Oceania oralities research and sustainable education: Exploring layers of engagement

Kabini Sanga
Te Herenga Waka, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand:
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0487-4111
Martyn Reynolds
Te Herenga Waka, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand:
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5742-1074
Tepora Wright
Institute of Education, University of the South Pacific, Fiji:
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1373-0286
Anna Joskin
University of Papua New Guinea, PNG:
https://orcid.org/0009-0007-9958-3451
Amton Mwaraksurmes
Emalus Campus, University of the South Pacific, Fiji:
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6338-0424
Vilive Cagivinaka
Fiji National University, Fiji:
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6827-7856

Oralities research has a central place in supporting sustainable education in the Oceania region because it has the potential to reveal what education does and could mean to communities at the local level. In this way, oralities research can assist interventions that key into and make sense of local ontological positions. The Oceania Oralities Framework (OOF) is an analytical tool that supports links between Oceania oralities and research. It provides a grounding for theorising Oralities research, supporting research design and shaping analytical scope in data treatment. This article extends the reach of the framework by drawing from a tok stori *session held at the OCIES 2023 Conference at the National University of Sāmoa, Apia. In the article, we approach the OOF in a way that points to some of the layers in the potential contribution of the OOF to oralities research. These focus on holism, framework elements, cultural principles and oralities as performance. The approach adds to the framework's value to support an appreciation of Oceania oralities across the region and points to how oralities research can support sustainable education. Formal education can be adjusted to fit the needs and perspectives of Indigenous groups and minorities only when their voices can be heard on their own terms.*

Keywords: Oralities research; Oceania Oralities Framework; tok stori, Indigenous education

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable education involves policies and practices that support people, communities and ecosystems. Sustainability in education requires educational ideas and practices that are tenable, systemically healthy and durable or long-lasting (Jeronen, 2020). Key indicators of sustainable education include relevance or appropriateness, the production of wellbeing and the operation of values coherent with those of the wider society(ies) that the education seeks to serve. Research that aims to support sustainable education must, therefore, be capable of garnering local voice, placing that voice in context and appreciating depth of meaning. Oralities research offers these qualities and can be regarded as a significant way forward to support sustainable education development in the Oceania region, as elsewhere (Kovach, 2010). Comparative and international education (CIE) research that does not employ approaches that can deeply 'hear' Indigenous groups and minorities whose communication practices are well established and orally constructed will likely miss opportunities for transformational change.

The Oceania Oralities Framework (OOF) of Sanga and Reynolds (2024) was created as an analytical tool to support developments in the field of oralities research. Publications are in hand (e.g., Cagivinaka et al., 2024) that theorise oralities research design and navigation for oralities researchers. This article extends the reach of the OOF through a layered approach, which involves probing meaning that exists at various 'distances' from the 'surface' of an experience. Below the layer of audible words, we point to holism, specific framework elements, space-framed cultural principles and performance as layers of oralities research that can be ordered through the OOF. These layers are of value in CIE because they attend to deep analysis that moves beyond the 'what' of education and towards the 'why', emphasising links and relationships, not abstraction and separation. The reasons for education are as much a part of sustainability as the provision of buildings, teachers and curriculum. Thus, we suggest that Oceania oralities research has a central place in supporting sustainable education in the region because of its potential to reveal what education does and could mean to communities at the local level, assisting any researched interventions to key into and make sense of local ontological positions.

In this paper, we begin by offering background information about oralities scholarship in CIE in Oceania. We then consider the nature of frameworks and apply this discussion to the OOF. We then describe the specific context of this paper, a *tok stori* session from the OCIES 2023 Conference at the National University of Sāmoa, Apia, in methodological terms. Next, we render voices from *tok stori* participants to illustrate four of the multiple levels at which the OOF offers value in oralities research. Finally, we draw conclusions that point to the value of OOF-supported oralities research for sustainable education in the Oceania region.

OCEANIA ORALITIES SCHOLARSHIP

Oralities research exists in many places in the world, such as in Indigenous communities in Canada (Kovach, 2010) and Australia (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Geia et al., 2013) and various Caribbean communities (Nakhid, 2021). Oralities scholarship deals with what Kovach (2010) calls the 'conversational approach" to research, which 'involves a dialogic participation that holds a deep purpose of sharing story as a means to assist others [which] . . . is relational at its core' (p. 40). An orality is a codification of conversation, a mode of dialogue that is habitually practised and well-understood in context. The research literature presents various Oceania oralities, including *tok stori* (Sanga & Reynolds, 2023) and Hawaiian talk story (Affonso et al., 1996; Sentell et al., 2020). Each of these terms is an umbrella or entry point that alludes to multiple local and contextual oral forms of encounter (Sanga & Reynolds, 2021;

Vaioleti, 2013). *Talanoa,* in various forms, has, since the work of Vaioleti (2006), been perhaps the most obvious Oceania orality in the research literature. Oralities research is progressively taking place among approaches supporting improvements in sustainable education (Sanga & Reynolds, 2019).

Oceania oralities research is on the move, and OCIES has played its part in anchoring and developing this trend. The 2017 conference, held in Nouméa, hosted the first OCIES conference *tok stori* session, a step that promoted Oceania oralities as conference topic and mode. Subsequently, a body of OCIES conference-related *tok stori*-centred articles has developed, including Sanga et al. (2018), Fasavalu and Reynolds (2019), Sanga, Johannson-Fua, et al. (2020) and Mahuri et al. (2023). Away from conference-related publications, oralities-centred articles published in the OCIES journal have included Fa'avae (2018), Iromea and Reynolds (2021), Dorovolomo et al. (2022) and Koloto (2023). This article adds to the OCIES-oralities CIE discussion.

THE OCEANIA ORALITIES FRAMEWORK (OOF)

Various functions have been proposed for theoretical frameworks, including classifying (Cook et al., 2008), enabling comparison and evaluation (Rearick & Feldman, 1999) and describing (Jarrassé et al., 2012). Ordering is the sequencing of matters that are related and connected. Ordering as a process enables description, classification, comparison and evaluation to be held together. Through ordering, the OOF has ambitions of encouraging the further disciplined exploration of the potential of Oceania oralities research in and beyond education—and, by extension, in CIE in other locations.

Frameworks tend to be more open and encompassing than generally specific, contextual and descriptive models. The openness of the OOF provides a grounding for dialogue between diverse oralities researchers and their interests and between holistic (Sanga et al., 2018) and analytically structured (Sanga and Reynolds, 2019) accounts of oralities. Indigenous groups whose connections with land, sea and sky have developed the customary dialogic practices that researchers progressively seek to leverage in new contexts should be the primary beneficiaries of oracies research. In terms of education, it is they who sustainable education should serve.

