# Rolling out the mat: A *talanoa* on *talanoa* as a higher education research methodology

Pearl Hindley, Nancy November, Sean Sturm and ‘Ema Wolfgramm-Foliaki (The University of Auckland)[1]

**Abstract**

The Pasifika (Pacific Island) research methodology *talanoa* (conversation) has contemporary resonance beyond its local context. At the recent Bonn Climate Change Conference, for example, *talanoa* was adopted to spark international dialogue about our collective futures. But this and other recent instances raise the question as to whether and how *talanoa* can and should be applied in a non-Indigenous context – or, indeed, online. As a culturally diverse research team, we undertook a *talanoa* about our experience of researching historical literacy with Māori and Pasifika students through *talanoa*. Here we introduce what we learned from the literature about the nature of *talanoa*, its use as a methodology and its application in higher education, and reproduce our own recent online *talanoa* on the experience of learning to do *talanoa* together. Three key lessons emerged from our research conversation. Firstly, we learned that time is of the essence: researchers must carefully balance the need for the *talanoa* to run its natural course with the need not to overburden the participants. Secondly, we learned that where the researchers undertake the *talanoa* is less important than attending to the relationships (the *vā*) between the researchers and participants, and the researchers and participants themselves. And, finally, in keeping with what some Māori researchers and their allies have argued of Kaupapa Māori research methodology, we learned that indigenous methodologies like *talanoa*, when employed with care and in recognition of their emergence out of decolonial struggles for indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, can foster a fruitful intercultural research conversation.

**Keywords**

*talanoa*, *vā*, indigenous methodology, Kaupapa Māori, research conversations, intercultural research collaboration

## Introduction

The Pasifika (Pacific Island) research methodology *talanoa* (conversation) has contemporary resonance beyond its local context.[2] At the recent Bonn Climate Change Conference, for example, *talanoa* was adopted to spark international dialogue about our collective futures (see Norton, 2018). But this and other recent instances raise the question as to whether and how *talanoa* can and should be applied in a non-Indigenous context – or, indeed, online. And although *talanoa* has been employed successfully as a research methodology at secondary and tertiary levels in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Fletcher et al., 2006; Henry et al., 2014; ‘Otunuku, 2011; Reymer, 2012), questions still remain about, for example, whether and how

it might fit with the time and ethics strictures of the Pālagi (white) academy, can be done online, or should be adopted as a research methodology by Pālagi researchers.

In this article, we seek to address such questions about *talanoa* as a higher education research methodology. We draw on a research question that we explored through a number of *talanoa* with academics and students at The University of Auckland in 2018–2019: When Māori and Pasifika students feel at home and do well in the historical disciplines, why? As a culturally diverse research team, we undertook the *talanoa* in a spirit of learning from each other, while staying alert to the cultural differences and power differentials that can exist in cross-cultural educational interactions (Jones, 2001). The two of us who were new to *talanoa* and not Pasifika explored it under the tutelage of our Pasifika colleague, learning as we went and carefully adapting it to a predominantly Pālagi academic context such that we produced a 'hybrid' research methodology (Bhabha, 1994).

Here we introduce what we learned from the literature about the nature of *talanoa*, its use as a methodology and its application in higher education, and reproduce our own recent online *talanoa* on the experience of learning to do *talanoa* together. That is, we *talanoa* about our experiences of doing the *talanoa* as people of different cultural traditions, touching on the nature of *talanoa* and the challenges of 'doing *talanoa*' (philosophically and practically) in a non-Pasifika context. We hope to demonstrate the affordances, but also the spirit, of *talanoa* as a higher education research methodology.

