"Getting beneath the skin": A *tok stori* approach to reviewing the literature of leadership in Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Marshall Islands

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A literature review is generally a compendium of written material on a topic presented as research background. It functions to describe what is known in academic circles and to justify research questions that step beyond the known. A more nuanced approach involves getting "beneath the skin" of the literature itself; considering the fabric of the literature; what worldviews are evident, the questions that started inquiry, and the usefulness to communities of the knowledge gained. In this article, we discuss the place of the literature review by going beyond a compendium approach. We offer summaries of literature from the Pacific Island Countries of Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Marshall Islands as background to a research effort on leadership indigenous to the Pacific region, before getting beneath the skin of our reading. We augment our approach by imagining a conference tok stori *discussion of Pacific leadership literature as a form of literature itself. This acts to re-value real-time discursive exploration and erodes the boundaries between the written and oral. Our aim is to investigate a more open and inclusive research space that honours Pacific-origin processes so that our research contribution can be increasingly permeated by Pacific values, wisdom and perspectives.*

Keywords: Orality; tok stori; Pacific education; leadership

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this article is the concept of academic literature; how we think about what it is, how it came to be, and how it might be treated. The term literature generally refers to written outputs of research. Most articles provide a compendium of research literature organized as a single body or in tranches that address aspects of a context to justify current research. This article seeks to nuance the value of assembling literature, using a current research initiative on school leadership in the Pacific as a case study. We aim to get some way "beneath the skin" of these corpora. We understand the skin of leadership literature to be what it has to say about leadership. Residing beneath this are matters such as assumptions about worldviews, the value of asking certain questions in certain ways, and ideas about the usefulness of inquiry.

Further, we question the boundaries of literature itself through the concept of oral literature. In scholarly circles, literature is generally understood as the written output of researchers elevated to that status by single- or double-blind peer review and other publisher-executed forms of quality control (Snodgrass, 2006). Unpublished or unreviewed material is called grey literature (Conn et al., 2003), and is often the output of organizations whose main function is not academic publishing (Hopewell et al., 2005). Grey literature might be included in a literature review. However, when oral literature is discussed, it is generally for aesthetic anthropological interest (see, e.g., Finnegan, 2012) or as a methodological matter in relation to an orality (or oral form) such as *talanoa* (Vaioleti, 2011), *tok stori* (Sanga et al., 2018) or *yarning* (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). The significance of orality for communities whose intellectual traditions remain orally based, and for whom written communication and research has a short history, suggests that it is appropriate to consider orally held and transmitted wisdom as literature. To be literate in an area is to be knowledgeable and need not be limited to the written word (Toumu'a, 2014).

Indigenous oral knowledge is sometimes represented in research as a subject matter. Examples include ethics (Sanga, 2015), knowledge guardianship (Sanga & Reynolds, 2020) and traditional environmental knowledge (Pollard et al., 2015). Sometimes, the discussion weaves an iterative pattern of participants' oral contributions and written literature. However, seldom are oral contributions imagined as literature or valued in literature reviews in similar ways to written research. We tentatively explore the benefits of intersecting these forms.

One possible reason for the division maintained between written and oral literature is the concept of objectivity as present in review and publishing processes. Perhaps oral literature appears too individual, too positionally framed, too partial an understanding, or merely opinion. However, when we "get under the skin" of written leadership literature, positionality is highlighted in the approach of researchers, the partialness of research, and limitations on what can be claimed. Consequently, confining oral literature to supplementary roles appears somewhat arbitrary. This is especially true when pursuing literature that engages with societies steeped in oral intellectual traditions where written forms have short histories.

Oral traditions are often linked to performativity. The performance of oral knowledge is the way in which the body makes sense of abstract meaning. For example, Tongan *maau* (poetry) is performed through song and dance. Including, in a literature review, oral knowledge/stories, in this case stories of leadership, means taking account of

understandings that not only reside in the mind but also in the *loto* (soul/spirit). This is felt knowledge; the body makes sense of the knowing through performance. Paradoxically, because of the nature of academic communication and the expected outputs of research, we are writing about oral traditions. However, as a step towards balancing the traditions of the academy and those of our research partners, we weave together oral contributions about leadership literature from a digital conference *tok stori* session and matters from the subsurface of the literature presented in that session. The oral and written contributions add mutual insight. This article tentatively suggests the kinds of learning that can come from this kind of weaving.

We begin by providing a brief research background, including a general discussion of the value of reviewing literature. Summaries of three bodies of written literature from three Pacific Island Countries (PICs) are then presented, and ideas about leadership are drawn from these. Next, a discussion is staged that pays attention to some of the matters that lie "beneath the skin" of the three bodies of literature. We intersect oral contributions drawn from a *tok stori* session under the auspices of the Oceania International and Comparative Education Society (OCIES) at the "Festival of OCIES 2020 Virtual Conference" with the written literature on which the session was based. By way of conclusion, we consider the value of this woven approach to reviewing literature in the context of our research and signal possible benefits for researchers in other contexts from praxis that honours the traditions of research partners whose lives are lived beyond the academy.

