[E]ssentially polite and respectful . . . there to play rugby because they might get a professional contract.

However, Martyn tells of a second, contradictory narrative of educational success for Pasifika students, paradoxically constructed around a unique student. One year,

[A] [Pasifika] student . . . was top in Physics, and the common narrative [was] . . . there you can see Pasifika success [for all] is possible.

Although these conflicting narratives were inadequate to explain the situation, Martyn's story reveals his inability to construct a more viable narrative at that time:

[T]he narrative I was living in did not explain what I was seeing . . . it wasn't one that enabled me to make a contribution to the lives of the students . . . I thought what is the narrative here?

Martyn's family's subsequent move to a Pacific Island nation is explained as an attempt to overcome ignorance. However, as well as learning about the lifeways of others, Martyn suggests he learned about himself:

We were seeing things around us that if we read them in our way it didn't make much sense . . . I tried to go [to a Pacific Island nation] . . . to upskill but I also learnt how much upskilling I had to do.

A critical incident and re-positioning. Martyn's story recalls that he started a PhD because of a challenge from a Pasifika parent but his understanding was initially confined by his position in relation to Pasifika education.

I was looking at the word relationships and it seemed . . . what we got asked to do [in Pasifika education was] the same thing but just to do it better.

A critical moment came in Martyn's account when he encountered *vā* in the work of Māhina (2004), a concept capable of shifting his experiential learning to a new paradigm.

When I started looking at this word *vā* I realised that it was actually another whole conversation out there about how we should be together, how our relationships should run and so that gave me a really new point in my conversation with education and with myself.

Learning about relationships through *va* began to open up the possibility of adopting the position of an edgewalker in Pasifika education.

Within the conference *tok stori*, Tali and Martyn undertook a second round of storying focussed on the effect of their relationship on their positions in regard to Pasifika education and research. Thus, this section is also an analysis of a *tok stori* about other prior *tok stori* sessions.

Tali's relational story

Fluid positionality. Tali's story reiterates the significance of fixed, categorical aspects of positionality on encountering Martyn at a lecture.

He was a guest speaker talking about his research class . . . you have questions, why is this white person talking about the things that are dear to me?

However, other aspects of positioning were also in play, which Tali describes shifting the way he contextually understood Martyn.

What connected me to Martyn and his research was the fact that he came in as a learner, not as the one who wants to sort of change our ways of doing things but someone who wants to understand the way we do things.

Here, Tali indicates how positional separation based on ethnicity can be undercut by the deliberately adopted position of another.

Catalytic relevance. Tali's story cites a moment to explain the significance of learning as a relational connection in this context. He had been unable to explain to school management his effectiveness in Pasifika education.

[T]hey were trying to get out of me, what are you doing with this class? . . . the students in this class . . . have said that I am the only one they listen to. And so the question was put out there and I didn't know what to say to it or how to answer it.

Tali explains his inability to provide a reply centres on his position in Pasifika education as a family member. In the *tok stori*, recalling this produced a very emotional moment, attesting to the depth of love required to undertake teaching as family care in line with cultural norms.

Teaching was no different than looking after my own sibling, little nieces and nephew, and the reason why I couldn't answer or explain . . . was because for me it was a normal practice . . . I didn't change the way I see whoever was sitting in front of me, I saw them as my own brothers and sisters.

Faced with his inability to explain, Martyn's learning became valuable to Tali.

I couldn't explain that for myself, but he was able to explain that because for me it was just normal practice and habits but for him it was new learning.

In addition, Tali's experienced validation of his Samoan culture in Pasifika education and realized the price he had paid to succeed:

[W]hat had happened is that I had neglected that side of me, my Samoanness, in order to learn in this environment, had to become a Palagi to learn like how they learn . . . I couldn't pin point the ideas until I came to study and heard Martyn talking about these things, I said . . . that's it!

Martyn's relational story

Catalytic relevance. In Martyn's narrative, the effect of the storying encounter with Tali was a re-understanding of the significance of his learning. Tali's tears challenged Martyn to respond.

I realised at that point what he had given me. What people had taught me, I knew it was of significance to other palagi teachers but I did not really appreciate it until I heard his reaction, the quality of the gift . . . the importance of what I have tried to learn . . . the responsibility

This explanation suggests that a person's response to emotion in storying can have a powerful catalytic effect, such as the rethinking of one's relational position and potential contribution to a field.

Fluid positionality. Storying as pedagogy capable of shifting a person's position in relation to a shared field is a theme in Martyn's account of his and Tali's interactions.

[P]assing the story backwards and forwards, I have really come to understand much more on the seriousness and power . . . of the Pacific wisdom and the importance of absorbing that myself . . . validated by my brother in his comments.

The validation of an "outsider" by their contribution to "insiders" has two-way consequences. The validated outsider may experience increased confidence and a consciousness of increased closeness to their field; insiders may re-address their relationship to the field as a result of the approach and re-languaging of outsiders. In this way, relational positioning developed through the flux of learning can be creative for all involved.

***Tok stori* as a relational space**

In this section, we briefly analyse the contributions of others to the conference *tok stori*, focussing on the potential of *tok stori* as a way of exploring positionality and relationality in a conference setting. Participants are indicated as P1, P2, and so on.

Validation of emotion as connection. One participant in the *tok stori* intersected her experience as a parent with that of Tali as a teacher through the emotion Tali had shown when thinking of teaching as a family activity.