## Defining *Talanoa*: From Concept to Methodology

Churchward (1959) describes *talanoa* as talking in an informal way to tell stories and relate experiences. The word is made up of two components: *tala-*, meaning 'to inform, tell, relate,' and *-noa*, meaning 'of any kind, ordinary, nothing in particular' (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 23). So, literally, *talanoa* is 'talking about nothing in particular, and interacting without a rigid framework' (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 23). In Tongan, *talanoa* thus refers to a 'discussion, conversation or dialogue between individuals or groups' (Prescott, 2008, p. 128). However, it is not just a Tongan term that has 'colonised' the Pacific (Tunufa'i, 2016); it is shared term in Fijian, Samoan and Tongan, and a common and preferred medium for communication throughout the Pacific: in Fiji, Samoa, the Solomons, Niue, Hawai'i, and the Cook Islands.[3] While each island nation may apply *talanoa* in its own way and in different contexts, it represents a shared cultural tradition with similar protocols across Polynesia that embodies the beliefs about spirituality, ancestral bonds, connections to land and family that constitute an Indigenous Pasifika world view (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014, p. 341).

The concept of *talanoa* as a Pasifika methodology has been credited to two Tongan researchers, Sitiveni Halapua and Timote Vaioleti (Anae, 2019; Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea). Following a coup in Fiji on 19 May 2000, Halapua (2000) introduced *talanoa* as a 'method to talk openly from the heart' in a political setting (Tecun et al., 2018, p. 157). In his capacity as Director of the East-West Centre's Pacific Islands Development Programme, he facilitated *talanoa* to address Fiji's national crisis (Tecun et al., 2018). For Halapua (2000), *talanoa* as a research methodology and method (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014; Vaioleti, 2006), rather than just a research method (Tunufa'i, 2016), must involve frank face-to-face dialogue – and this remains an important consideration when one adopts it to work with Pasifika people (Otsuka, 2005; Prescott, 2008; Vaioleti, 2006). As Vaioleti (2006,

p. 25) argues, it is almost always carried out in person, which 'removes the distance between researcher and participant, and provides research participants with a human face they can relate to.' That it acknowledges the importance of sociohistorical and spatial relationships grounds it in indigenous philosophy (cf. Tunufa'i, 2016) and contributes to its strength as a research methodology for addressing national, cultural, social and interpersonal issues facing Pasifika peoples, in particular (Prescott, 2008; Vaioleti, 2006), for whom relationality is ontologically and ethically fundamental (Halapua, 2003), but also raises the question as to whether and, if so, how *talanoa* can be done online. We asked ourselves, What is the *vā* (space) of *talanoa*?

## *Talanoa* as Pasifika Philosophy and Methodology

The Pasifika concept of *vā* refers to the space or the relationships between people: 'the sacred, spiritual, and social spaces of human relationships,' as Melani Anae (2019, p. 1) puts it. Its cultivation is at the core of all interactions for Pasifika peoples; thus, building relationships of reciprocity and respect is vital when conducting research with Pasifika people, especially in *talanoa* (Tecun et al., 2018), the strength of which as a research methodology and method lies in its grounding in local indigenous philosophy and its adaptation from a local cultural practice (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014). And the cultivation of *vā* in *talanoa* aims to achieve understanding rather than agreement, and thus to generate information that is true or authentic (*mo'oni*) (Vaioleti, 2006). It achieves this by intermingling the knowledge, emotions and experiences of the researchers and participants through talk (*tala*) that is without a fixed agenda (*noa*). When all goes well, the *tala noa* leads to *mālie*, or 'the energizing and uplifting of spirits to a positive state of connectedness and enlightenment,' and *māfana*, or 'inwardly warm feelings' (Fa'avae et al., 2016, pp. 140–141). What it does is allow 'rich contextual and inter-related information to surface as co-constructed stories' (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 24). Thus, *talanoa* differs in its emphasis from other methodologies that rely on interviews. While interviews are typically focused on eliciting knowledge or information from respondents, *talanoa* aims to cultivate relationships and 'reach a state of understanding' between researchers and participants (Prescott, 2008, p. 132). And while interviews sometimes cultivate a certain distance between the researcher and the participant, and the researcher and the interview content, *talanoa* requires that the researcher is an active participant with a stake in the conversation. Indeed, Prescott (2008, p. 131) argues that the *talanoa* 'cannot take place if a condition of the inquiry is that the researcher takes a neutral or distant position.' Instead, 'researchers must be prepared to share their own experiences and stories as part of the *talanoa* philosophy of openness, sharing and mutual respect' (Prescott, 2008, p. 139).