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is a valuable aspect of qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). However, not all reviews are the same; context shapes intent, focus and structure. For example, there are reflexive approaches to literature review, such as grounded theory (Thornberg & Dunne, 2019) and emerging post-foundational approaches (e.g., Mizzi, 2013). There are also emergent efforts to recognize broader forms of academic literature. These include Creative Arts and Community Voices pieces in this journal (McCormick, 2020). Building on the expanding conceptualization of both literature and review, we present three overlapping aspects of reviews salient to this discussion drawn from Haverkamp and Young (2007); that is, the review as foundation, as an account of perspective, and as an exploration of paradigm. These aspects deal with the related questions of what, how and why knowledge has been constructed in literature.

First, the literature review as foundation. Haverkamp and Young (2007) say "there is a consensus that existing literature is important in establishing the scientific context and purpose of a study, its rationale, and anticipated contribution" (p. 285). In other words, research that takes account of extant literature can find justification from the sum of what is (and what is not) known about a topic of interest so that literature provides a foundation for new research.

Second, Haverkamp and Young (2007) note the way literature portrays the perspective(s) researchers have taken to a field. This aspect pays attention to how things became known. A literature review can take account of the "voice(s)" represented in research, the dynamics of a field that researchers have (and have not) attended to, the constructs they used in theorization, and so on.

A third important aspect of a literature review is its paradigmatic portrayal of a field (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). Attention to paradigm shines light on the stance researchers adopt. Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) discuss a paradigm as a set of related assumptions, a philosophical orientation, or a set of beliefs about the nature of knowledge. These renditions point to ontology; researchers embed their research approach in assumptions, beliefs, and philosophies, which are all elements of worldview. The ontology in which the research makes sense can be their own or the ontologies of research participants. Since literature sits on an ontological platform, it can be mined for paradigmatic information.

In this article, we attend first to the content of the school leadership literature of three PICs as a foundation for our research. We then examine the perspectives and paradigms that sit beneath the skin of the literature, a move enriched by honouring the potential of oracies in Pacific ontologies.

School leadership literature

We are involved in research that seeks to learn from and offer benefit to school leaders. Our main question is: How is leadership understood in different Pacific cultural contexts operationalized in the context of school leadership? This research, coordinated by the Development Leadership Program (www.dlprog.org) for DFAT, and involving staff from the Institute of Education, University of the South Pacific (USP) and Victoria University of Wellington/Te Herenga Waka, aims to increase knowledge, support contextualization in future donor-aid initiatives, and enhance curriculum developments in a regional school leadership qualification, the Graduate Certificate in School Leadership (GCSL) (Sanga, Maebuta et al., 2020).

Leadership has been understood in multiple ways: behaviour, influence over others, individual traits, interaction patterns, perception of others regarding legitimacy of influence, role relations, and the occupation of an administrative position (Yukl, 1994). As a working definition, we follow Yukl: leadership "involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person [or group] over other people [or groups] to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organization" (Yukl, 1994, p. 3). This definition emphasizes "influence" and "relationships" as key social processes in leadership. This is appropriate because of the centrality of relationships (Anae, 2019; Vaai & Casamira, 2017; Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017) and influence through relationships (Sanga & Walker, 2012) in many Pacific cultures. Our foci include what has been called Indigenous leadership (Khalifa et al., 2019); locally framed leadership as understood and practiced by the peoples of the PICs with whom we are engaged. We are also interested in how introduced forms of leadership are translated, negotiated and operationalized on the ground through relationships, and the interplay between co-existing leadership models.

Our approach to leadership takes the "direction of naming" (Sanga & Reynolds, 2017, p. 198) from the point of view of leadership practitioners in schools and communities. This recognizes the value of their wisdom, capabilities, experiences and reflections to themselves, their communities and to wider groups involved in leadership and education. Thus, in order to begin to sift what is known and to sharpen our research conversations, members of the research team produced elements of the literature review summarized here. As individuals, we adopted our own approaches.

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The Solomon Islands corpus was assembled through a combination of Google Scholar searches (using terms such as "Solomon Islands leadership", "Solomon Islands education", followed by terms derived from the results of initial searches such as "Big Man" and "matrilineal leadership Solomons"), following the bibliographic genealogy of recent writings in the area, and consultation with Solomon Island experts and practitioners in the field. The Marshall Islands (RMI) corpus was assembled by a grounded approach through *bwebwenato* (relationally mediated conversations) with school and community leaders and their lived experiences of leadership and service. The few published sources were woven together with *Kajin Majōl* (Marshallese) ideas and ideals of leadership knowledge and practices as reflected and articulated by the school and community leaders. The Tongan body of literature originated in a compilation of PhD theses written by Tongans to mark the USP's 50th Anniversary. The collection is in the USP Tonga Campus Library in a special section commissioned by His Majesty Tupou VI, as *Kuku Kaunaka*. To prepare a brief for His Majesty, the abstracts from the 100+ theses were compiled into a book. This led to the revelation that there were only two PhD theses based on Tongan conceptualizations of educational leadership as practiced in Tonga: Paongo (1999) and Johansson-Fua (2003). Consequently, for this research, the Tongan corpus was compiled by expanding the education-based literature search using data base searches such as Google Scholar to include relevant leadership literature from other disciplines, including history, sociology, and political science.

