E Aogā le Talanoa: A Critical Autoethnographic unpacking of negotiating Pacific identities in Aotearoa, New Zealand classrooms

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education in Education.

Waipapa Taumata Rau | the University of Auckland

April 2024.

Abstract

This thesis employs critical autoethnography to examine the influence of educational spaces on identity through my lens as a student and teacher. These experiences are depicted in diary entries that have followed my journey in education and are best understood through theoretical frameworks such as the liminal third space and vā. Vā (Wendt, 1996) and the liminal third space (Bhabha, 1994), are both spaces in-between, thus in weaving together these theoretical frameworks, I engage both vā and third space to critically unpack my experiences in the educational context using relevant literature to support my analysis. In addition, I weave talanoa (Vaioleti, 2006) together with critical autoethnography (Holman Jones, 2016) as my methodologies, enabling me to share my personal narrative as well as serving as a cultural analysis. My findings highlight the different aspects of educational spaces - such as teacher roles and cultural representations - that can impact the negotiating processes of identity for students. Understanding these findings, especially by teachers, can strengthen the experience of Pacific students within educational spaces (Rata, 1998; Samu, 2006; Pasikale, 1998; Tupuola, 1998). As such I argue that there are also socio-economic barriers impacting the educational achievement of Pacific students which drives the purpose of this study which is to combat these barriers through understanding the classroom space as a space that can create change. Overall, this thesis calls for a systemic shift in educational practices and policies towards inclusivity and equity, recognising the unique challenges and cultural wealth of Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Glossary

Alofa - love

Aiga - family

Amata - to start, or begin

Diaspora - the dispersion or spread of a particular group of people from their original homeland to various other locations around the world.

Fa'asinomaga - a person's inheritance, identity, or heritage

Faaiuga - the end

Feagaiga - a sacred relationship or agreement between different parties, for example a sacred relationship or agreement between brother and sister

Fono - meeting

Gagana Sāmoa - Samoan language

Hui - meeting

Iwi - tribe

Kaumātua - elders

Kura - school, education, learning gathering

Mana - power, prestige

Malu – customary Samoan female tattoo

Pacific Diaspora - specifically refers to the migration and experiences of Pacific people in regions such as New Zealand, Hawaii, the west coast of the USA, and Australia

Pālagi or Papālagi - people of European descent

Rangatira - chief

Tala - story

Talanoa - to chat, to converse together; to engage in dialogue; to make conversation or discuss

Talanoa'i - talking which involves analysis and evaluation, a critical relational orality

Talanoaga - chatting, conversation, discussion, dialogue

Taonga – treasures, something that is highly prized

Tatau - Samoan customary tattoo

Te Tiriti o Waitangi - Treaty of Waitangi

Tauiwi - people who are not Māori, especially non-indigenous New Zealanders

Vā - physical and relational space between people and things

Whakatauki - proverb.

Acknowledgements

To my kura - my colleagues and students, thank you for supporting me in applying for a study grant, taking 32 weeks off work and the continual support in the next steps of my journey - '67 to the oti.

To my supervisors - Dr. Jean Uasike Allen, Dr. David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae and Dr. 'Ema Wolfgramm-Foliaki – the struggle has been real during this thesis writing process. Thank you for constantly reassuring me, answering my questions no matter how busy you were, and believing in me. I see all your hard work, sleepless nights and tiresome mornings and still you stay ready to fill my cup during our many supervision hui. I am forever grateful for the selfless service you have given not only myself, but to the field of Pacific education. Thank you for paving the way for hopeful Pacific educators like me who never thought postgraduate studies was even possible. You give me hope that I too can follow in your footsteps in academia. One day, no promises hehe.

Last, but not least, thank you to the higher powers; God, the universe, atua(s), my ancestors, and angels for guiding me spiritually, mentally, and physically throughout this postgraduate journey. It has been magical.

Ia se tatou amata le talanoa (let us start the talanoa).

Contents

Chapter 1: Amata

Unuhia te rito o te harakeke kei whea te kōmako e kō?

Whakatairangitia – rere ki uta, rere ki tai;

Ui mai koe ki ahau he aha te mea nui o te ao,

Māku e kī atu he tangata, he tangata, he tangata!

Remove the heart of the flax bush and where will the kōmako sing?

Proclaim it to the land, proclaim it to the sea;

Ask me, "What is the greatest thing in the world?"

I will reply, "It is people, people, people!"

Throughout my years as a student and as a teacher, I have saved many phrases, quotes and proverbs that have resonated with me at different parts of my journey. I include these phrases, quotes, and proverbs at the start of every chapter as a tribute to that point in my journey and how it still inspires me today as I write this thesis. I start with this whakatauki that served as the whakatauki for the Social Science learning area curriculum, which due to the nationwide curriculum refresh project is now also a part of the Aotearoa, New Zealand Histories curriculum. Northern Māori kaumātua attribute this whakatauki to a rangatira who was part of an arranged marriage for the purpose of securing peace for her iwi. Unfortunately, this rangatira was also prevented from bearing children. The whakatauki is both a lament for her personal loss but served as a more general warning about the importance of nurturing future generations (Metge et al., 1995). As a Social Science teacher, this whakatauki reminds me about the power in the subjects and topics I teach, and the influence I