Because *talanoa* is participatory and fosters shared understandings between researchers and participants, it has sometimes been associated with the constructivist strand of interpretive qualitative research (Prescott, 2008), more specifically with methodologies like 'grounded theory, naturalistic inquiry and ethnography' that belong to the 'phenomenological research family' (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 25). But Suaalii-Sauni and Fulu-Aiolupotea (2014, p. 336) argue that locating *talanoa* in, rather than alongside, phenomenology runs the risk of 'making our Indigenous world views (including our forms of communication) subservient to the different [namely, Pālagi] world views that dominate

phenomenology.' They also assert that classifying Pasifika research methodologies as generally 'qualitative fields of inquiry' is limiting because, like other decolonising Indigenous methodologies such as Kaupapa Māori research (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012), 'Pacific research must have research methodologies that determine for itself its visibility and scope' (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014, p. 336). Vaioleti would no doubt agree, writing as he does that *talanoa* is 'orientated towards defining and acknowledging Pacific aspirations while developing and implementing Pacific theoretical and methodological preferences for research' (Vaioleti, 2006, pp. 24–25). Nonetheless, Indigenous methodologies can struggle for recognition and validation in the face of dominant Pālagi research paradigms. Thus Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba (2014) argue that those employing *talanoa* to decolonise Indigenous research need to stay alert to its political dimensions, cultural appropriateness and socio-ecological impact, which requires that they position themselves in their culture (as insiders) and as a minority culture in the Pālagi academy (as outsiders). That it is a decolonial Indigenous methodology that aims to addresses issues facing Pasifika peoples, in particular, raises the question as to whether and, if so, how *talanoa* should be adopted as a research methodology by Pālagi researchers. We asked ourselves, As a culturally diverse research team, should we adopt *talanoa* as our research methodology and, if so, how can we adapt it to fit with the strictures of the Pālagi academy?

### *Talanoa* as Higher Education Methodology

*Talanoa* has been gathering momentum as an Indigenous research methodology in the field of educational research, in particular (Fletcher et al., 2006), where it has been employed by Pasifika academics and postgraduate students alike to explore the educational experiences of primary, secondary and tertiary level Pasifika students in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Tunufa'i, 2016). For example, Henry et al. (2014) employs *talanoa* to document how high-achieving Pasifika postgraduate students at the University of Auckland negotiate and maintain their Pasifika identities within a 'Pālagi university' (p. 8). As Dave Fa'avae (2019) has argued in his work on Indigenous cultural practices as a way of disrupting and decolonising doctoral research, *talanoa* works as a research methodology because it speaks to the experience and aspirations of Pasifika peoples in the academy and beyond. It 'aligns with the fluid, shifting and transient nature of Pasifika/Moana people identity/ies in the diaspora' (Fa'avae, 2019, p. 11), in particular, with the complex personal and cultural identity of Aotearoa/New Zealand-raised Pasifika. For Fa'avae (2019), because it is informed by the foundational concepts of *ta* (relationality, time) and *vā* (positionality, space), it is capable of facilitating the deconstruction and (re)construction of the lived educational realities of Pasifika peoples across the 'sea of islands' that is the Pacific (Hau'ofa, 1994). For this reason, it speaks to the aspiration of Pasifika and other Indigenous researchers to decolonise and disrupt 'the boundaries that shape how they see, interact with and interpret the world within academia' (Fa'avae, 2019, p. 11). But, perhaps most importantly, it serves their practical aspiration to better educate their Pasifika and Indigenous students because 'most Pasifika/Indigenous researchers engage in educational research because of their desire to improve the schooling experiences of minority peoples in Aotearoa' (Fa'avae, 2019, p. 7).