No claim is made that the review is exhaustive. Instead, we highlight differences in the bodies of literature found to date, the result of the various search processes employed, level of prior knowledge and funding, research and publishing agendas.

Solomon Islands

There are multiple domains in Solomon Islands thinking, a consequence of a history that involves established clan systems of governance, the influence of Christian missionaries, and colonialism more generally. Sanga and Reynolds (2019) and Sanga (2008, 2009) discuss three domains with matching "masters". These are culture (or *kastom*), church, and formalized institutions. It is in this complex territory that Solomon Islands leadership studies are located.

There are also multiple models of leadership in Solomon Islands. Rowland (2016) outlines the Big Man (or Big Woman, (Pollard, 2006)) whose title and dignity rests on strength, cultural knowledge, wealth, and its distribution (Kabutaulaka, 1998); Chief (see also Ruqebatu, 2008), a tribal or clan leader who holds a life-long position related to land ownership and may be involved in resolving disputes; and *Lida*, sometimes developed through programs by groups such as churches, civil society, and formal sector organizations, including for female leaders. In a multi-domain context, gender plays out in various ways (Sanga, 2008) and tensions between leadership models can exist. School leadership is in the institutional domain (Sanga, 2009) but seeks to serve *kastom* defined and organized communities in a multi-ethnic context. Ruqebatu (2008) suggests that against the background of *kastom* leadership, school leadership may be a site of tension because "leadership within the school context is new and though there are similarities [with traditional forms] it is conceptually different" (p. 3).

Literature about educational leadership in Solomon Islands can be usefully divided into two bodies. The first pays attention to how effective school leadership can be understood. Examples include Sanga and Maneipuri (2002), Misite'e (2008), and Ruqebatu (2008). Each provides a multi-component model of effectiveness in school leadership. In addition, Rodie (2011) advocates for school leadership in a cooperative and communal form embedded in "villages of learning" (p. 209). This metaphor references shared, community focused leadership.

The second body of Solomon Islands leadership literature deals with education leadership development. Sanga, Maebuta, et al. (2020) draw on a range of research (e.g., Lingam, 2011; Lingam & Lingam, 2014; Malasa, 2007; Rouikera, 2013; Sisiolo, 2010) to note that training has generally taken place in Honiara, the capital; has been offered to small cohorts; and is sometimes outsourced to institutions from outside Solomon Islands. Sanga and Houma (2004) state leadership models used in training do not adequately describe the role of the Solomon Island principal. Rouikera (2013) decries the limitations of imported leadership models; Sanga and Taylor (2001) question the hierarchical relationships that often underpin aid-funded leadership training and point to mutual learning as a productive framing for this kind of activity.

A body of literature is also developing on Solomons-designed and delivered programs including the GCSL (Sanga, Reynolds, Houma, et al., 2020; Sanga et al., 2018), embracing work that specifically unpacks contextualization in Solomon Islands leadership training (Sanga, Maebuta, et al., 2020) and that sits well with regional re-thinking education initiatives (Sanga, 2003).

The under-representation and under-appreciation of women in Solomon Islands school leadership for various reasons including patrilineal structures in education despite wider matrilineal social structures in some areas, is a theme in the literature (Akao, 2008; Edwards et al., 2016; Houma, 2011; Maezama, 2015; Sisiolo & Giles, 2011).The multifaceted ways gender plays out in leadership illustrate the complexity of the relationship between leadership models and cultural understandings (Sanga, 2008).

There is also grey literature pertinent to educational leadership in Solomon Islands. Ruqebatu (2008) calls for a fully developed official educational leadership model and the *Solomon Islands Teaching Service Handbook* (MEHRD, 2011) pays attention to three characteristics of school leaders: professional attributes, professional knowledge, and interpersonal and pedagogic practices. However, the literature suggests that this leadership model is not always borne out in practice (Akao, 2008; Aruhu, 2010; Memua, 2011).

Marshall Islands

When compared to the Solomon Islands, the readily available literature of school leadership of the RMI is thin. Consequently, we revert to literature that pays attention to Marshall Islands leadership more generally. Relationships between the general leadership literature and school leadership literature are then offered.

Leadership is a valued practice in the RMI (Jim et al., 2021). Many authors position Marshallese concepts of leadership by tracing storied connections between people, the cosmos, sea, and land, significant events, and supernatural powers and beings (Carucci, 1989; Dobbin & Hezel, 2011; Dvorak, 2016; McArthur, 2004; Rudiak-Gould, 2011).