have in moulding and nurturing young minds through the curriculum. It is one of the reasons I enjoy teaching in the Social Science learning area so much – because tangata, people, are at the centre of our curriculum. In saying this, teaching subjects like History, Pacific Studies and Social Studies comes with great responsibility. Teachers become holders and storytellers of histories that may not be our own. Thus, it is important that teachers carefully consider how we approach and teach histories to our students. I am always conscious of the sacredness of such subjects, making sure that I handle our histories and Indigenous histories like taonga, being careful to story them respectfully to give them the mana that they deserve. History is not merely a record of events but a means of interpreting and deriving significance from the past. It has often been used as a tool of colonisation, marginalising indigenous narratives such as that of Māori. Yet, in skilled and capable hands, history can also be empowering, enlightening, and validating. This whakatauki also pays homage to my role as a Te Tiriti partner – Te Tiriti o Waitangi being the first immigration document between Māori and Pākeha enabling non-Māori to settle in Aotearoa, New Zealand, among other key factors outlined in the document. As tauiwi, I acknowledge Māori as tangata whenua of Aotearoa, New Zealand, the place I call my home. Lastly, this whakatauki is honouring those who came before me, who paved the way for Pacific educators and researchers of Pacific education in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Entering my postgraduate studies, I had little to no understanding of the vast oceans of research and academia dedicated to Pacific education. I acknowledge, appreciate, and admire those who contributed to this space which has allowed me to respectfully contribute my own part to the field of Pacific education. It is in this vein that I introduce the key aims of this thesis alongside my research questions.

Research Aims and Questions

The title of my thesis is "E Aogā le Talanoa: A Critical Autoethnographic unpacking of negotiating Pacific identities in Aotearoa, New Zealand classrooms". "E Aogā le Talanoa" in Gagana Sāmoa (my heritage language) means that the conversation is good, useful, or fruitful, which describes the talanoa, or discussion, within this thesis. The talanoa explores how the classroom impacts the negotiation of identities of students, specifically Pacific students. Through this self-reflexive research approach (Nagata, 2004), I will unpack different pedagogical and curricular aspects of my education to understand how they influence Pacific learners and their developing identities. My chosen methodology is critical autoethnography (Holman Jones, 2016) weaved with talanoa (Vaioleti, 2006) a cultural practice that resonates with Pacific worldviews. It is through the intentional weaving of methodologies that I answer the following research questions:

- What does the New Zealand-born and raised Pacific identity mean for me as a Pacific learner and teacher?
- What messages from the literature and autoethnographic narratives would help secondary school teachers understand ways to appropriately address Pacific learners' identities in the classroom?
- How can talanoa as a valid Indigenous Pacific method be weaved-well together with critical autoethnography to appropriately capture Pacific ways of knowing, being, and becoming?

The aim of my research is to critically examine and unpack my experiences of negotiating my identity within educational spaces. In the context of this thesis, I use the terms classroom space and educational space interchangeably to describe any

space where learning occurs. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of vā (Wendt, 1996) and third space (Bhabha, 1994), I delve into my personal experiences to illuminate cultural phenomena that can inform teacher practices, particularly in relation to Pacific students. Furthermore, this thesis delves into the complex interplay of culture, the history of Pacific education in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and the societal positioning of Pacific peoples, all of which have profoundly shaped my identity within educational contexts. Reflecting on years spent both as a student and a teacher in the classroom, I contend with diverse interpretations of culture that have influenced my self-perception. Initially, I perceived the concepts of identity and culture as fixed, conforming to the notion that I must embody the perfect "teine Samoa." However, as I grew older, I came to recognise a misalignment between this ideal and my personal self-image, which is heavily influenced by my upbringing in the Pacific diaspora. This disconnect prompted a critique of how Pacific identity is represented in educational policies and translated into classroom practices, often failing to resonate with the realities faced by New Zealand-born and raised Pacific students. In advocating for educational approaches that embrace and integrate the nuanced identities of Pacific students, I aim to enrich learning experiences for Pacific students which should be tailored to their unique backgrounds and experiences.

Background

Listen teacher

Listen to me

Don't look away

See my eyes they hold messages

that can make you understand me

Hold my hand and your heart

will warm towards me.

Let me dance and sing you

my own songs which you don't know,

and you might smile

as you've never smiled before

Let me tell you a story

of my ancient past

and then, maybe, you will see

another person in me.

Emma Kruse Va'ai (1985)

I came across the poem above written by Emma Kruse Va'ai, a renown Pacific scholar, as I was researching the themes and ideas of Pacific identity in education for this thesis. This is one of the only poems, amongst the many poems and quotes from Pacific scholars I came across, that stood out to me during my research process as the others were drawn from various moments in my life. Within this poem, Va'ai talks about her own teacher and the potential depth of understanding her teacher could have of Emma's identity and culture if she listened and looked to understand. Identity is a theme that connects various pedagogical frameworks in Pacific education such as the Tapasā framework (Ministry of Education, 2018) and the Va'atele Framework (Si'ilata, 2019). Such frameworks recognise identity as a key to unlocking educational success for Pacific learners (Siope, 2011). Alongside providing guidelines for teachers of Pacific students, these frameworks also encourage teachers to understand the "shared and ethnic-specific identities, languages and cultures of Pacific learners'' and how they underpin "the way they think and learn, which is fundamental to their well-

being and success" (Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 10). When this is acknowledged within educational spaces, Pacific learners can make strong and meaningful connections between home knowledge funds and knowledge gained at school – experiencing success in both spaces. In many pedagogical frameworks that specifically cater to Pacific learners, acknowledging identity remains a large component to the teaching and learning of these students. With a focus on Pacific students within Aotearoa, New Zealand classrooms, it is important to foreground the position of Pacific peoples in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Pacific Peoples