However, in today's 'measured university' (Peseta et al., 2017), Indigenous researchers frequently have to contend with the 'rigid requirements of Western academia'

(Fa‘avae et al., 2016, p. 140). For example, they face time constraints that can impact their authentic use of *talanoa*. They have to reckon with heavy teaching loads and tight timetables, short timeframes for research, student participants’ work and caregiving responsibilities, and ethics committees’ limits on the use of students’ time for research, especially with Indigenous students who are heavily in demand for educational and other research – not to mention other ethical requirements like determining research questions in advance that reflect a Pālagi research culture. Nonetheless, while such researchers might be constrained by their research agenda or deadlines, they must accommodate deviations or digressions ‘because it is respectful to allow them to happen, and it helps with the rhythm and the flow of *talanoa*’ (‘Otunuku, 2001, p. 50). As a Tongan academic who has returned to her homeland to carry out research through *talanoa*, ‘Ema has acknowledged the need to allow participants adequate time to speak, which should not be rushed because ‘it takes time to establish a genuine connection’ (Wolfgramm-Foliaki, 2016, p. 34). And she could not automatically assume insider status and needed to ‘take time to establish a rapport’ with participants (Wolfgramm-Foliaki, 2016, p. 36). Also, because *talanoa* is a rich and time-honoured cultural practice as well as a research methodology, it is an ‘enactment of cultural competency’ (Fa‘avae et al., 2016, p. 143) that takes time to learn, as well as to perform, especially for culturally diverse research teams like ours.

A necessary requirement of decolonising Western research practices is that Indigenous researchers – and non-Indigenous researchers, we would argue – ‘purposefully and actively align research outcomes to the cultural survival of Indigenous peoples’ (Jones, 2001, p. 5). This process should involve adopting – and, for non-Indigenous researchers, acknowledging and potentially carefully adapting – Indigenous perspectives, knowledges and methodologies such as *talanoa* (Fa‘avae, 2019). Like *talanoa*, that adoption – or adaption – must be based on reciprocity and respect (‘Otunuku, 2011). There are also guidelines for Pālagi researchers working with Indigenous communities in New Zealand that should be borne in mind (‘Otunuku, 2011). In their set guidelines, Anae et al. (2001, p. 16) suggest that, while it is preferable for Pasifika researchers to carry out research with Pasifika peoples, it may be necessary to include non-Pasifika researchers when the number of Pasifika researchers available is limited, when they complement the skills of the team required for a project, or when they serve as mentors for the Pasifika researchers in the team. Fletcher et al. (2006, p. 47) found that the inclusion of both Pasifika and Pālagi in their research team enabled them to ‘overcome the differences that are often present in the cultural capital of most Pasifika research that has been undertaken by Palagi researchers.’ In our case, the mentorship was reciprocal, as our culturally diverse research team negotiated the challenge of undertaking a large-scale cross-cultural research project using *talanoa* with culturally diverse academics and Indigenous students in a large multicultural university.

**Our methodology**

In our research into Māori and Pasifika students’ experiences studying in the historical disciplines at university, we were concerned to preserve our participants’ voice and place in order to capture what was specific to teaching and studying history in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the stories of those with whom we talked. It was for this reason that we employed *talanoa* to discuss with Māori and Pasifika students what helped and hindered them in their university

studies across the historical disciplines.[4] After we and the participants introduced our cultural and academic histories, the conversations were allowed to unfold with as few time constraints as possible and with minimal direction from us (‘Otunuku, 2011). The conversations moved more or less easily between *pō talanoa* (everyday talk), *talanoa usu* (intimate talk) and *talanoa faka‘eke‘eke* (formal interview) (Vaioleti, 2013/2014) in a way that is not untypical when *talanoa* is used as a research method in the academy (Fa‘avae, Jones, & Manu‘atu, 2016). Since most of the conversations included researchers and participants who were not fluent in Māori or Pasifika languages, they were primarily in English. They were also undertaken one-to-one or in small groups and in one-off sessions due to time constraints on the participants as students with work and often caregiving responsibilities.

Because students often lack a language to discuss pedagogy, like Curtis et al. (2012) in their *Tātou Tātou* project on Māori student success, we drew on Brookfield’s (2006, p. 27) Critical Incident Technique, which focusses on ‘specific events and actions that are engaging, distancing, confusing or helpful’ to document ‘how students are experiencing their learning and perceiving [their teachers’] teaching.’ Focussing on the lived experience of the students with whom we talked enabled them to be specific about what worked for them in learning environments, activities and outcomes, and helped us to explore and evaluate teaching practice from their perspective. In accordance with the Critical Incident Technique, we sometimes asked them to ‘recall a time when’ they were particularly closely engaged in learning a given concept or skill in a course in a historical discipline. Using this prompt allowed them to narrate their learning histories in and on their terms and in accordance with their cultural ways of being.