Stories are the basis of Marshallese leadership structures (Dobbin & Hezel, 2011; McArthur, 2004) and establish the origin of power (Dobbin & Hezel, 2011), who it is bestowed upon (McArthur, 2004), how power and leadership are structured and legitimized (Peterson, 2009), and how leadership is characterized (Carucci, 1989; Rudiak-Gould, 2011). Dobbin and Hezel (2011) identify the source of leadership power by reference to the sky god and island creator, Lowa. Several authors (Dobbin & Hezel, 2011; Hage, 1998; Jetnil-Kijiner, 2014; Walsh, 2003) present the story of Liwatounmour as cosmological evidence of the origins of leadership. Other relevant stories include that of Letao (Carucci, 1989). Leadership stories contribute to identities of "we" and "they" which help Marshallese make sense of who they are and what they experience (Carucci, 1989).

Leadership and followership are holistically linked in RMI conceptualizations. According to Petersen (2009), leadership legitimacy is based on connections to those who first settled an atoll or established a community. Authority is given by the extended family or clan (Palafox et al., 2011; Petersen, 2006, 2009) through land rights (Kupferman, 2011; Palafox et al., 2011; Taafaki & Fowler, 2019) and involves specialized and protected types of knowledge and expertize (Palafox et al., 2011; Stone, 2001). Patterns of reciprocity are established through land, family, and history so that leadership and sustainability are integrated.

The cosmologically rooted relationship between gender and leadership is interwoven in complex ways (Hage, 2000; Kupferman, 2011). Traditionally, leadership and power have been derived through matrilineal kinship that has its origins in the Loktanur narrative (Ahlgren, 2016; Dobbin & Hezel, 2011; McArthur, 2004; Vinson, 2017). Loktanur, a mythical mother figure from the sky, asked each of her sons if she could accompany them on a canoe race; all but her youngest son, Jebro, refused. Loktanur gifted Jebro a sail which he used to win the race and be awarded the *iroij* title (Ahlgren, 2016). The stories of Liwatounmour and Loktanur bestow the prerogative of the female line in chiefly succession (Dobbin & Hezel, 2011; McArthur 2004). The power of the narratives is manifest because current chiefly lines and leadership rights and roles are traced through the female side (Dobbin & Hezel, 2011; Hage, 2000; Hezel, 2001; McArthur, 2004; Petersen, 2009; Pollock, 1974; Spennemann, 2006).

In addition to gaining legitimacy through matrilineal links, Marshallese leaders were traditionally expected to have leadership qualities displayed by key characters of origin stories (Ahlgren, 2016; Petersen, 2009; Rudiak-Gould 2011). For instance, Loktnur and Jebro's story reveals that successful leaders are expected to reflect generosity and obedience towards elders (Ahlgren, 2016), diligence, persistence, resilience, humility, and respect towards the needs of their matrilineage through the effective management of resources (McArthur, 2004; Petersen, 2009). Petersen (2009) identifies the ability to prevent strife coupled with the ability to be gentle and caring as key leadership qualities valued by the Marshallese. The matrilineal logic of Marshallese kinship and its links to the land promote the life-giving qualities of nurturing and love; a leader must be able to strongly defend the kinship extension of the mother and her life-giving power.

Jim et al (2021) bring cosmological, experiential, and school leadership together through the *Kanne Lobal* canoe-based framework. This has been applied to the leadership and educational aspirations of elementary school leaders in the RMI. School principal and

community leader, Danny Jim, depicts intergenerational leadership practice through his experiences via the metaphor of the canoe:

> My grandfather's stories about people's roles within the canoe reminded me that everyone within the family has a responsibility to each other. Our women, mothers, and daughters too have a significant responsibility in the journey, in fact, they hold us, care for us, and give strength to their husbands, brothers, and sons. The wise man or elder sits in the middle of the canoe, directing the young man who helps to steer. (Jim et al., 2021, p. 11)

As a traditional Marshallese approach linked to navigation, *Kanne Lobal* provides a worldview that honours the voices and lived experiences of Marshallese people. *Kanne Lobal* provides the possibility of unpacking and empowering the education experiences of Marshallese (Jim et al., 2021).

As with Solomon Islands, the RMI leadership literature points to discord between local and introduced models of leadership. The advent of capitalist structures is shifting leadership and power relationships to reflect Western patriarchal power relationships (Dvorak, 2016). Jim et al (2021) share their frustrations concerning how the education system in the RMI is driven in this way: accreditation acts as a vehicle to shape leadership in competitive directions. They describe school leaders' interactions on Majuro as lacking intimacy; most school leaders do not value working together. Consequently, the cultural practices of the past are no longer as valued they were (Jim et al., 2021). The RMI grey literature document *Teacher Standards and Licensing System* (Ministry of Education, 2013) contains the expectation that teachers will maintain *Kajin Majōl* culture and values. School leaders are expected to collaborate with traditional and community leaders, families and community members, and mobilize community resources. However, direct reference to *Majōl* leadership models is absent.