As discussed in Sanga and Reynolds (2024), the OOF is modelled on a woven mat from Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea. The framework seeks to support clarity and development in Oceania oralities research through explicitness, discipline and attention to the ontological foundations of customary oralities, particularly in research contexts. The woven circular design encloses an incomplete set of elements: identity, presence, relationality, influencing agents, spiritual, visual, digital, numerical, text, oral-aural, spatial and a space for future extensions. These are analytical categories that researchers can use to think through when engaged in oralities research. Between the elements are relational spaces. These spaces provide opportunities for the contextual embodiment of the elements and their relationships. As a result of its configuration, represented in Figure 1, the OOF offers high-level abstract and local contextual avenues for appreciating oralities as research and performance.

Figure 2 shows how researchers can populate framework elements with aspects of context. In this case, the information is derived from the Gula'ala of Malaita, Solomon Islands (Sanga & Reynolds, 2024). The interplay between a (partial) ordering framework and local context renders the OOF valuable in the diversity of Oceania, where both recognition of uniqueness and the relationships inherent in regionalism are valuable.

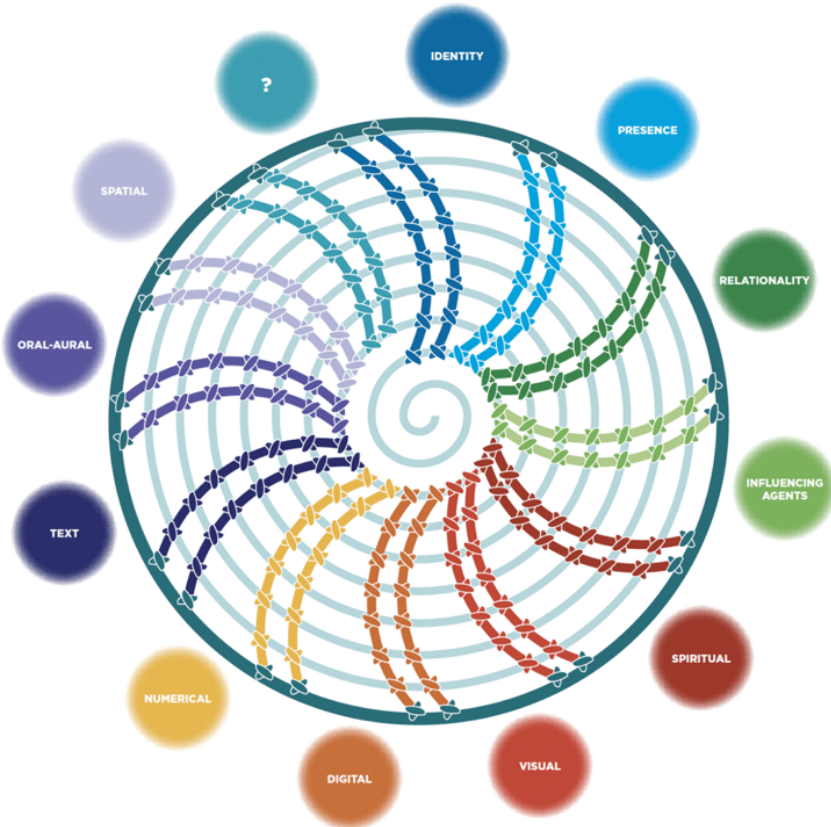**Figure 1. The Oceania Oralities Framework**
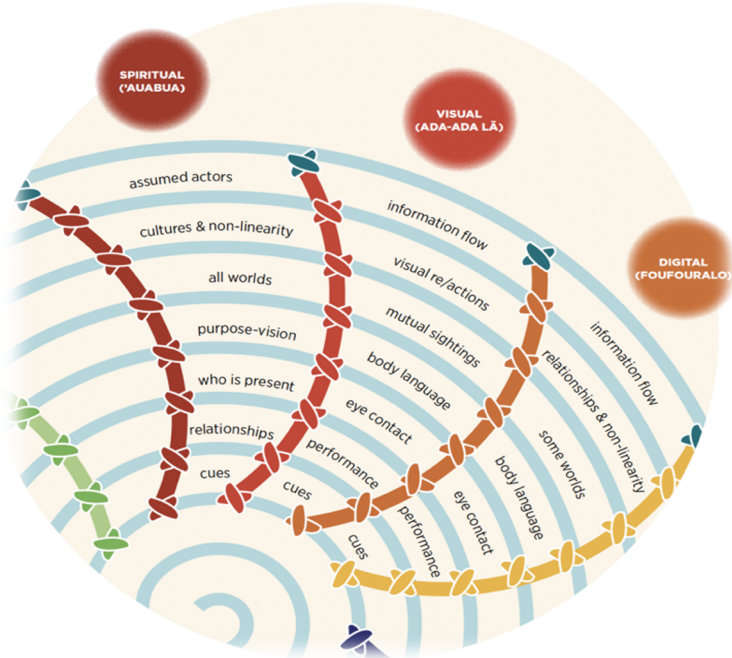

Figure 2. Detail of the Oceania Oralities Framework from Sanga and Reynolds (2024)

Figures 1 & 2 taken from: K Sanga and M Reynolds. (2024). Telling it like it is: A framework exploration of Oceanic Oralities through the example of tok stori. In Y. Usef Waghid & A. Alsafour (Eds.), Values education and beyond: Implications for emotional learning. Koninklijke Brill NV.

The layered nature of Oceania oralities and oralities research has a central place in supporting sustainable education in the region because this form of research has the potential to answer longstanding questions such as 'Education for what?' (Bugotu et al., 1973) from local ontological positions. In this example, the 'for what' of sustainable education is not merely a matter of national policy but is also the product of philosophy and lived experience at the community level.

METHODOLOGY

The main focus of this article is a *tok stori* session entitled *Exploring Oceania Oralities* held at the OCIES 2023 Conference at the National University of Sāmoa, Apia. *Tok stori* is a Melanesian orality or dialogic form increasingly used in research contexts, including through conference storying sessions. Briefly, *tok stori* involves dialogic storying in a space made safe by relational care and the sense of being a *wantok*, one who has obligations to others, in this case, other *tok stori* actors. Agreement or consensus is generally redundant in a *tok stori* (Iromea & Reynolds, 2021; Sanga & Reynolds, 2020b; Sanga et al., 2018), where mutual understanding is prioritised. The co-authors of this paper were either invited *tok stori* participants from the conference session, variously from Fiji (Vilive Cagivinaka), Sāmoa (Tepora Wright), Vanuatu (Amton Mwaraksurmes), and Papua New Guinea (PNG) (Anna Joskin), or session instigators from Solomon Islands (Kabini Sanga) and the United Kingdom (Martyn Reynolds).