Pacific peoples make up an increasingly significant part of the population and society of Aotearoa, New Zealand. Connell (2015) describes migration to Aotearoa, New Zealand by Pacific peoples as one prompted by the improvement of quality of life for families, especially in the 1950's and 1960's where there was a huge unskilled labour shortage. Within this period, Aotearoa, New Zealand welcomed Pacific peoples to fill this unskilled labour shortage from the island nations of New Zealand's colonial administration such as Western Samoa, Niue, Tokelau, and the Cook Islands. During this period, the Pacific population living in Aotearoa, New Zealand increased significantly with figures showing 8103 Pacific peoples in 1956, 26, 271 in 1966 and 65, 694 in 1976 (Samu, 1998). Pacific communities and hubs were formed around Aotearoa, New Zealand as result of this migration (Si'ilata et al., 2019). These cohesive communities were grounded in Pacific values and cultures which Salesa (2017) refers to as a "Pacific archipelago - an archipelago made up of 'islands' (institutions and in some cases, neighbourhoods)" (p. 10). Within these hubs, significant emphasis was placed on language resulting in an active effort to maintain

heritage languages and cultures as language loss and culture was common for Pacific migrants who moved away from the Pacific islands. Both aspects play a significant role in the collective identity of these newly established Pacific communities. Pacific peoples in Aotearoa, New Zealand are dynamic and diverse now making up eight percent (381,642 people) of the total population (Ministry of Pacific People, 2020). This number has been steadily increasing over the years with a 29% jump between the 2013 and 2018 census'. This growth rate means that the population will potentially increase to 440,000 – 480,000 in 2025 and to 530,000 – 650,000 in 2038.

The Ministry of Pacific Peoples reports that the Pacific population is also a young population with a median age of 23 years, in which thirty-four percent of Pacific peoples are under the age of 15 years. In comparison to other ethnic groups in Aotearoa, New Zealand, the Pacific population is the youngest population with the Māori median age of 25.4 years, 31.3 years for Asian and 41.4 years for European in comparison. The Pacific population is made up of 17 distinct ethnic groups which includes Cook Islands Māori, Fijian, Hawaiian, i-Kiribati, Indigenous Australian, Kiribati, Nauruan, Niuean, Ni Vanuatu, Papua New Guinean, Pitcairn Islander, Rotuman, Samoan, Solomon Islander, Tahitian, Tokelauan, Tongan, and Tuvaluan (Ministry of Pacific Peoples, 2020). Despite these listed ethnic categories, Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa, New Zealand, are not homogenous but are diverse with identities that are ever changing and are especially influenced by their experiences living within the diaspora, or Pacific archipelago. Thus, I foreground my use of the term "Pacific peoples" in this thesis in which I am referring to people living within Aotearoa, New Zealand who have migrated from the Pacific islands, or who identify as Pacific because of their ancestry or heritage.

Pacific Education

Education was a major factor that influenced the relocation of Pacific peoples to Aotearoa, New Zealand. Pacific families have always had high aspirations for education in Aotearoa, New Zealand especially for the future generations. In saying this, the educational system they encountered in Aotearoa, New Zealand, was founded on Western principles. The framing of "Pacific education" was prompted by the need to shift away from the Eurocentric education system that was prevalent in Aotearoa, New Zealand in the early 1960's and 1970's which seemed to disadvantage Pacific learners (MacPherson, 1996). An example of these disadvantages was the prioritisation of the English language, where teachers even advised immigrant Pacific parents to only talk English to their children at home (Anae, 1998). In analysing power dynamics in education, Bishop and Glynn (2003) states that it is important to understand "how the dominant culture has maintained control of the positions of power within the political, social and economic centres of society" and "how historical and social processes can impact on people's lives and in what ways power imbalances may shape perceptions of other people in society" (p. 135). The dominant Western values in the education system of Aotearoa, New Zealand caused a power imbalance in which prioritisation of the dominant culture meant that marginalised peoples, including Pacific peoples, had to adhere to the ways of the dominant culture. Many argue that this is still the case in education today.

Much Pacific research has been conducted to analyse the gaps in education that disadvantage Pacific learners in Aotearoa, New Zealand. In the late 1990's, state funded programmes and research looked at strengthening Pacific learners' experiences in Aotearoa, New Zealand schools. The development of these programmes was highly influenced by reports such as those conducted by the

Education Review Office (ERO), "which argued that chronic issues of low student attainment, truancy, poor teacher morale, and recruitment in these schools were caused by poor school performance." (Si'ilata et. al, 2018). Furthermore, the release of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) first Program of International Student Assessment (PISA) results in 2000 showed that Māori, Pacific, and children with special needs performed poorly thus intensifying state funding in national policy and research targeting systemic change and Pacific focused initiatives in education such as the Pasifika Education Plan (Alton-Lee, 2005). As a result, school and community leaders identified sociopolitical factors as the main cause of the issues outlined by the ERO reports. Most of the students in these socio-economic disadvantaged areas were of Pacific descent. Thus, the need to strengthen education in these areas became a priority. This informed professional learning and development (PLD) projects that targeted three key priority groups that the Ministry identified: Māori, Pasifika, and children with special needs. These projects recognised that culturally responsive pedagogies are vital for strengthening educational experiences for Pacific students (Si'ilata, et. al, 2018). The consideration of these factors within teaching practice meant quality teaching.