Tonga

As with the RMI, the accessible written school leadership literature of Tonga is thin. Although there has been interest in Tongan leadership from historical, sociological, and political perspectives, little research on Tongan educational leadership other than works by Johansson-Fua (2001, 2003, 2007); Johansson-Fua et al. (2011); Paongo (1999) and Vete (1989) has been developed. Consequently, we focus on Tongan conceptualization of leadership in order to support the review of Tongan educational leadership literature that follows. This framing is relevant because Tongan school leaders operate within Tongan society.

In contemporary Tonga, people personify leadership by virtue of their social position. The monarch is the highest ranked chief (*hau*); the nobles of the realm are hereditary leaders or royal appointees. Within the *kainga* (clan/tribe), leadership is invested in the *'ulumotu'a* (head of a clan) and to some extent the *mehekitanga* (father's sister). Leadership is maintained through negotiations of power relations and the cultural recognition of leaders by followers (Helu-Thaman, 1988), symbolically exhibited through such values as *'ofa* (love), *mateaki* (loyalty) and *faka'apa'apa* (respect) (Latukefu, 1974; Wood-Ellem, 1999).

Rank underpins the dynamics of Tongan leadership. Gender and age are two major identifiers for establishing rank (Aoyagi, 1966; Bott, 1981; Helu-Thaman, 1988; Herda, 1987; Wood-Ellem, 1987). Rank is always defined within family or *kainga* but is highly

dependent on context. For example, a person's rank can change according to the presence of maternal or paternal relations. However, in their position as a sister and *mehekitanga*, women are always ranked higher than their brothers and their brothers' children. Conversely, as mother or wife, women are of lower rank than their husbands.

The concept of power informs Tongan understandings of rank and leadership. Power or *mafai*, the capacity to lead (Bott, 1981 p. 10) is not synonymous with "authority", translated by Churchwood (1955) as *pule*. A person of *pule* (authority) does not always necessarily hold *mafai* (power). For example, the *mehekitanga* apparently lacks *pule* (Helu-Thaman, 1988; Herda, 1987). Within traditional leadership, *mafai* can be divided into *mana* (mystical powers) associated with *mehekitanga*, and secular power (not necessarily associated with men) (Herda, 1987; Rogers, 1977).

The influence of over a century of contact with Western civilization has led to a compromize or composite culture (Helu-Thaman, 1988). Wood-Ellem (1987) presents a model of traditional leadership responding to a modern context in the form of Queen Salote and Tungi's leadership during their reign. Their relationship was both based on and set precedent. She writes: "there was only one model of female-male partnership for Salote and Tungi to follow: the traditional dual leadership of a male chief and his 'eldest sister'" (p. 219). Through this model, traditional leadership appears a joint effort; the *'ulumotu'a* oversees all responsibilities associated with the land and all secular affairs; the *mehekitanga* oversee all responsibilities associated with *koloa fakatonga* and all that is sacred in Tongan rituals.

The middle class, firmly established by the end of the 20th century, is characterized by several "modern" features and limited by several "traditional" features of Tongan culture. Civil leadership and social distance are eroding traditional leadership, particularly of the nobility (James, 1997; *Matangi Tonga Magazine*, 1992). Although nobles continue to hold on to their ascribed status, church ministers, educators, businesspeople, farmers, and town officers are among new leaders who rely on status gained through education, commerce, and industry. They are legitimized by a model of leadership that relies more on authority and ability to lead. However, their assumed authority is tentative and ambiguous, fraught with social contradictions, and tempered by the tension surrounding commoners who "get above their station" (*fie 'eiki*).

Studies conducted of Tongan school principals strongly suggest that for commoner leaders in education, leadership relies heavily on an ability to relate to people. Whereas the power (*mafai*) of the noble is within his title (*'eiki*), the power base of the commoner leader is within his/her relationships with stakeholders. Principals recognize the importance of relationships in exerting social influence over teachers, students, and stakeholders (Johansson-Fua, 2003), and know that fostering close working relationships with teachers helps them gain their respect and support (Johansson-Fua, 2003). Principles know that "authority" might be based on their position but their "power" to influence the lives and activities of people in their schools depends primarily on their ability to maintain appropriate relationships with their stakeholders.

Johansson-Fua (2003) also revealed that principals are aware of their personal and professional values and the ways these affect their leadership practices. A strong link exists between espoused values and the nature of relationships that principals cultivate in their schools and communities. Knowing and understanding one's culture, customs, and

traditions, as well as those of the people you work with and for, is a necessity. Leadership is not only just an issue of the workplace but of living; leadership is not just a skill – it is an integral part of one's life. Leadership in the context of the social milieu is how a person is assessed in the Tongan context (Kavaliku, 2007).

Summary

There are varied foci in the three bodies of literature we have assembled to support our research. The Solomon Islands corpus is tightly focused on school leadership with subdued reference to Melanesian models of leadership. What was reported directly about school leadership in the RMI section is slight. The support of a wider Marshallese literature base is, therefore, helpful to draw implications for the research. Similar comments can be made about the Tongan written literature base. However, all three bodies contain references to mismatches between leadership framings at the interface of educational leadership and community leadership as schools seek to serve communities. These and similar qualitative facets focused a fruitful exploration beneath the skin of the literature at a *tok stori* session at the Festival of OCIES 2020 Virtual Conference the US.