Tok stori is a relational activity (Sanga & Reynolds, 2020b; 2023), and in this case, previously developed relationships were methodologically significant. The instigators knew the invited participants as previous students, co-researchers, co-authors and/or colleagues and friends. Consequently, there was team confidence to conduct a *tok stori* across a wide canvas.

The instigators offered minimal direction to the invited *tok stori* participants in the form of a copy of the OOF, a brief prior discussion of the framework, and the request to think and then story about what stood out to them from the OOF. This approach aimed to access the positional expertise of participants, honouring the potential of *tok stori* to accommodate the diversity of interest and focus while creating relational closeness. A wide-ranging set of storied responses eventuated. A recording was made during the *tok stori* session, which was transcribed, and relevant extracts were member-checked.

We curate the diverse conference *tok stori* contributions here as the core of the article as layered discussions. The curation process involved one member of the authorship team being responsible for carefully listening to what was said in the conference session to establish a pathway into the material appropriate for a written exegesis. The technique of fitting the analysis to the storying session (rather than the other way around) supports the prioritisation of the stories.

Through careful listening at the time and subsequent re-reading of transcripts of the conference session, the core of each speaker's contribution emerged and was then member-checked. Each core idea was then considered in the light of the other contributions, allowing the development of a layered arrangement. The layered arrangement privileged both separation and connection between the ideas through layers of abstraction, moving from the conceptual to the oralities performance. Since this article does not aim to report on a single session but seeks to illuminate the ways people appreciate the oralities in which they engage, we supplemented the conference session with subsequent online and face-to-face *tok stori*. In addition to the invited speakers, many others contributed to the conference *tok stori*. Unfortunately, the recording of this section of the session failed. However, we recognise these contributions through acknowledgment.

In the next section, we approach the storying from the 2023 conference session through four layers: holism, framework elements, spaces populated by cultural principles, and performance. Figure 3 represents these layers and suggests ways researchers might understand oralities encounters, privileging one or another layer according to intent and context.

Figure 3. A layered approach to oralities research through the Oceania Oralities Framework
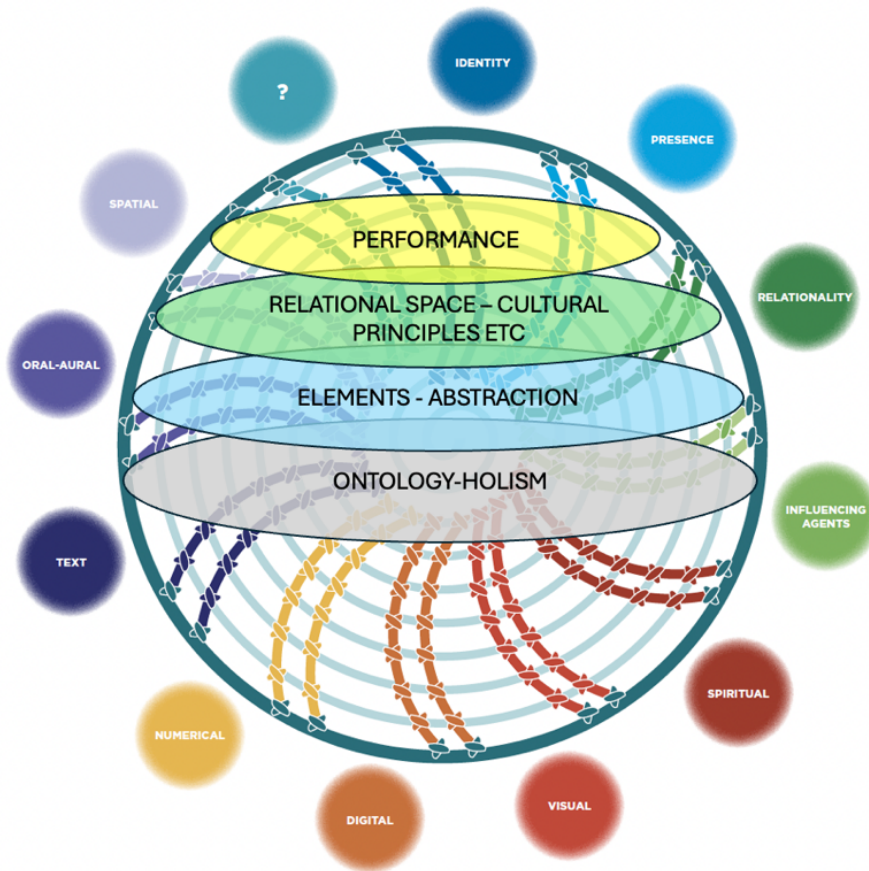
FINDINGS

This section presents findings about the layers apparent from the conference *tok stori* session. We suggest four levels as ways of appreciating aspects of Oceania oralities: ontological holism or interconnectedness that frames all oralities activities; abstracted analysis of oralities, supported by the elements on the OOF; acknowledging the presence of a culture's prioritised principles in the spaces between OOF elements; and oralities as performance. The order of the layers is intended to suggest the links between ontology and performance, as well as the value of the OOF in mapping the kinds of connections involved.

Level #1: The OOF frames ontological holism

Oceania peoples are diverse, and the OOF does not claim to order all aspects of every Oceania life, a fact clarified by positioning a question mark (?) in its fabric; however, the circular shape and woven structure of the OOF point to the ambition to honour the holistic logic of many Oceania ontologies. Vilive's contribution to the conference *tok stori* illustrates how oralities researchers can privilege ontology in oralities research. This is evident through a discussion of

the correspondence between the framework and the holistic sense of reality it seeks to order embodied in Vilive's references to the Fijian philosophical and ontological understanding of the *Vanua*. Here, we draw out two aspects of his storying to present ontological foundations accommodated in the OOF: relationships in space and life as a connected journey.

Relationships in space

The circular shape of the OOF represents holism in Oceania ontologies. All points in a circle are connected and are related through the enclosed circular space. The circularity of the OOF asserts the 'overall' layer as the primary intent of the model—a framing device for ontological relational space. When thinking of oralities in a Fijian context, Vilive explains that the relational storying space is not only occupied by those sitting together. Neither is it populated by separate individuals who happen to be in the same room. Instead, Vilive remarks: 'You did not come here alone. We all came with others'. This statement refers to people's attendance at the conference and the web of relationships contributing to who one is in any dialogic space.