We approached the analysis of the *talanoa* in a similarly hybrid spirit. Although *talanoa* is usually considered a form of narrative inquiry (Vaioleti, 2013/2014), most often in the existing literature the conversations are typically analysed thematically and presented in the form of social scientific exposition (see, for example, Teevale & Teu, 2018). Only occasionally are they presented verbatim to allow the participants to speak for themselves as much as possible and preserve the *talanoa* as a document or performance (see, for example, Henry, Manuela, Moeono-Kolio, & Williams, 2014). In what we have published elsewhere, we have blended the two approaches in a ‘restorying’ (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002) that involved open coding by listening to the *talanoa* and talking about the learning histories recounted there, as well as allowing the participants’ histories to speak at as great a length as possible. In the body of this chapter, as an experiment in preserving a *talanoa* as a document or performance as Henry et al. (2014) did, we reproduce as a narrative the *talanoa* that we, the three principal investigators on the project (‘Ema, Nancy and Sean), undertook online via Skype on the experience of learning to do *talanoa* together as a culturally diverse research team.[5] We do so by way of a response to the questions raised above as to whether and how *talanoa* a) should be adopted as a research methodology by Pālagi researchers, b) can be done online, and c) how it might fit with the time and ethics strictures of the Pālagi academy.

## Our *talanoa* about *talanoa*

Our *talanoa* about *talanoa* on began with us revisiting the purpose of our conversation.

1. On *talanoa* as a cultural practice

Nancy: If we can capture from each of us the challenges and benefits of *talanoa* as a method in higher education research, then that would be extremely useful as a real-life example [of *talanoa*].

Sean: Yes, so who wants to begin?

'Ema: When I read through the [literature] review, it reminded me that *talanoa* is a practice. It's based on a Tongan saying, '*Fofola e fala kae talanoa e kāinga,*' which literally means to roll out your mats, so your whanau [family or analogous social group] can sit down and begin to have a conversation. It's the practice where, whether you need to talk about a funeral or a disagreement or for planning, you put your mats out, which is an invitation for an open conversation. And it also implies it's a safe space for family and people to come together. Because, you know, for example, if you're talking about a wedding you've got two families coming together. And they may or may not necessarily know each other beforehand so when you base it on that framework, or metaphor, it does imply a safe space where people come together and, and hold a conversation. So when I was reading through this, I thought of how that might work for what we're doing. It's a 'cyber' [online] kind of *tala* that we are opening up.

2. On *talanoa* as a process

Nancy: But the idea of the rolling out of the mat actually draws your attention to the physical space nature of it. And also the proximity, which we don't have here [on Skype] …

Sean: But we can see faces!

Nancy: We can see faces, yes. But the sort of the homeliness or the casual nature of it, if you like (you need to advise me on that, 'Ema), but that's something that's quite hard to replicate in a Higher Ed. context, where, especially if you have either lecturers or tutors talking to students, that sense of welcome and casual 'we're all here to chat' and that we've done a bit of preparation, but this is going to be something that's almost off the record – that's probably really hard to replicate.

Sean: I think we did try and create that kind of atmosphere of hospitality. And the fact that we tried not to emphasise the difference in expertise or the difference in life experience between us and the students helped. Obviously we can't completely get rid of those distinctions between us and the students. But the things we did like beginning with our histories of engagement with the university and the importance of the conversation for us did create a kind of a sense of a shared conversation …

Nancy: And we had food!

‘Ema: Yes. I think if we go back to the importance of *vā* in creating and having a relationship with the students: the three of us might be rolling the mat out in a cyber kind of way, but we have established a relationship. And, with the students, I think that can be part of the challenge, if you like …

Sean: Because we weren’t relying on the existing relationships with the students for the most part, were we?