TOK STORI METHODOLOGY

Kovach (2010) presents an informative discussion of how Indigenous conversational modes or oralities support research. She states that conversation is "congruent with an Indigenous paradigm" (p. 124) in which storytelling is recognized as a dialogical means of assisting others, and conversation is a way of gathering information.

Tok stori is an orality Indigenous to Melanesia (Kabutaulaka, 2015). It involves the creation of a safe space in which story telling takes place (Davidson, 2012; Sanga, Johannson-Fua et al., 2020). This is achieved because the dialogic process of speaking and listening creates the kinds of relational closeness (Fasavalu & Reynolds, 2019) that implies deep interpersonal commitment. *Tok stori* is at home in a dialogic relational ontology (Sanga & Reynolds, 2019). As a methodology, it has been helpful in a wide range of research contexts such as evaluation (Paulsen & Spratt, 2020), leadership (Sanga, 2017), social research (Davidson, 2012), and professional learning (Sanga, Maebuta, et al., 2020). *Tok stori* as method sits within and overlaps with *tok stori* methodology.

The method of this particular *tok stori* was developed to respond to the effects of COVID 19 on travel and academic interaction. As a way of facilitating connection under restrictive conditions, OCIES hosted an online conference in which the research team offered *tok stori* as a model of engagement. Thus, this account contributes to the scholarship of virtual *tok stori* (Sanga et al., 2021) and that of relationality in virtual spaces more generally (Enari & Matapo, 2020; Koya- Vaka'uta, 2017a; Koya-Vaka'uta, 2017b; Sanga & Reynolds, 2020). The *tok stori* also offers an opportunity to examine what can be learned by intersecting aspects of written literature with *tok stori* contributions imagined with the status of oral literature.

During the OCIES virtual *tok stori*, one research team member acted as chair and three members presented short accounts of the bodies of literature from Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands and Tonga. However, much of the two-hour session was offered to the 30+ participants of many ethnicities and locations to contribute their own expertize, reflections, and stories. The session was opened with *mihi* (greetings) that acknowledged

both the place of hosting, Aotearoa New Zealand, and the wider Oceanic space of discussion. The *tok stori*, entitled 'Getting beneath the skin" provided ethically cleared data in an oral form for the following section. Imagining the salience of orality as oral literature is appropriate for research with communities whose intellectual traditions are orally based and for whom written communication and research has a short history. This idea is also congruent for research that seeks to learn from the way leadership in formal education, which is a centre of written communication, interacts with the local traditional form that are generally exercized through oralities.

GETTING BENEATH THE SKIN

In this section, oral contributions from the OCIES virtual conference *tok stori* session are woven with aspects of written literature. In an enterprise such as this, there are inevitable compromizes. In oral as much as in written literature, the status of knowledge creators affects credibility; expertize is informed by position. However, for ethical and practical purposes, here we generally treat the *tok stori* data as a jointly constructed narrative, indicating categorial aspects of position such as gender and ethnicity only when they appear to us immediately salient to the argument. This approach balances the woven nature of *tok stori* with an understanding of positionality as relational (Crossa, 2012; Fasavalu & Reynolds, 2019); relational positionality acknowledges categorical aspects of identity (Carling et al., 2014) since these have relational roots. In a *tok stori*, a pertinent positional approach is not to consider "who am I", but "who are we". In this case, "we" are various members of OCIES and other friends present at the session.

Further, the thematic structure we use enhances critique at the intersections of written and oral expression. We acknowledge that this is at the expense of interrupting the flow of *tok stori*, present despite the virtual nature of the dialogic space in which more "chairing" was required than might otherwise have been needed. We pay attention to three themes generated by the *tok stori* as examples of the way oral literature can contribute to a literature review by getting beneath the skin of written scholarship: temporality, scale, and direction of naming.

Temporality

Temporality draws attention to literature being not only of its time but acting within time. Here, we demonstrate how the intersection of oral contributions from the *tok stori* with the written corpus is of value to our research through the concept of immediacy.

Immediacy points to the relevance of ideas from literature to current leadership thinking. A contribution to the *tok stori* focused on a tale of a slow *vaka* (canoe) voyage between RMI atolls. Three aspects of leadership emerged from this. First, leadership evidenced by the mutual learning of the crew during the voyage: "You can see the leaders on *vaka,* sharing knowledge and opportunity around navigation, reading the forecasts, working their way through the currents, sun and so forth". This offers immediacy to the Marshallese leadership model, *Kanne Lobal* (Jim et al., 2021), metaphorically constructed as it is around the everyday Marshallese activities of steering and sailing. Second, when a young crew member was asked the contemporary question "Who are you?", the *tok stori* speaker described his cosmological reply – the story of Loktnur and

Jebro (Ahlgren, 2016). His answer illustrates the vitality of traditional understandings contributing to current aspects of identity as it informs leadership.