Alongside the many initiatives to improve Pacific education in Aotearoa, New Zealand is the "Tree of Opportunity", a conceptualisation of Pacific education which came to fruition during a 2001 symposium at the University of South Pacific (Samu, 2010). "The Tree of Opportunity" offered a strength-based approach to education asserting that "young people in New Zealand should not assimilate or submit to any form of cultural identity allocation" and that "education should be a process that is grounded in diverse Pasifika cultures" (Samu, 2010, p. 7). The Tree of Opportunity recognises that being culturally responsive in education means curriculum and

pedagogy needs to be tailor-made and contextualised for learners, ensuring that the cultural identities and values that Pacific learners bring into the classroom are not compromised or influenced by other factors. Culturally responsive pedagogical frameworks and professional development opportunities have since been implemented to create more equitable learning environments for Pacific students in Aotearoa, New Zealand classrooms. Overall, these efforts aim to address historical inequalities and empower Pacific learners to succeed academically while preserving their cultural identities.

Positionality

In tying up the themes presented in the previous sections, it is important I explain my positionality as the sole participant and researcher of this project, to help make sense of my talanoa as a New Zealand born and raised, second generation Samoan person. In the Samoan indigenous reference, fa'asinomaga means "a person's inheritance, identity or heritage" (Sauni et al., 2014, p. 25). My heritage is strongly reflected in my name. My full name is Temukisa Chantelle Pasese. I am named after my father's younger sister with whom he had a particularly strong feagaiga. My father and his sister Temukisa hail from the villages of Malie and Lepā in Upolu, Samoa. Chantelle is the name of my mother's cousin whom she lived with when she migrated over to Aotearoa, New Zealand. My mother hails from the villages of Faleatiu, Upolu and Salelavalu, Savai'i. Pasese, my paternal grandfather's first name, was embraced as the surname by his children, following a cultural tradition common among many Samoan families. My own names embody my heritage, familial connections, and the experiences of my parents in our birthplace, Aotearoa, New Zealand.

My parents both migrated over to Aotearoa, New Zealand in the 1980's for better opportunities. They decided to settle down in Māngere, South Auckland which is where I was born and raised. With a strong Pacific presence in Auckland due to the labour shortages of the 1950's-1960's, the city was fast becoming a multicultural society. By the mid-1970s though, gentrification caused many Pacific communities to relocate away from the city, moving to areas such as South Auckland. By the time my parents settled in South Auckland, it was already a community grounded in the cultures and values of the Pacific. This is where my sisters and I were born and grew up. Most of my schooling has been largely based in South Auckland, including the schools I have taught at as a secondary school teacher. Thus, my identity is deeply rooted in South Auckland, a small region in my diasporic home that emblematises aspects of Pacific and Western culture. My connection to my ethnic heritage is influenced by my strong affinity towards where I grew up and currently work – South Auckland, Aotearoa, New Zealand. Aroha High School (pseudonym) was the first kura I taught at and holds a very special place in my heart. Much of my insights in teaching, and a huge part of the reason why I formulated my questions as a basis for this research, was because of my experience teaching in this kura. Much of how I see myself as a Pacific person is strongly influenced by the Aotearoa, New Zealand context. I wouldn't be the person I am today if it wasn't for my experiences within South Auckland.

Considering the various aspects of my identity, my positionality has heavily influenced the themes and ideas of my thesis talanoa. Thus, critical autoethnography has afforded me the privilege of having my voice and experiences in educational spaces heard. I outline how I unpack these experiences in my thesis overview below.

Thesis Overview

Chapter 1 of this thesis, titled "Amata", sets the stage by introducing the main ideas and themes of this thesis. This is followed by a literature review in Chapter 2, which firmly grounds the thesis within the field of Pacific education. Chapter 3 covers my research design, unpacking my chosen methodology and theoretical frameworks in more detail. Chapter 4 and 5 are based on my findings and the analysis of my findings: Chapter 4 explores the concept of identity and analyses my experience as a Pacific student, Chapter 5 focuses on Power and Pedagogy which analyses my experience as a Pacific teacher of Pacific students. Chapter 6 concludes this thesis with a summary of how each research question has been answered. Each chapter also starts with a quote or poem which introduces us to the relevant themes and ideas that I talk about in that section. I have come across each of these quotes and poems throughout my educational journey, some of them giving me inspiration and motivation during challenging times in the classroom. They each serve as markers of my educational journey and are weaved within my identity as a teacher thus I use them as markers to start each chapter of this thesis. I also acknowledge my engagement with the indigenous framework of talanoa within this thesis, both as a method but also as a way of writing that interweaves the themes and ideas present in my research - almost as if there is an oral discussion within this thesis. Thus, I use the phrases "ia se tatou amata le talanoa (let us start the talanoa)", "se tatou fa'aauau le talanoa (let us continue with the conversation)" and "talanoa within my thesis" throughout my writing in reference to this interweaving of themes and ideas like a live discussion. I continue this thesis with a literature review foregrounding the chapters to come in this thesis talanoa.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Educate yourself enough,