'*Coming with*' makes sense to Vilive because, according to the *Vanua*, he is connected to 'those who came before me' in a situation where 'my responsibility is to prepare and nurture things for the future – the young ones – that's the Vanua'. This understanding suggests that a person's position in time and space is always connected to the positions of others. In this, relationships are as significant as entities. Awareness of this state brings obligations to act in nurturing ways––caring for others whether they are physically or metaphysically present. An orality encounter is an opportunity to enact such obligations. This involves appreciating that 'wisdom is in the people sitting beside you'.

Holistic relationships in the OOF are not restricted to the human but include other forces and entities. This is most clearly visible in the OOF elements of the Spiritual (which encompasses invisible forces and entities) and Influencing Agents (which order the human and more-than-human). These elements sit alongside and at the same level as elements that may seem more human-centric, such as Visual and Oral-Aural. When people participate in an orality, all the entities they relate to are present. Vilive explains the self as 'where you are from; families, totem—all these things make me a Fijian—a tall palm tree called *saqiwa, plus koli* or dog'. These elements sit with him in the orality and inform who he is, what he hears and how he speaks. Thinking about oralities research at the ontological level means that the understanding of orality actors' contributions can be enhanced by appreciating the context of wider relationships and, therefore, the whole self of participants.

Life as a connected journey

Vilive's contribution to the *tok stori* articulates time as a holistic field in which life as a journey takes place. Time, in some understandings, is linear, a constant flow that separates the past from the present and the past and present from the future. In Oceania, views of time can be embedded in spatio-temporal complexity (Māhina, 2010) so that time and space are related in a unity. Time can also be structured around relationships and episodes, so that it has different meanings depending on one's temporal position in relation to the relationships and episodes (Telban, 2017).

The dialogic nature of life for many Oceania people means that the past and future travel with oralities actors into the present in a visceral way. For example, tears shed in *tok stori* (Fasavalu & Reynolds, 2019) or at face-to-face *talanoa* sessions (Fa'avae et al., 2022) indicate the vitality of relational links across time and space. In circular time, life becomes a journey of return, a

malaga (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009) in relational space. This is a valuable notion when considering the relational space at the heart of Oceania oralities.

Vilive highlights the way the OOF accommodates holistic ideas of time. In the *Vanua,* he explains, 'Life is circular. It continues in the afterworld'. In addition, 'knowledge is re-used', built from already known elements and gifted to the future for clarification, adaption and further re-working. For Vilive, learning from oralities research involves appreciating the complexity of space and time: 'I will take back to my country, and I will teach my students that even though we may be separated by oceans . . . we share common views. We may have different ways of approaching things but at the end of the day we all want the best for our people, not for me.' This is because in life as a connected journey, it is important to have 'big hearts to accept whoever came ashore to be part of our journey', a factor of particular importance in 'multi-racial Fiji'. Continued dialogue is a feature of Oceania oralities because oralities are not limited by present time but exist in holistic time, continuing into the future.

Level #2 The OOF orders abstractive analysis

Within the OOF are multiple elements; categories that provide order for oralities researchers when thinking about methodological design, data, analysis and so on. These elements are interwoven in a holistic ontology but can provide helpful analytical categories for abstractive analysis. Here, we use one element as an example of how the OOF can help order analytical thought and consequent action in oralities research. Tepora's contribution to the conference *tok stori* session focussed on the Spiritual element and illustrates that thinking through a construct of this nature can reveal matters of importance in the context of oralities research.

Conceptualising the spiritual

There are many ways of understanding the OOF element of the Spiritual. As with all OOF elements, a sense of openness invites diversity. Tepora's contribution to the *tok stori* elucidates four ways of understanding this element. First, she presents the idea of intergenerational trauma where 'some are saying that trauma—drowning or fire [for example]' is passed down as 'something that is not explained by the physical right now'. Intergenerational trauma has been characterised as collective hurt that requires spiritually orientated healing (Gabel, 2019) or may be investigated through epigenetics (Henriques, 2019; Zimmerman, 2023). Second, the Spiritual can also encompass organised religion, such as Christianity. Typical of Oceania people, Tepora notes, 'we grow up in Christian homes . . . we learn about Christian theology'. Through religion, the OOF Spiritual element can order human-divine relationships. Third, Indigenous spiritual understandings are held by many communities in Oceania, such as the Sāmoan notion of *mauli*. As a fourth and umbrella perspective, Tepora suggests the Spiritual element in the OOF can embrace all things 'relating to the unseen—not of the body, so of the spirit, nevertheless present and [to be] acknowledged'. This umbrella approach is pursued here.

Taking an inclusive approach to the Spiritual element, Tepora illustrates situations where unseen spiritual matters are often ignored in education. 'For example, policy has unseen aspects'. The language of 'inclusive v mainstreaming' creates a 'negative space' where the 'unseen nature of the bond that holds us together' is downplayed in favour of 'separation'; the whole child is hidden behind attention to a limited set of skills. Similarly, 'second chance education' invokes ideas about education as 'competitive'*,* a system in which there is only 'one way' to proceed. This diminishes the 'completeness' of the individual in a materially orientated discussion. Language can ellipse spirituality but 'informs behaviours and actions' so that the

mauli is 'not considered in [education] policy'. Habitually framed discussion can ignore the ubiquity and significance of the unseen.

The spiritual potential of the oralities space

Since the spiritual is present in all contexts, the OOF element of the Spiritual points to the significance of the unseen and immaterial in Oceania oralities encounters. In Tepora's view, this means 'being aware—there is a greater potential for good things to happen by acknowledging mauli'. Acknowledgement of the spiritual applies to the content of oralities sessions, such as in the policy examples above. However, attending to the Spiritual also conditions how an orality is understood. Tepora points to the constructive potential of 'openness at a deep level' in encounters with oralities. She reflects that although 'offering a [Christian] prayer or blessing' at the start of a session acknowledges spiritual connections, this act may 'harness the form, not the [full] power' of the Spiritual. To go further, one might consider the unseen orientations that oralities actors have toward each other and the act of storying. For example, mutual spiritual openness can lead to actors *'coming to understand not through explanation'*, which, in turn, can produce relational connections of significance beyond the matters discussed.