In addition, the *tok stori* speaker explained that, upon arrival, the young crew member made a solo visit to the atoll's traditional chief. The story depicted the young man saying: "I've been telling the chief where we have come from, what you've been doing, who you are. And at the end of that, the chief has given you permission to carry out your work." The *tok stori* speaker wove this story with ideas from Carucci (1989):

> People who consider themselves to be "we" all share the similar story of where they originated in the atoll chain and . . . the cosmos. Being in the group "they" . . . means that you have originated from a different place, and you are . . . moving towards these people . . . [He] was paving the way and giving us permission to start walking towards the [atoll's] people to discuss things such as educational leadership.

Oral contributions of this kind are delivered in the here-and-now. They provide a tool to get beneath the skin of a body of literature written over a long period by drawing attention to its immediacy. The oral material "reviews" the written literature by suggesting the contemporary relevance of daily activities theorized within its pages. For example, the written cosmological framing is made immediate by the oral account of its everyday ontological utility. In turn, the written literature suggests the generalizable potential of the speaker's experiential anecdotes as accurate depictions of how Marshallese think about leadership. The intersection of the oral and written literatures suggests that there is value to our research in investigating the reproduction and relevance of long-held ideas of the origins, authority, and practice of leadership in present times.

Scale

Scale is another subcutaneous aspect of literature. Paying attention to scale in leadership research is a matter of interrogating leadership by observing where day to day leaderful acts are observed and described. In research that seeks to examine the interfaces between institutionally framed leadership and leadership in communities, the concept of scale has the potential to point to areas of leadership poorly depicted or absent in previous research. In this example, we show how oral storied literature can combine with written literature to point to the utility of a creating focus on leadership exercized on a small scale

Small-scale leadership in PICs is often a matter of village life. A *tok stori* contributor described the way dinghies arriving with cargo from the urban centre of Honiara are observed by Solomon Islands village women. They learn "who is carrying what when it comes to the shore . . . information [that]. . . will be shared at the river" at dishwash time, for instance. In this context, leadership is about "the daily survival of their families" achieved by women who are leaders of "skill and ability . . . in their homes . . . [and] families". The story depicts leadership exercized through reciprocal means. The leaders need:

> [T]o know and to weave the connections at the community level, to be able in the evening, to get some kumara (sweet potato) and take it to the lady who received some sugar during the day – she will receive the kumara and then give in exchange a packet of tea or a packet of sugar.

Such small-scale acts of leadership centred on reciprocation sit in the *kastom* domain (Sanga, 2009; Sanga & Reynolds, 2019) as longstanding elements of village life.

However, it is hard to see where they fall in the tripartite leadership models proposed in much written leadership literature of Melanesia. Nonetheless, these acts are leadership within Yukl's (1994) definition since intentional influence is exercized through relationships.

A second example of small-scale leadership was present in the *tok stori* through an account drawn from the Leaders and Education Authorities Project (LEAP) (Sanga et al., 2018), a literacy and leadership intervention in Solomon Islands (Paulsen & Spratt, 2020). In the project, *tok stori* as pedagogy was used to mentor leaders at the village level. The OCIES *tok stori* ran:

> We . . . observed this category of leaders who suggested . . . how to take the learnings from LEAP forward at the community level . . . Therefore, women are coming up . . . men are emerging from that whole scenario to ensure that there is sustainability, there is continuity . . . emerging leaders who are not necessarily position holders, either in the village level or in the traditional tribal context. But they are emerging because they see the need . . . for them to play a leadership role at the community level.

The *tok stori* speaker suggests that small-scale acts of leadership construct new leadership roles, perhaps close to those described in Solomon Islands written literature specific to women (Houma, 2011; Pollard & Walker, 2000). The *tok stori* points to the need to observe and listen carefully when researching school leadership in order to avoid over-concentrating on positional leadership and the models through which it has been theorized (e.g., Misite'e, 2008; Ruqebatu, 2008). There is a danger for our research that forms of leadership embodied in informal small-scale acts will be erased if we over-concentrate on positionally-defined leadership.

These two stories suggest the potential of *tok stori* as a review tool to illuminate missing perspectives (Haverkamp & Young, 2007) in written literature by drawing attention to the significance of small-scale acts that embody leadership framings such as reciprocity and need-based leadership. The starting off point for Solomon Islands school leadership literature is generally the thinking of those in leadership positions. However, beneath the skin there may be a silence that masks the work of others: students, staff, ancillary workers, community members involved with schools, and so on. In addition, some leaderful acts of positional leaders may be missed if deemed outside of "professional" leadership conversations. Weaving the *tok stori* with the written corpus offers our research guidance by making scale visible as an important aspect of perspective.

Direction of naming

Sanga and Reynolds (2017) say: "The naming and consequent framing of any field is an important concern. Naming is not a passive or inconsequential activity. It focuses identity. One's name has genealogical origins: it carries *mana* and defines who one is" (p. 199). Naming has ontological implications; the way researchers construct reference points for their work relates to their paradigmatic position. Paying attention to the philosophical underpinnings of literature is significant for research on how leadership is understood in the various domains in PICs, particularly in the relational spaces between leadership models. During the *tok stori*, paradigmatic considerations emerged at the intersection of

oral and written literature and can be exemplified through considering the treatment of gender in leadership.