So you may understand

The ways of other people

But not too much

That you may lose

your understanding

Of your own

Try things *palagi*

Not so you may become *palagi*

But so you may see the value

Of things Samoan

Learn to speak Samoan

Not so you may sound Samoan

But so you may

Feel the essence

Of being Samoan

Above all

Be aware and proud

Of what you are

So you may spare yourself the agony

Of those who are asking

What am I?

I came across this poem by the late Lemalu Tate Simi during my first couple of years of teaching. I was being challenged, like all new teachers, by the realities of the classroom which consisted of behaviour management, curriculum knowledge and learning new systems and processes. But deeper than that, I was being challenged by myself. In these formative years of my career, I was still finding my feet and developing my teaching identity and philosophy. My confidence in who I was as a teacher was slowly growing. I say slowly because as a young teacher there were many times when I felt way out of my depth. I constantly struggled with a sense of imposter syndrome, as if I were perpetually playing catch-up in both my teaching career and in life, especially given my position as a young Pacific teacher with limited life experience at the time. This lack of innate confidence also came from the continuation of the negotiation of my identity, but within a new context. I was suddenly re-negotiating my identity as I was now trying to figure out who I was as a Pacific teacher. I found solace in this poem, and I approached it as if it were a guideline. Shortly after coming across this poem, I enrolled into a Gagana Sāmoa language course for beginners at Manukau Institute of Technology. This led me to a space where I met other beginners who had a similar story to me. We were all New Zealand born Samoans just trying to reconnect. I felt solitude in the collectiveness of our story and struggle. This poem resonates with many aspects of Pacific identity, but for me it emphasised the importance of learning and educating ourselves of things pertaining to each world – our home world and the Western world of our diasporic homes – whilst maintaining the essence of who we are.

It captures the true struggle of having our feet planted in two worlds but not yet feeling a true sense of belonging in either space. In this vein, this chapter conducts a talanoa between several themes related to New Zealand born Pacific identities and draws on Pacific scholarship to demonstrate some of the issues Pacific peoples face in education. It also looks at the potential of the classroom as a space for identities to be positively negotiated and pedagogical tools that teachers can use to strengthen their practise in the classroom to create more inclusivity for Pacific students. I start this part of the talanoa by first looking at the socio-economic positioning of Pacific peoples in in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Socio-Economic Positioning of Pacific Peoples

Given that the Pacific community in Aotearoa, New Zealand is located within a wider narrative of migration and navigation, an understanding of context is needed. The Pacific Aotearoa Status Report: A Snapshot (Ministry of Pacific Peoples, 2020) provides some insight into the lives of Pacific peoples living in Aotearoa, New Zealand. The statistics highlight some concerning factors regarding Pacific communities and their socio-economic positioning in Aotearoa, New Zealand. One in four Pacific people (or 26%) are in social housing, where rates of severe housing deprivation in Aotearoa, New Zealand are highest among Māori and Pacific young people. Pacific peoples are also severely over-represented in homelessness statistics in Auckland which is where 63.9% of the Pacific population live. 24.4% of Pacific peoples are acutely overrepresented in the statistics of New Zealanders who are house deprived with Pacific peoples also the least likely to own a home compared to other ethnic groups in Aotearoa, New Zealand. These socio-economic factors have a detrimental effect on the education that Pacific students have access to. PISA reports have also shown that

in Aotearoa, New Zealand, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have lower achievement rates than more socio-economic advantaged students (Education Counts, 2022). The 2022 PISA report also showed that in Aotearoa, New Zealand, students from low socio-economic backgrounds had a larger drop in average Mathematics achievement than more socio-economically advantaged students. The results from the PISA programme also reflected proportionately high disparities in achievement in Aotearoa, New Zealand when compared to other countries in the Organisation for the Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Ferguson et al., 2008). Turner et al. (2015) studied the achievement gap for Māori and Pacific students, highlighting that in 2013, 78.7% of Pākeha and 82% of Asian students in Year 11 achieved Level 1 of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), while only 55.3% of Māori and 64.8% of Pacific students gained the qualification (NZQA, 2014). These disadvantages contribute to the achievement gap for Māori and Pacific students who, historically, have underperformed in international assessments in comparison to other ethnic groups in Aotearoa, New Zealand (Houghton, 2015). Moreover, this highlights an even deeper issue that these students are potentially being underserved in our education system. This interconnection between housing instability and educational achievement amongst Māori and Pacific students in Aotearoa, New Zealand, is alarmingly clear, with a disproportionate representation of these communities in social housing and homelessness statistics. Reports consistently show that Pacific students perform below their peers from more socio-economically advantaged backgrounds and in comparison, to other ethnic groups in general.