Vaai (2014) discussed orientation and space in terms that are helpful here. Vaai reminds us of the potential in storying, to face someone as well as look through the other person's eyes in what Tepora calls 'the direction in which they see, and the potential that all this "seeing" can enable'. On a material level, we generally 'talk to' and are 'facing each other' across the physical storying space. Tepora's concern for the *mauli* asks questions beyond this. For example, what is the potentiality of 'facing with' and 'talking with'? These metaphysical terms centre unseen bonds of unity and suggest that the significance of relational interactions between oralities actors can go well beyond the audible and visual. Since Oceania oralities involve safe and living space, open concepts of time and value placed on enduring relationships, such questions are highly appropriate because they focus on unseen aspects of holistic ontology. As Tepora says, 'For the spiritual aspect, some of us might be speaking from a different space sometimes that the other person doesn't fully understand . . . [or] there could be spiritual communication going on'. The OOF element of Spiritual encourages researchers to consider and then investigate unseen and undiscerned dimensions of this nature. For CIE, attention to the spiritual nature(s) of educational spaces offers nuanced ways of understanding how those involved might understand their educational experiences. For example, awareness of the spiritual dimension of the *vā* shifts classroom conduct from a solely transactional series of events to a flow of events that connect and/or separate those involved in spiritual terms. CIE that takes account of the spiritual (Anae, 2010) potential of educational spaces can pursue sustainability and success in ways well beyond measured academic achievement.

The value of abstraction

The element level of the OOF offers ordering that can promote the development of deep accounts of any area in focus. As illustrated by the *tok stori*, the OOF element of Spiritual names and legitimises localised and potentially plural understandings of the spiritual that validate community understandings of life. As a result, the words in storied accounts can be augmented by unseen matters such as intergenerationality, relationships to the divine, the kinds of spaces invoked by language, the orientation to the openness of oralities actors and the spiritual potential of the communication taking place. In this way, the element level of the OOF promotes a fuller account of oralities encounters and the ontologies to which they are relevant.

Level #3 - The OOF orders space for a culture's prioritised principles

Abstracted elements within the OOF, such as the Spiritual, are valuable when ordering an appreciation of Oceania oralities. However, the OOF configuration also creates space between framework elements. These are relational spaces in which ontological matters emerge in how people understand parts of their context. We use the term 'a culture's prioritised principles' here to point to ontologically driven contextual understandings that inform the execution of oralities in the field. This term emphasises context since any such principle is developed in a cultural context. The term also emphasises that principles are neither fixed nor absolute; the idea of prioritisation makes space for contradictory or shifting principles at work for a cultural group from which those involved make contextual choices as prioritisation.

Although always operating, a culture's prioritised principles are a particularly valuable methodological tool in Oceania oralities research. This position is supported by the OOF because, through the relational spaces provided in the framework, the OOF makes visible those elements of culture that inform any discussion of localised methodologies in a more global frame. By way of example, we discuss an example of a culture's prioritised principles positioned between the OOF elements of Spatial, Visual, Relationality and Identity. This principle is 'gender-as-separation'. Here, we focus on the space between the elements of Spatial and Identity because separation is generally spatial, and gender is an informant of identity.

Space and gender linked by a culture's prioritised principles

The literature indicates the significance of the relationship between gender and spatial ordering in Vanuatu. Hess (2009) discusses gender as a non-negotiable aspect of Vanuatu *kastom.* She says, 'appropriate distance or social space between agents (people and places) is expressed as respect' (p. 28). For example, Hess shows how clothing for males and females reinforces gender and role separation, as do differing activities undertaken in gender groups. Ni-Vanuatu's application of gender can also be seen in the non-human world, such as categorising some food products (Jolly, 1994), a means by which various staples are ordered within a holistic ontology.

Amton, a researcher and tribe member from Vanua Lava, offered stories to the conference about operating cultural principles in everyday contexts. Shared heritage underpins such principles, and Amton observes that the 'OOF image reminds us of the Vēnēm system, the tribal system for our 16-18 tribes . . . Basically everything is there—leadership, relationships, how the tribes can all be related—we come from the same origin.' Significantly, he points out that 'One of the ideas we all expect from all of the tribes on the island is . . . respect'.

Respect is key to understanding the operation of the cultural principle of gender-as-separation. Four examples of *kastom* behaviour given by Amton provide a grounding for discussing the principle of gender-as-separation in oralities practice and research. These involve eye contact, separated spaces, gendered knowledge, and gendered activities and discussions.

Application of gender-as-separation

Eye contact is a very significant element of gendered *kastom* in Vanua Lava. In the conference session, Amton related that a 'father and a daughter should not make prolonged eye contact', their gazes generally remaining separated. Some spaces are separated: 'We demonstrate respect when men and women go swimming in the river, the men will be upfront, and the women must use another spot downstream.' Further, gender and subject expertise are linked, so that, for example, women are knowledge holders about 'cultural weaving of mats . . . yam planting and some aspects of fishing'. Fishing on the reef is a women's activity but deep-sea fishing is done by males. In situations where *kastom* oralities are practised, 'land discussions will be generally

conducted by males'. However, 'in community settings, meetings are open'. Thus, in *kastom* life, gender and space intersect as ordering categories and can be jointly articulated through the cultural principle of gender-as-separation.

Gender-as-separation in oralities engagement

Amton's contribution to the *tok stori* also shows how a culture's prioritised *kastom*-derived principles provide ordering in oralities engagement, which is unsurprising since the same ontology is at play. Gender-as-separation can be seen in oralities seating arrangements. For example, in an open meeting, when males and females are present, the space between a man and woman who are not married to each other may be occupied by the woman's father or spouse. In addition, the man and woman 'would not be directly facing'. In circumstances when this is difficult to arrange, those involved might simply 'face away' to create distance. As indicated in the literature (Sanga & Reynolds, 2020a), not all knowledge is public, and gender-as-separation can act as an axis of restriction on sharing. Since some subjects 'belong' to one gender or another, researchers should reflect on the gender composition of storying groups to seek veritable information. Finally, the order of speakers in an oralities research engagement can reflect the cultural principle. Women may pause until men have spoken before offering their contributions, 'waiting their time' not as inferiors but as a matter of ordering driven by Vanua Lava cultural groups' prioritised principle of gender-as-separation. In such circumstances, weight is not attached to contributions by sequence, but *kastom* is respected by employing time as a separating element.