Much of the written leadership literature cited above that deals with traditional contexts depicts complex gender relations. For example, the RMI stories of Liwatounmour and Loktanur (Dobbin & Hezel, 2011; McArthur, 2004) present explanations for why the female line is significant in chiefly succession. Similarly, some Tongan written literature cited (Aoyagi, 1966; Bott, 1981; Helu-Thaman, 1988; Herda, 1987; Wood-Ellem, 1987) shows how the female line can be ranked above the male line and how gender roles are a matter of complementary leadership operating across different domains (Wood-Ellem, 1987). Sanga (2008) discusses the relative presence of female leadership across different domains in Solomon Islands, while Maezama (2015) discusses female leadership against the backdrop of matrilineal Santa Isabel. These accounts "name" the significance and configuration of gender roles from the "direction" of local communities.

Contributors to the *tok stori* also provided examples of complex community referenced relationships in leadership between genders. Gender roles in Tongan leadership were described by a Tongan speaker as "complementary"; Tongan women's leadership is more evident in the spiritual as opposed to the secular field so that "mana is associated with the power of the sacred: a woman has mystical powers". A Samoan speaker depicted dynamic gender relationships in Samoan leadership:

> Yes, it was usually the men to whom was granted . . . the titles. But . . . now you're seeing more and more women. . . . So that's what I mean about balance, it's a dynamic understanding of change . . . My grandmother was the leader of our extended family. Yes, we had a high chief in our family which was her son and my dad.

According to Finau (2017), the more frequent gifting of titles to Samoan females is a reversion to pre-European Samoan practice reflecting more fluid relationships between certain forms of leadership and gender in the past. These examples of the complexity of gender in leadership support the community referenced written literature.

However, the direction of naming employed in a portion of the written literature of educational leadership cited above depicts leadership through a focus on leadership positions and follows introduced models. One result is that the Solomon Islands corpus (Akao, 2008; Edwards et al., 2016; Sisiolo & Giles, 2011) mainly alludes to women as absent from school leadership and training or as opposed (Sisiolo, 2010) and suppressed (Houma, 2011) by men. This approach signals an area of genuine concern: who becomes a manager in Solomon Islands education and how? However, it also has the potential to shape approaches to gender in leadership in descriptive ways through an oppositional or inclusion/exclusion dynamic.

A *tok stori* speaker asked a question that interrogates the paradigm from which this literature emerges: "If you draw from the *kastom* knowledge domain in the Solomons, you will note that women are doing very well there. And so why don't we bring some of that framing or understanding into the institutionalized domain." A suggestion was made that this could be because of the temporal position of the literature:

> The written knowledge base on Solomon Islands educational leadership . . . is in its infancy . . . what we might call descriptive and applied in nature . . . generally mimicking conventional University conceptualizations of leadership as well as methodological benchmarks.

The absence of community-based understandings of leadership in this literature could also be a matter of scale—what is recognized as leadership by research in school contexts. This is also a paradigmatic matter.

The relationships between local traditional leadership and institutional leadership are key areas for our research. One *tok stori* contribution provided clarification about what a woven relationship between two models of diverse origin might look like through a story of a visit to a Kura Kaupapa Māori, an iwi-led school:

> Before the school board appointed even the principal, what they did was appoint two of the old ladies of the community, to have the *kuia* . . . "They carry the wisdom of our community and so they have to be here first". So, the "normal focus" would be…
> . . . [appoint] the school board and the principal and the teachers, . . . but they [first] filled . . . [leadership roles] with the knowledge of community women.

The question and this partial answer illustrate how *tok stori* can act as a paradigmatic tool in literature review. *Tok stori* is a safe space where questions that get beneath the paradigmatic skin of literature can be asked and where people's storied experiences can begin to construct answers beyond the parameters of previous publications. Consequently, research such as ours is encouraged to question its own paradigm as a potentially limiting factor on what leadership is or could be.

CONCLUSION

This article has provided a discussion of literature as an element in research. Using our own endeavour as a case study, we have gone beyond a compendium approach to the literature review by attempting to get beneath the skin of some of the written literature we found. Especially when engaging with people strong in orally based practice, we have pointed to the value of including discursive, conversational material developed through virtual *tok stori* in the review process, honouring it by imagining through the status of oral literature. As a result, we have enhanced our understanding of several matters; these include: temporality as an aspect of literature; immediacy as a testament to the vitality of long-established thinking; history as a factor in the limitations of some written literature; and the way the paradigmatic orientation can be revealed through the direction of naming and the way scale is applied. For our research, the process has emphasized the need to consider both leadership and research as practice (Wood, 2006) and to try to avoid imposing limitations contingent on prior knowledge, previous practice and paradigmatic habit. The erosion of the boundaries between written and oral literature by matching the sanctity of the written word with honour for the spoken is a case in point.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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