I have a child . . . his teacher . . . said to me, I am paid to teach I am not paid to like him and I don't like him . . . how lucky those students are to have a teacher that brings that kind of love to the classroom. (P1)

This contribution suggests the way emotion in *tok stori* can enhance relational connection, lead to the validation of one person by another, and support ideas such as the importance to Pasifika education of love.

A second participant connected to the story as a teacher. He recounted a prior conversation in his home (Asian) country:

She told me . . . “this means that you love bringing something to your students, that you want to connect with your students” . . . But for me when you ignore students that means you lose your heart. (P2)

This exemplifies the idea that *tok stori* encourages emotional connections which mediate ethnic or other categorical differences.

Validation of relationships as potential pedagogic spaces. Because a *tok stori* session, unlike a traditional conference presentation, opens a space which values relationality, pedagogical connections can readily be developed and/or acknowledged. These contributions speak of prior experiences but offer validation to involved listeners in the *tok stori* moment:

[W]hat helped me was having [my] husband's perspective and other people's perspectives but hearing your take on it [vā] helped me connect with it too. (P3)

[I remember] having a conversation . . . a few years ago [about Pasifika education] and since then it has shifted my thinking . . . I have just been on this journey . . . one that is striving for relationships . . . where we might be sharing our journeys, where it [our learning] can hit home. (P4)

Validation of re-positioning. A *tok stori* space is one in which people's understanding of the world and their place in it is discursively created. The conference *tok stori* from which this data has been drawn refers to prior *tok stori* in an iterative, dialogic, and circular fashion. “Flattened” relationships and consequent opportunities afforded by *tok stori* can act to facilitate new understandings which can challenge and shift a person's world view.

We are not here to compete but we are here to complete each-other and I think just seeing the relationship . . . highlights there is a movement in terms of the thinking and mind in terms of retraining and reframing challenging and overcoming a lot of things. (P5)

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In the literature of relational positionality, researcher agency is generally confined to the period of research. This is because relationality is understood as an interpersonal matter, often to do with a balance perceived between multiple categories of identity. However, a *va*-based understanding of relationality can include people's relationships with entities such as the field of Pasifika education, relationships over which they may have ongoing agency. Understanding the ethics of Pasifika education through *teu le va* means that where researchers do have agency over their positionality, they also have responsibility to nurture this in order to enhance their contribution to communities.

Understanding positionality through a longer time base makes sense through this lens. The data suggests that, in the field of Pasifika education, long-term relationships which strategically support researchers as edgewalkers are particularly valuable. The *tok stori* reported on here suggests that valuing agency in positionality can be powerful when this is enacted through learning and the development of appropriate relationships at a deep level. Emotional connection is an expectation in *tok stori*; the tears and laughter shared through *tok stori* in the OCIES conference promoted storied intersections that demonstrate this kind of depth.

However, the data suggests that processes which have agentic potential to render positionality fluid are neither simple nor straightforward, but structured by a tension between fixed and less stable items. Fixed items include categorical positional markers that support stereotypes. However, the data indicates that it is possible to erode the effect of such markers through relational activity. Critical events are another fixed category. Researchers can respond to these in a variety of ways, including deliberate learning and self-actualization in order to achieve a degree of re-positioning.

Recognizing existing strengths and identifying areas of need are also strategies capable of supporting positional fluidity. This is particularly true where relational positionality is understood to go beyond how researchers are regarded by others and to encompass who the researcher is as person, how they regard themselves, and their contribution to community research. This does not deny the relevance of power as an aspect of positionality but sees all those involved in research as having positional agency to mediate flows of power through the ethics and understandings they bring.

The data raises the question of the relationship between position and disposition. Disposition is a concept focussed on the individual; positionality is relational. Perhaps a researcher's disposition is implicated in the way tensions between fixed and fluid items which affect positionality are resolved. The data suggests that where resources such as prior experience, cultural practices such as storying, and conceptual information exist, these are recognized and valued if a disposition to learn is also present. Where this is true, a responsibility is placed on researchers and practitioners in education to position themselves as learners from the plethora of resources available.

The researcher-as-learner and teacher-as-servant have the potential to build enhanced relational bridges with the communities they serve. However, since everyone has the ability to learn, perhaps the activation of this aspect of disposition is itself a result of environmental factors such as the extent to which stereotypes constrain the optimum conditions for learning.

In this article, autoethnography has proved a valuable methodology for creating a platform from which to discuss positionality as a relational matter. The individual narratives shared in the *tok story* continually reference storytellers to a field of relationships. The vulnerability associated with autoethnography is also helpful since the relational accounts given in the data of positionality both fixed and fluid are steeped in emotion. Admissions of ignorance, conformity to stereotype and so on are deeply personal matters.

Given the partial understanding we have of people's experiences, attributing such things to others is judgemental, not honouring. The potential of an autoethnographic sensibility to expose the illusionary distinctions between elements of research such as researcher and field is also helpful when seeking to expand the boundaries of discussion around relational positionality.

As has become clear, both time and the range of relationships which are acknowledged can be usefully expanded when a more holistic and relationally focussed lens is applied to research. By creating space between ourselves and our stories, the IGT analysis of autoethnographic text has taught much to us as storytellers. Our learning about the kinds of processes which have affected us, permits increased deliberateness as we continue our research and teaching journeys.

Finally, this article has demonstrated that where edgewalking is a way of caring for research relationships with community, interpersonal relational activities in the space between "sides" of the edge can enhance close relational positionality with individuals, community, and field. We appreciate the responsibility and feel the joy that this realization brings. In our case, we have realized with Crocombe (1976) that a "person who behaves towards you as a brother deserves to be addressed as one" (p. 4).

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