Changing Tides

Despite these statistics, the education system in Aotearoa, New Zealand are making efforts to improve outcomes for Māori and Pacific students. These improvements are prompted by initiatives that have been created over the past few decades to help improve the educational outcomes and experiences of Māori and Pacific students in Aotearoa, New Zealand classrooms. Some of these initiatives include pedagogical frameworks that specifically cater to teachers of Pacific students to strengthen their practise within the classroom in order to potentially improve Pacific achievement and experiences in education. An example of this is the Tapasā framework (Ministry of Education, 2018) consisting of three key competencies to help inform teacher practise of Pacific students through the respect and acknowledgement of Pacific students' language, culture, and identity in the classroom. Other initiatives include the Action Plan for Pacific Education (APPE), which looks at improving Pacific achievement over the period of 10 years through cultural competencies, tackling systemic racism and discrimination in education, and collaborating and co-designing with families to fulfil learning and employment aspirations of Pacific students (Ministry of Education, 2023). Lastly, funding schemes such as the equity index funding ensures schools in lower socio-economic areas receive the appropriate funding to achieve more equitable outcomes for their students (Ministry of Education, 2024). The equity index funding is based on "the percentage of households with income in the lowest 20% nationally, the percentage of employed parents in the lowest skill level occupational groups, the percentage of households that are crowded, the percentage of parents with no educational qualifications and the percentage of parents receiving income support benefits" (Ministry of Education, 2014). Because of these new initiatives over the past decade, StatsNZ Tatauranga Aotearoa (2020) claims that young Māori and Pacific

students are leaving schools more qualified than older generations (StatsNZ, n.d.). The 2018 census also reported that 80.6% of Māori and 83% of Pacific 15–24-year-olds had at least a Level 1 qualification or equivalent (such as school certificate). The national average for this age group was 85.8%. This represents the progress and efforts that have been made to improve education for Pacific students over the past few years with many of these pedagogical frameworks acknowledging identity as a significant component to the achievement of Pacific students.

Pacific Identities

The diversity of Pacific Peoples goes further than cultural and linguistic heritage by including identities grounded in migrant communities within the Pacific diaspora. An example of this is the New Zealand born and raised Pacific identity which is specific to people of Pacific descent born and raised in Aotearoa, New Zealand. I use the term "Pacific identity" to describe the ethnic and cultural identities of Pacific peoples - that there are many and that they are different, complex, and ever changing depending on variables like location and environment. For Pacific peoples who live within the Pacific diaspora, identities become more nuanced in relation to the diasporic homes they find themselves in. I acknowledge that there are a range of aspects that contribute to identity, but for the purpose of this thesis, I am framing it as Pacific identity.

The New Zealand born and raised Pacific identity has sometimes been referred to in literature as an identity profile or intra-group diversity (Ferguson, 2008). Pasikale (1999) refers to these subcultures as identity profiles - naming them as traditional; New Zealand blend; and New Zealand made. Anae (1998) refers to the Pacific subcultural identity within Aotearoa, New Zealand as "NZ-born". These subcultures, or identity profiles, all capture the New Zealand born and raised Pacific experience. The

formation and presence of these sub-cultures or identity profiles are enabled by the understanding that identity and culture are fluid concepts. Pasikale (1999) argues that identity is not a static product but "a process of constant navigation, based on a core of convictions that provide a foundation for self-acceptance" (Pasikale, 1999, p.6). Wendt (1982) viewed the development of new subcultures within the Pacific diaspora as moving towards "a new Oceania". In his talanoa, Wendt celebrates culture as dynamic and an evolving concept that doesn't necessarily have a starting point, nor an end point. It is not fixed but is constantly changing by people and location. Thus, New Zealand born and raised Pacific identities are rooted in experiences specific to Pacific peoples born in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Samu (2015) explores this identity which she states comes under the 'Pasifika Umbrella' and believes that this identity has unique forms of expression and identification. She further elaborates by saying that New Zealand born and raised Pacific young people demonstrate an identity that is creative and asserts a self-determination. New Zealand born and raised Pacific young people strive to be "bicultural or multiethnic on their own terms" and celebrates a blend of traditional culture with the urban and contemporary (Samu, 2015, p. 133). It is an identity grounded and rooted in Pacific migrant communities specifically in New Zealand, Hawaii, Australia, and the West Coast of the USA. This identity celebrates and validates the experiences of Pacific peoples who are born in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Anae (1998) explores this in her PhD titled *Fofoa-i-vao-'ese: the identity journeys of NZ-born Samoans* which examines "fa'aSamoa, church, and life in New Zealand impacts on life choices and on the construction of the self, and secured identities" (Anae, 1998, p. i). Anae states that "NZ-borns" also have access to two different knowledge systems and lifestyles, thus oscillating between the two can cause

some confusion. Occasionally, the confusion may also stem from those who can make them feel inadequate or unaccepted, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

I am - a Samoan, but not a Samoan... To my 'âiga in Samoa, I am a pâlagi. I am - a New Zealander, but not a New Zealander... To New Zealanders I am a 'bloody coconut', at worst, a 'Pacific Islander', at best I am - to my Samoan parents, their child (Anae, 1998, p. 2).