Nancy: But I did find, in every case, that the students didn’t seem to have a problem opening up. I was very surprised by that – especially in the context of some other types of interviews I’ve done. I really did find that they seemed to know that it was ok. They were a little bit hesitant to dig in and eat the food, and treat it as if it was a cafe or as if we weren’t actually in an academic setting. But they seemed to be quite ready to talk, and often even about some personal stuff. So perhaps they got it, you know: they said, these people are inviting us to *talanoa*, and I know what that is, and I’m going to engage in that.

Sean: Yes, we allowed them to actually talk, so as long as they weren’t overly shy – which they didn’t seem to be, perhaps because they were self-selecting – then because it was talking about themselves, it seemed to make them more comfortable …

Nancy: Whereas, had we said, ‘what do you think of the concept of historical literacy?’ then maybe … [laughter]

‘Ema: I also think, maybe, that there are students out there, like the ones we talked to, who really want to share their experiences with us as a way letting other students know, maybe …

Sean: Many of them seemed to have that sense that what they were doing was important and it wasn’t just for them, even though they were primarily telling their story.

[…]

Sean: Now, ‘Ema, there’s a couple of constraints that we had in terms of the *vā* [space, relationship]: most of the time, we didn’t want to commit the students to more than an hour on a *talanoa*, and we also were meeting in unfamiliar spaces for a lot of the students. Did you sense that these two things made any difference to the conversations? Has it worked differently when you’ve done *talanoa* in other contexts?

‘Ema: Yes, I think time is a big thing. Because it would’ve been really nice to have had the opportunity to have them together as a group and share food, just to introduce ourselves to them and tell them a little bit about the study, and then come back for the *talanoa*.

Sean: So to have a meet-and-greet first?

‘Ema: Yes. But time is a real factor because, with ten students, then out of the ten, only six can make it to the introduction session, and so on. So time is one of the main challenges of using *talanoa* in Higher Ed – because *talanoa* is not supposed to be bound by time, that’s for sure …

Sean: … but by the topic at hand and by the *mālie* [sense of collective uplift] and *māfana* [sense of warmth], right?

‘Ema: Yes. And I think maybe the place was a bit unfamiliar, but I think the fact that it was on campus helped.

Sean: So when you compare how we conducted things – which was kind of out of necessity – how was the experience different [in your other research project on ‘first in the family’ Pasifika students] when you had a meet-and-greet first, and then had the students come back and talk in smaller groups with the researchers?

‘Ema: It just tells them that they are part of a bigger group and they’re doing this collective mahi [Māori, ‘work’], if you like. I think that would’ve been nice [in this project]. I think that would’ve helped with us establishing our *vā* [relationship] with them. But, again, time is the issue. On one hand, you’re saying that *talanoa* is about talking freely and stuff, but, on the other hand, we’re also bound by the university’s ethics and our concerns: we don’t want to have two and a half hours of *talanoa*, when they’ve got classes and what have you …

Sean: No, there’s always going to be practicalities that determine a little bit how things are going to go. You are never going to have an ideal situation where you can sit down and everyone is going to be fine and there are no ulterior motives in talking, I think.

‘Ema. No.

Sean: You know, there was a really interesting distinction when we were doing the *talanoa* between the ones where we had groups and the ones where we did them singly. Having more than one person kind of drew out the stories in quite interesting ways …

Nancy: I was thinking that too – because they would bounce off each other. I remember distinctly one where a student said, ‘Well, no, that was completely not my experience, mine was da, da, da....’ So it wasn’t necessarily ‘oh, yeah, yeah, yeah,’ and sort of I agree, and just following the pack, but rather no, but this is the way I think about it …

Sean: Although when you got the single person talking they could tell you really deeply about their personal story, there weren’t the kind of unexpected interplays between the students, which took the conversation in unexpected directions.