Amton's stories regarding the prioritised principles of gender-as-separation illustrate the relationality between OOF elements. In the examples given, gender is a key element of identity and informs *kastom* relationality – how one relates and to whom (and what). Space (and time) operate to separate genders so that respect is maintained according to context. Through its configuration, the OOF affords spaces in which researchers are supported to identify and execute as relevant a culture's prioritised principles, a facility of increased value where not all involved are steeped in local *kastom*. Oralities research is valuable precisely because it can operate according to the relevant *kastom* ontology, and delineating cultural principles as a methodological consideration is of great help in achieving this aim within the dynamism of research contexts.

Level #4 - The OOF orders analysis of oralities as performance

People experience Oceania oralities as performance. Although the OOF layers of ontology, elements and space for cultural principles point to the complexity and depth of oralities encountered when a group assembles to t*alanoa* or *tok stori*, the core activity is enactment of relationality through meeting, speaking and listening. Ontology frames performance, elements exist within performance, and cultural principles shape performance. However, without an oral encounter, these aspects remain as potential to be realised.

Performance and relationships

Oralities as performance is focussed on what people do, a layer that is informed by who they are in the context of the engagement. In many Pacific ontologies, people are relational beings, and context shapes relationships. For example, understandings of the *vā* include ideas of closeness and distance and/or connection and separation (Anae, 2010; Ka'ili, 2005; Wendt, 1999). These are matters that describe relationships between entities rather than the entities themselves. In Melanesia, to be a *wantok* is not a solo or personal matter but a social construct focussed on contextual relationships (Fito'o, 2019; Nanau, 2018). In Fiji, *veiwekani* (Nabobo-

Baba, 2015) mediates relationships between people in the *vanua*. As Vilive pointed out in the conference session, no one comes alone; we are all linked through space and time. As an example of the value of the OOF to frame the discussion of Oceania oralities as performance, we draw on Anna's contribution to the OCIES conference *tok stori* by focusing on the performative aspect of the OOF element of Influencing Agents as she experienced this in Papua New Guinea, her home.

Performing as an Influencing Agent

Anna's account during the conference session of Influencing Agents in Oceania oralities draws on her own experience and self-conceptualisation as a contributor in many oralities encounters. In many of these, she relates to others as a teacher. She says, 'I wear my teacher's hat with pride . . . [inspired by] Christ's first role as a teacher'. Anna explains, 'What I try to do [in *tok stori*] is to connect the spiritual aspects with relationships . . . My faith, how can I influence my students, my children, my faith, my country'.

Three domains of influence exist in Melanesian society: *kastom,* or the traditional domain, church or the religious domain, and the institutional domain, which includes democratic institutions and the education system of schools, colleges and universities. Each domain competes for influence, and *kastom* is generally the strongest (Sanga & Reynolds, 2022). On traditional matters in village settings, relationships exist in which Anna's role in performing *tok stori* requires gendered management within *kastom* parameters. However, in the institutional domain in Papua New Guinea, as an educated woman, advocate for women and underserved groups and a culturally aware person, Anna has space to 'recognise the potential of the person you already were'. She says, 'The PM listens to academics when they speak . . . So, when he attends and talks about issues, he listens . . . to a small woman. I come from a male-dominated country, but I carry the identity of a person who has studied and gained a PhD.' Anna describes this aspect of herself in *kastom* terms, metaphorically linking the *kastom* and institutional domains. '[In kastom] you go to the hausman (man's house) to be trained in initiation . . . I have been initiated into that Western concept of research'. As a result of this process, she is responsible for performing as an influencing agent, 'navigating between women in PNG and decision making—influencing decisions.'

Oceania Oralities as performative pedagogy

Anna describes great value in using the Melanesian orality of *tok stori* as pedagogy. She seeks to use the orality to influence her students through 'good stories . . . stories that make a difference'. This does not mean rejecting the need to examine problems and issues through *tok stori,* but it captures Anna's relational role as 'mama-teacher-meri (mother-teacher-woman)' in her working context—someone who is obliged to show love, is focused on education as a positive force and is positioned to look at life from a woman's point of view. Her position as an Influencing Agent drives her to claim and thereby model 'equality of participation' as she 'claims the influence' of her initiation and academic position.

Many elements of the OOF can be implicated in oralities as performance. Identity can be expressed in performance, including gender as an aspect of identity, as discussed above. Similarly, the OOF Visual element can be used to order appreciations of Oceania oralities as performance. Facial expression and gestures are obvious aspects that can sit under this element and form part of how actors perform oralities. Equally, the OOF Oral-Aural element is available to order appropriate aspects of oralities performance. Researchers and teachers will benefit from considering how oralities actors present themselves and their stories as a performance. Researchers should also consider the nature and significance of their own parts in oralities as

performance; communication and configurations of relationality are among the consequences of how the performance of oralities researchers is read and understood.

DISCUSSION

This article makes a case for the value of the OOF in ordering thought about Oceania oralities by using the four example layers of holism, specific framework elements, space-framed cultural principles and performance. Holism frames oralities through ontology; framework elements provide guides for abstractive analysis; the spaces between elements host contextual ideas and practices such as a culture's prioritised principles; and performance points to enactment as a key aspect of Oceania oralities. The need to consider further the potential contribution of layered exploration of Oceania oralities to sustainable education remains. This can be explored by revisiting the four example layers.

First, Oceania oralities research that is sensitive to ontology can garner local voice, place this in context, and appreciate depth of meaning. In many Oceania societies, educational activities taking place in the institutional domain are not truly separable from *kastom* and church domains (Sanga et al., 2023). Sustainability is tied to the fit and negotiation between educational practice, *kastom* and church-based understandings of the world. For example, Vilive's understanding of time in the *Vanua* links the past and future through the present. Sustainable education is integrated into the past through cultural understandings and practices, and in turn, promises an uninterrupted but developing future.

Similarly, the *Vanua*-derived holistic explanation of space in Vilive's account is ecologic and relational. Sustainable education can involve ideas of educational space focused on the wellbeing of people and place that do not place care for one in competition with the other. Thus, research guided by the OOF that privileges ontological understandings is likely to be able to understand local ways of framing sustainable education.

Second, the OOF approach to Oceania oralities provides opportunities to prioritise within a holistic framework through abstraction. Tepora's contribution to the conference *tok stori* portrayed the Spiritual as encompassing religious, indigenous and collectivist understandings of the physically unseen. The unseen can shape what is regarded as good and what can be justified in contexts such as education. Education is sustainable when it is tenable and is contested and dysfunctional when institutional values compete with those of the home. Unseen aspects of peoples' realities hold consistent sway across all their activities, including education. As a result, research that can access local voice and abstract contextually relevant overarching factors is valuable. Other elements of the framework that are clearly valuable for abstractive analysis in the pursuit of sustainable education include identity, which can be used to abstract who one is, could be, or is encouraged to be in educational contexts, and relationality, which can be used to abstract the way relationships in education support or erode sustainability (Paulsen, 2018).