The confusion that New Zealand born and raised Pacific peoples sometimes face is a result of navigating and negotiating two worlds - one of their heritage cultures and the other of their diasporic homes. Anae (1998) refers to it as the world of our parents/grandparents and the Pālagi world, where in many cases, New Zealand born Pacific peoples experience a struggle to fit into the norms of each identity profile. This is especially the case when viewing identity as a static concept. Wendt (1982) questions identity as a static concept as he argues that there is no state of cultural purity. Wendt goes on to say that in pre-Papālagi times, cultures were influenced and changed by factors such as inter-island contact, politics, and religions. He argues that the only valid culture worth having is the culture being lived out now, and states that "knowledge of our past cultures is a precious source of inspiration for living out the present" (Wendt, 1982, p. 207). Furthermore, Wendt talks about cultural stagnation which is when there is an expectation that everyone who is Samoan must act and behave in a certain way – this behaviour is indicative of a 'true Samoan'. The concept of a 'true Samoan' creates strict boundaries on how Samoans must behave, think, dance, talk, dress, and believe - a concept challenged by Wendt as he describes it as "an invitation for a culture to choke in its own body odour, juices and excreta" (Wendt, 1982, p. 207). Wendt refers to some of these subcultures as urban lifestyles and

credits the lifeblood of any culture to "the diverse contribution of its varied subcultures" in which he says is working towards a new Oceania (Wendt, 1982, p. 208).

The Potential of the Classroom

How the nuances of Pacific identity transfers into education are important to note, especially when it comes to policies that depict and represent Pacific cultures and identity in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Over the past few decades, there has been a huge cultural shift in education in response to the educational underachievement of Māori and Pacific students in Aotearoa, New Zealand (Houghton, 2015). Moreover, a multicultural approach to education has taken hold of Aotearoa, New Zealand as it seeks to address the inequities in education affecting Māori and Pacific students. This includes designing initiatives and programs that prioritise socio-cultural elements of education which studies have shown appeal more to our disadvantaged students (Bishop & Glynn, 2003). For teachers, the classroom space has the potential to improve the achievement gap through strengthening teacher pedagogy of Pacific students. Alton-Lee (2003) says that "teaching needs to be responsive to the diversity and the diverse realities within groups, for example, diversity within Pākehā, Māori, Pasifika (the Pasifika umbrella) and Asian students who are arguably the most diverse ethnic group categories by cultural and linguistic heritage" (p. V).

Part of understanding how the nuances of Pacific identities is acknowledged in educational spaces is also acknowledging the Western foundations of the education system in Aotearoa, New Zealand which favours the values and norms of a dominant Western culture over others, thus disadvantaging ethnic minority students (Eriksen, 2018; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Si'ilata, 2019). Anne Milne describes this as white space, a construct of Eurocentric values and worldviews in which she argues mainstream

schools favour the "white background" (Milne, 2013, p. 5). Milne argues that when multiculturalism or diversity is referred to in the context of education, what is really being addressed is the colour of the students, or their difference from that white norm. The importance of recognising this space as "white" means we can make strides to effect change as Milne points out that if the white space doesn't change, then schools will continue to practise Eurocentric and assimilative tendencies that relegate non-white children to the margins. In changing the colour of the space, education and schools need to fit the children, not the other way around as some students might experience. The positioning of the classroom as a place of negotiation of identity emphasises the significance of this space to young people. The learning that takes place within the classroom becomes one of not only contextual education but also personal education.

Lei (2006) sees the classroom as a significant space of discovery as both teachers and students develop an awareness and consciousness around their social positioning, especially when it comes to their own cultural and ethnic groups in wider society. The classroom helps students reflect on their own positioning and what this means for them. For Asian and Pacific students specifically, immigration experiences may affect their relationships with their native countries and that is a significant factor that is sometimes overlooked by educators who homogenise Pacific identities and their experiences. Lei (2006) argues that the identity of Asian and Pacific peoples is more complex and complicated than what research presents, which is that they are only cultural beings. Lei goes on to explore the influence of immigration on Asian and Pacific students' experiences in education, arguing that "immigration experiences can affect Asian and Pacific Islander students differently" (2006, p. 94). This may mean that Pacific students and their families have varied connections and relationships with

their native countries. Lei (2006) recognises that it is important to understand the immigration history of Pacific peoples to Aotearoa, New Zealand, especially when it comes to understanding Pacific learners and their complex social identities for educators. This could minimise the risk of educators homogenising Pacific students and their identities (Lei, 2006). This understanding should start with learning about the immigration histories of Pacific peoples to Aotearoa, New Zealand, specifically the political and economic factors that contributed to this migration and how this led to Pacific peoples living within the Pacific diaspora.

Anae and Peterson (2020) acknowledge the significance of the classroom as a space of negotiation for learners and reflects on a third year Pacific Studies paper at the University of Auckland where students can explore aspects of their ethnic identities. Through this paper the students were able to define and derive meaning for a more secure ethnic identity. They capture the ethnic identity journeys of 13 Pacific students who are interviewed on how their Pacific identities were nurtured or rejected at different times of their lives. One Tongan participant shared, "I completely denied my identity as a Tongan in order to assimilate to the culture that is believed to enhance opportunities and success. This was the mindset and attitude that I continued to carry all throughout primary, intermediate, and high school education (P12FT)" (Anae & Peterson, 2020, p. 40). While this person was clear about denying their identity as a Tongan, other participants shared similar experiences. These participants were able to find spaces where they felt nurtured and welcomed as Pacific peoples. This is reflected in another student's experience as shared in the following:

I went to AGGS [Auckland Girls' Grammar School]. I feel like I was comfortable in my skin and there was no question of who I was because

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my school was very diverse . . . like we have PI's [Pacific Islanders] . . . at our school and they really talk about strong tamaitai [young women] . . .. At uni . . . I feel like when I go to my science papers and then it's predominantly palagi and then there's me sitting in the corner and I feel like I can't breathe until I come here . . . I feel like I can't breathe or relax until I come to Arts, you know, like my safe space . . . (P1FA-S) (Anae & Peterson, 2020, p. 41).