3. *On doing justice to* talanoa

Sean: The other thing that I think we should also think about is the challenges that we might have faced as individual researchers in the process. Because, for me, it was a challenge to try and stay faithful to the idea of *talanoa* – because I felt as if I was learning as we went – and also to the idea of our research as a collective enterprise. I guess that it might have been, in my case, the over-enthusiasm of a learner, wanting to make sure that I did things right …

'Ema: I wouldn't want to say I'm the expert in this methodology because there were things that I struggled with, like, is this authentic enough? And if it isn't authentic enough and I am the person who's of Pasifika descent in the group, what am I doing about it? Am I being true to being Tongan and to the fact that this is a methodology that's been developed for Pasifika by Pasifika to benefit Pasifika? I struggled with that, always thinking, always questioning. And I guess Hinekura [the other Māori member of our team] leaving [because the project moved away from Kaupapa Māori] made me reflect on what I should be doing. But there's positives that come from that process. When I've gone to talk to your class [about *talanoa*, Nancy], I think, 'Well, I'm not doing a Powerpoint. I need to dig in straight to what the *talanoa* is.' I'm trying to enact and embody what it's about. And as a researcher, as an indigenous researcher, that's what you are supposed to be about – constantly asking yourself how it could be better: we did it this way, and why we did we do it that way, and how can others learn from it?

Sean: And also, I think, even people who do *talanoa*, say, in the Islands, quite often they haven't followed through. They've used the *talanoa* as a sort of a 'data gathering' opportunity, and then they've tended to write it up in a really kind of a [Pālagi] 'social sciency' way. Everybody is always making these sort of hybrid decisions. I really like the idea that this kind of work is about the relationship between two traditions: if there's anything in cross-cultural projects, it is the fact that there is something happening in between them. I think it can be too easy to say that the indigenous method is the right way and the Western method is the wrong way. Well no, they are different. And sometimes when people apply a Western method, it's constraining and it's damaging, but it isn't always. I think that we are operating in that really interesting space between the two traditions where you are hopefully trying to do justice to both of those traditions in ways that they actually talk to each other.

Nancy: If I can just jump in here, I think that this project has definitely been, both personally and from an academic point of view, the most difficult research project I've done altogether. And that's because I've constantly felt that I've been bad cop, having to constantly curb my tendency to watch the time and guard the ethics and so on. And the moment when Hinekura left was very, very challenging for me: to think, Am I responsible? What have I done? And, actually, have I done anything? What really helped – what you both just said – is that any good pedagogy is going to be a critical pedagogy, one which keeps you thinking all the time about what you are doing, and keeps you justifying that, keeps you adapting it and not just applying some mould to fit. And that this tension between the two methods throws up something that's almost greater than the sum of the parts. I think that, for me, that actually happened during the *talanoa* when I felt the *mālie*. I could feel myself diving in with all these questions, you know, and then thinking, 'No, no, I shouldn't be doing that, this should be the

conversation unfolding,' and then thinking again, 'No, it's ok because I'm caught up in this and I'm really interested to know, and I want to say these things as well.' So that was the moment for me, when there was the tension between the two methods, but I could see something good emerging. It was good for me personally and as a researcher; it was also possibly good for the situation because I had a sense of warmth from the process that seems to me to be the central part of the process. When it's happening, well, that's kind of the high point of the *talanoa*, when things are cooking, if you like.

'Ema: You know, that happens when you have, say, a wedding, and there are obviously people who have the right to speak on both sides, but when someone is sitting there and they're feeling the *mālie*, they just jump in. And, of course, it can take the conversation way over the other way. But there is room for that….