Next, the spaces between elements in the OOF can be populated with contextual matters such as a culture's prioritised principles. Educational sustainability is supported when contextualisation is understood deeply (Sanga, Maebuta, et al., 2020). In research terms, this means framing inquiry in ways that make local sense and provide optimal chances of gaining veritable information. In practice terms, this means finding appropriate contextual information through research and translating it into operational forms in classrooms, schools and educational systems. The OOF contribution of holding space for recognising matters such as

cultural principles supports enhanced research into sustainability through process and potential product.

Finally, attention to the performance aspect of Oceania oralities research adds a local flavour to the truths suggested by Patti Lather (1986) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) that the researcher is a key aspect of the research context such that ideas of objectivity are irrelevant and misleading. Identity, Visual and Influencing Agents are all aspects of researcher performance mapped by the OOF in oralities research. Authentic research that seeks to support sustainable education requires researchers to be present, contributing to narratives about what education is and could be, perhaps through offering expertise, perhaps through constructive ignorance (Townley, 2006), which can lead to deep thought by oralities actors. For example, encouraging communities to think beyond fixing present education systems through storying can support sustainable education. In contrast, passive so-called 'objective' approaches might lead to minor changes and essentially more of the same. Honouring the 'Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative' (Van Peer, 2006) requires provocation, challenge and critique. This is a potential role of the researcher in storying contexts, as illustrated by Anna's story of deliberate influence.

CONCLUSION

This article drew on *Exploring Oceania Oralities,* a *tok stori* session held at the OCIES 2023 Conference at the National University of Sāmoa, Apia, to illustrate how a layered approach to the OOF has value in supporting sustainability in education. Key elements of the argument included paying attention to ontology, mapping elements that can structure abstraction, holding space for contextual matters, and considering how performance in oralities can contribute to sustainable outcomes. Given that those involved in the session brought experiences from diverse cultural and geographic locations across the Oceania region, the discussion also shows how the framework nature of the OOF enables conversations across traditions, knowledges and spaces. In a way, the framework operates as a connective and shared body of water, as understood by Hau'ofa (1994), mapping the potential of regionalism to respect and transcend localism. Since sustainable education is a fractal of a more general sustainable life, this aspect of the OOF has potential in the increasingly complex and apparently progressively divided world in which we seek to live well together.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Affonso, D. D., Mayberry, L., Inaba, A., Matsuno, R., & Robinson, E. (1996). Hawaiian-style 'Talkstory': Psychosocial assessment and intervention during and after pregnancy. *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic, & Neonatal Nursing*, *25*(9), 737-742.

Anae, M. (2010). Teu le va: Toward a native anthropology. *Pacific Studies*, *33*(2), 222-240.

Bessarab, D., & Ng'andu, B. (2010). Yarning about yarning as a legitimate method in Indigenous research. *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, *3*(1), 37-50. http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11937/37083

Bugotu, F., Maeke, D., Paia, H., Ramoni, M., & Arnold, B. (1973). *Education for what? A report on the findings of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate Educational Policy Review Committee* (B. S. I. P. Department of Education, Ed.). Government Printer.

Cagivinaka, V., Reynolds, M., Baleisomi, S., Vatuloka, S., & Sanga, K. (2024). Talking about climate change: Veitalanoa in Fijian climate change research. *Pacific Dynamics*, *8*(1), 534-550. https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/items/63b979f1-3494-4d94-b611-b0a97b8833ac

Cook, D. A., Bordage, G., & Schmidt, H. G. (2008). Description, justification and clarification: a framework for classifying the purposes of research in medical education. *Medical education*, *42*(2), 128-133.

Dorovolomo, J., Laulaupea'alu, S., Rafiq, L. Z., Rodie, P., & Fito'o, B. (2022). Social Capital is critical to perseverance at university during COVID-19: Pasifika students in Fiji, New Zealand and Solomon Islands universities. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *21*(2), 53-67.

Fa'avae, D. (2018). Complex times and needs for locals: Strengthening (local) education systems through education research and development in Oceania. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *17*(3), 80-92.

Fa'avae, D. T. M., Faleolo, R., Hepi Havea, E., Enari, D., Wright, T., & Chand, A. (2022). e–talanoa as an online research method: extending vā–relations across spaces. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, *18*(3), 391-401. https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801221118609

Fasavalu, T. I., & Reynolds, M. (2019). Relational positionality and a learning disposition: Shifting the conversation. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *18*(2), 11-25.

Fito'o, B. (2019). Wantok-centred framework for developing citizenship. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *18*(2), 55-67.

Gabel, K. A. (2019). Raranga, raranga taku takapau: Healing intergenerational trauma through the assertion of mātauranga ūkaipō. In C. Smith & R. Tinirau (Eds.), *He Rau Murimuri Aroha: Wāhine Māori insights into historical trauma and healing* (pp. 16-31). Te Atawhai o Te Ao: Independent Māori Institute for Environment & Health.

Geia, L. K., Hayes, B., & Usher, K. (2013). Yarning/Aboriginal storytelling: Towards an understanding of an Indigenous perspective and its implications for research practice. *Contemporary Nurse*, *46*(1), 13-17.

Hau'ofa, E. (1994). Our sea of islands. *The Contemporary Pacific*, *6*(1), 148-161.

Henriques, M. (2019). *Can the legacy of trauma be passed down the generations?* BBC. https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190326-what-is-epigenetics

Hess, S. C. (2009). *Person and place: Ideas, ideals and the practice of sociality on Vanua Lava, Vanuatu*. Berghahn Books.

Iromea, J., & Reynolds, M. (2021). Access, ethical leadership and action in Solomon Islands education: A tok stori. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *20*(3), 31-44.

Jarrassé, N., Charalambous, T., & Burdet, E. (2012). A framework to describe, analyze and generate interactive motor behaviors. *PloS one*, *7*(11), e49945.

Jeronen, E. (2020). Sustainable Education. In S. Idowu, R. Schmidpeter, N. Capaldi, L. Zu, M. Del Baldo, & R. Abreu (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of sustainable management* (pp. 1-10). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02006-4_237-1

Jolly, M. (1994). Hierarchy and encompassment: Rank, gender and place in Vanuatu and Fiji. *History and Anthropology*, *7*(1-4), 133-167.