***Conclusion***

Here our *talanoa* about *talanoa* comes to an end. It offers only provisional responses to the questions as to whether and how *talanoa* a) should be adopted as a research methodology by Pālagi researchers, b) can be done online, and c) how it might fit with the time and ethics strictures of the Pālagi academy. But it taught us a lot. In reverse order, we learned that time is of the essence: researchers must carefully balance the need to allow the *talanoa* to run its natural course (until the *mālie* and *māfana* are exhausted) with the need not to overburden the participants. We learned that where the researchers undertake the *talanoa* is less important than attending to the relationships (taking care of the *vā*) between the researchers and participants, and the researchers and participants themselves. And, finally, in keeping with what some Māori researchers and their allies have argued of Kaupapa Māori research methodology (Hoskins, 2017; Smith et al., 2012; Jones, 2012), we learned that indigenous methodologies like *talanoa*, when employed with care and in recognition of their emergence out of decolonial struggles for indigenous sovereignty and self-determination such as the Kaupapa Māori model of research by, for and with Māori (Smith, 2012), can foster a fruitful intercultural research conversation. *Talanoa* can be applied as a research methodology by Pasifika researchers most productively when they remain alert to the theory and practice of Pālagi research. It can be adopted – and, perhaps, more carefully, adapted – by Pālagi researchers only when it is guided by a Pasifika researcher or mentor who is critically alert to the tensions in the *vā* between Pālagi and Pasifika cultures and research traditions. In part, this is because Pasifika researchers are enculturated into being aware of *vā* and its importance in Pasifika cultures, and are thus sensitive to it and its role in *talanoa*. And, in part, this is because *talanoa*, when applied in a culturally sustaining way, is a decolonising methodology, so its application should serve as an opportunity for Pasifika researchers to apply their expertise, assert their leadership and maintain ownership of it as a decolonising transformation of a cultural practice that is informed by indigenous philosophy that is historically, geographically and culturally grounded in the Pacific, the practice of which can be passed down to future researchers, along with its 'findings' and 'outcomes' (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014). When treated as an occasion for an intercultural research conversation, research by indigenous researchers and their Pālāgi allies can thus write back

against the accusation that indigenous methodologies are culturalist, neotribal and anti-modern (Rata, 2012; see Stewart & Devine, 2019).

When we were writing this chapter, we came upon what have become known as the four Pillars of Tonga (*Faa'i Kaveikoula 'a e Tonga*) described by Queen Salote in her speech at the opening of the Tonga Cultural and Heritage Society in 1964 (cited in Ministry of Social Development, 2012, p. 7). They sum up the spirit in which *talanoa* should be undertaken when researchers roll out their mat to work with Indigenous peoples. The researchers must

- be respectful (*faka'apa'apa*)
- be humble and teachable (*anga fakatokilalo/loto tō*)
- attend to relationships (*tauhi vā*)
- persevere (*mamahi'i me'a*).

It is in that spirit that we say Mālō 'aupito (thank you very much) to those students and academics who took part in the research and who prompted our *talanoa* on *talanoa*.

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[1] Note that we have chosen to present the authors’ names in alphabetical order, not by level of contribution.

[2] In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Māori are regarded as Indigenous, rather than Pasifika people; Pasifika is synonymous with ‘Pacific Islanders,’ which referred historically to Samoan, Cook Islands Māori, Tongan and Niuean migrants to Aotearoa/New Zealand. We do not italicise Pasifika (Pacific Island) or Pālagi (white) because those words are in common use in New Zealand English, but we italicise all other Tongan words. We do not italicise Māori (New Zealand Indigenous) words because Māori (te reo) is an official language of Aotearoa/New Zealand. We use ‘Aotearoa/New Zealand’ rather than ‘New Zealand’ in recognition of the Treaty of Waitangi relationship between Māori and Pākehā (white) settlers.

[3] Māori use the term kōrero for conversation, but the term is broader in that it includes any spoken discourse. Athough kōrerō carries the same connotation as *talanoa* of coming together (hui) to talk and face-to-face (kanohi ki te kanohi) interaction, Māori tend to use the term hui, not kōrerō, for formal meetings. We would note that, although Kaupapa Māori research (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012) often relies on conversation, there is no direct equivalent of *talanoa*. The closest methodology would likely be Pūrākau (Lee, 2009), a narrative research methodology that relies on storytelling (pūrākau means story).

[4] Because there is no direct equivalent of *talanoa* in Kaupapa Māori research, we used *talanoa* for our conversations with Māori students because its face-to-face conversational model is also culturally relevant for Māori researchers and students.

[5] In social scientific terms, the narrative we present here is an ‘edited transcription’ (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998), rather than a ‘poetic transcription’ (Glesne, 1997). We preserve the substance and the sequence of the conversation, but abridge and edit it for readability. We use brackets for editorial additions and comments.