Ka'ili, T. O. (2005). Tauhi va: Nurturing Tongan sociospatial ties in Maui and beyond. *The Contemporary Pacific*, *17*(1), 83-114.

Koloto, M. L. (2023). Exploring inclusive education (IE) research in Tonga through Tongan cultural lenses and methodologies. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *22*(2), 35-47.

Kovach, M. (2010). Conversational method in Indigenous research. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, *14*(1), 123-136.

Lather, P. (1986). Issues of validity in openly ideological research: Between a rock and a soft place. *Interchange*, *17*(4), 63-84.

Lilomaiava-Doktor, S. (2009). Beyond 'migration': Samoan population movement (malaga) and the geography of social space (vā). *The Contemporary Pacific*, *21*(1), 1-32.

Māhina, O. (2010). Tā, vā and moana: Temporality, spatiality and indigineity. *Pacific Studies*, *33*(2), 168-202.

Mahuri, D., Cagivinaka, V., Baleisomi, S., Soti, F., & Reynolds, M. (2023). From the ground up: Weaving a tok Stori of quality education. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *22*(2), 61-76.

Nabobo-Baba, U. (2015). The mutual implication of kinship and chiefship in Fiji. In C. Toren & S. Pauwels (Eds.), *Living kinship in the Pacific* (1 ed., pp. 15-35). Berghahn Books. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt9qctd3.5

Nakhid, C. (2021). *A culturally affirming approach to research methodology through the Caribbean practice of liming and ole talk*. Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1630

Nanau, G. (2018). Wantoks and kastom (Solomon Islands, Melanesia). In A. Ledeneva (Ed.), *The Global Encyclopaedia of Informality.* (pp. 244-248). UCL Press. https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/86227

Paulsen, I. K. (2018). Relationships, relationality and schooling: Opportunities and challenges for Pacific Islander learners in Melbourne's western suburbs. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *17*(3), 39-54.

Rearick, M. L., & Feldman, A. (1999). Orientations, purposes and reflection: A framework for understanding action research. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *15*(4), 333-349.

Sanga, K., Johannson-Fua, S., Nabobo-Baba, U., & Reynolds, M. (2020). The keynote-as-storied-discussion: A Pacific departure. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *19*(2), 8-19.

Sanga, K., Johansson-Fua, S., Reynolds, M., Fa'avae, D., Robyns, R., Rohoana, G., Hiele, G., Jim, D., Case, L. J., & Malachi, D. (2023). *Leadership negotiation in Oceania: The*

context behind the context. Development Leadership Program. https://dlprog.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/DLP-Leadership-negotiation-in-Oceania.pdf

Sanga, K., Maebuta, J., Johansson-Fua, S., & Reynolds, M. (2020). Re-thinking contextualisation in Solomon Islands school leadership professional learning and development. *Pacific Dynamics*, *4*(1), 17-29. https://dx.doi.org/10.18124/gyp6-bc39

Sanga, K., & Reynolds, M. (2019). Melanesian tok stori in leadership development: Ontological and relational implications for donor-funded programmes in the Western Pacific. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *17*(4), 11-26. https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801211058342

Sanga, K., & Reynolds, M. (2020a). Knowledge guardianship, custodianship and ethics: a Melanesian perspective. *AlterNative*, *16*(2), 99-107. https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180120917481

Sanga, K., & Reynolds, M. (2020b). Talking about tok stori. *DLP Opinions*. https://www.dlprog.org/opinions/talking-about-tok-stori

Sanga, K., & Reynolds, M. (2021). Bringing research back home: exploring Indigenous Melanesian tok stori as ontology. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, *17*(4), 532-542. https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801211058342

Sanga, K., & Reynolds, M. (2022). The pattern for a good life: Indigenous Solomon Islands ethics'. *Synkrētic*, *3*, 23-41.

Sanga, K., & Reynolds, M. (2023). Melanesian Tok Stori research. In J. Okoko, S. Tunison, & K. D. Walker (Eds.), *Varieties of qualitative research methods* (pp. 303-308). Springer Nature.

Sanga, K., & Reynolds, M. (2024). Telling it like it is: A framework exploration of Oceanic Oralities through the example of tok stori. In Y. Yusef Waghid & A. Alasfour (Eds.), *Values education and beyond: Implications for emotional learning* (pp. pp??-??). Koninklijke Brill NV.

Sanga, K., Reynolds, M., Paulsen, I., Spratt, R., & Maneipuri, J. (2018). A tok stori about tok stori: Melanesian relationality in action as research, leadership and scholarship. *Global Comparative Education*, *2*(1), 3-19. https://www.theworldcouncil.net/uploads/8/6/2/1/86214440/gce_wccesjournal_vol2-no1.pdf

Sentell, T., Kennedy, F., Seto, T., Vawer, M., Chiriboga, G., Valdez, C., Garrett, L. M., Paloma, D., & Taira, D. (2020). Sharing the patient experience: a 'talk story' intervention for heart failure management in native Hawaiians. *Journal of patient experience*, *7*(3), 399-407.

Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Zed Books.

Telban, B. (2017). Seeing and holding time: Karawari perceptions of temporalities, calendars and clocks. *Time & Society*, *26*(2), 182-202.

Townley, C. (2006). Toward a revaluation of ignorance. *Hypatia*, *21*(3), 37-55.

Vaai, U.L. (2014). The prayer of a fa'atosaga: Fa'aaloalo in Sāmoan indigenous religious culture. In T. M. Suaalii-Sauni, M. A. Wendt, N. Fuamatu, U. L. Va'ai, R. Whaitiri & S.L. Filipo (Eds.), *Whispers and vanities: Sāmoan indigenous knowledge and religion*. Huia Publishers.

Vaioleti, T. (2006). Talanoa research methodology: A developing position on Pacific research. *Waikato Journal of Education*, *12*, 21-34.

Vaioleti, T. (2013). Talanoa: Differentiating the talanoa research methodology from phenomenology, narrative, Kaupapa Maori and feminist methodologies. *Te Reo*, *56*, 191-212.

Van Peer, L. (2006). *Catching the vision: Rethinking Pacific education initiative–An exemplar for future development practice. Report on RPEI participants' critical reflections*. Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington.

Wendt, A. (1999). Afterword: Tatauing the post-colonial body. In V. Hereniko & R. Wilson (Eds.), *Inside out: Literature, cultural politics, and identity in the new Pacific* (pp. 399-412). Rowman & Littlefield.

Zimmerman, R. (2023). *How does trauma spill from one generation to the next?* Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2023/06/12/generational-trauma-passed-healing/