Although these students' excerpts are from the context of tertiary education, we can draw many similarities between classrooms across the different educational sectors. These experiences are not synonymous with these students but represent the struggle of many Pacific learners. Samu (2015) states that for Pacific Island peoples living within the Pacific diaspora, the struggle begins as they become socialised in a predominantly Westernised environment which comes with its own dominant values. The pressure for Pacific learners to adapt to the dominant culture of a Western environment, which in this case is education, means sometimes suppressing parts of their identity. This separation of worlds is part of the struggle especially when the worlds conflict with each other with differing values, expectations, and pressures. Hill and Hawk (1998) explain that Pacific learners live in multiple worlds consisting of their family, culture, church, part time employment, peers, and school. Sometimes students choose to separate these worlds as parents are only familiar with the family, cultural, and church worlds and have little comprehension of the other worlds their children inhabit. The same can be said for teachers about the world their students go home to when they leave school. The merging of these worlds could eliminate certain challenges Pacific learners face when moving between the different spaces, especially the sacrifices they sometimes must make to survive in each space. The classroom can be transformed into a space that allows the merging of both worlds to occur, this

is indicative of the power that teachers have in transforming this space. With this said, teachers must be informed in pedagogies that can help create a more inclusive space in the classroom. Pasikale (1996) warns against educators ignoring the diversity of Pacific identities saying that identity is a critical issue for many Pacific learners and that "understanding the issues can mean the difference to our positive cultural continuity and the alienation of a generation more comfortable with other forms of sub-culture" (p. 6). This can also have an impact on the educational outcomes of Pacific learners.

Hunter and Hunter (2019) carried out a study focusing on the experiences of Pacific students in Mathematics classrooms, which included obtaining insights from these students about what it is like to be Pacific while studying Mathematics. One student described their experience in the classroom as the following:

It feels like I'm a different person from a Samoan person... because whenever I'm learning maths, I think I'm a Palagi (White) person... because whenever I'm doing maths I can't remember I'm Samoan. I don't like about maths when I get up to the hard part, I can't do it I don't feel like a white person anymore I feel like myself again and I'm nervous" (Hunter & Hunter, 2019, p. 23).

This is an example of the turmoil Pacific students face when learning in the classroom - almost as though they must embody somebody else (Pālagi person) to succeed at Maths. This devalues Pacific students and their cultural identity as the student associate's success in Maths as something only a Pālagi person can achieve and when they encounter a "hard part" they are back to being Samoan again. Pacific students need to have confidence that they can succeed as Pacific students.

A possible influence on Pacific student perceptions of self are the perceptions of those who teach them. Teachers can have lower expectations of Pacific learners which leads to detrimental issues such as lowered self-esteem (Spiller, 2012). This is especially the case when Māori and Pacific students are aware that teachers' perceptions of them are different from others. While high teacher expectations can have positive effects on student achievement, low teacher expectations can lead to student discomfort and ultimately failure (Spiller, 2012). A factor that influences teachers' expectations of students is ethnicity as expectations are usually lower and more negative for indigenous and minority group students compared to their white counterparts (Webber, 2015). Hunter and Hunter (2019) explore this deficit theorising by interviewing teachers of Mathematics and recieving feedback such as the following, "I am really surprised when I hear some of the kids, I thought were lowies asking good questions or sharing their thinking, really good thinking...I really thought they knew nothing and so I just used to tell them what to do" (Hunter & Hunter, 2019, p. 25). This is an example of deficit theorising which encourages low student participation and performance and an overall negative academic identity. Allen and Webber (2019) describe this deficit theorising in the classroom as stereotype threat which is when one or more of our social identities may be devalued leading to underperformance. Allen and Webber (2019) argue that positive academic identity is a challenge to ethnically diverse students and that these students are more vulnerable to stereotype threat than other students (Siope, 2011). This is because of the negative and deficit attitudes people have towards low socio-economic areas, low decile schools and Pacific peoples based on historical factors. Māori and Pacific students are vulnerable to negative stereotyping by teachers who are often white and middle class. In order for

Pacific students to foster belief in themselves, they must see that belief in those who also teach them.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogical Tools

Quality teaching for Pacific learners means engaging culturally responsive pedagogies in educators' practice. All students walk into the classroom with their own cultural funds of knowledge or bodies of knowledge. Culturally responsive pedagogy recognises and acknowledges students' cultural identity that they bring to the classroom allowing it to inform their teaching practice and topic choice in the classroom. Summer (1995) mentions three main points when it comes to culturally responsive teaching,

> (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (Summer, 1995, p. 160).

Academic success means teachers effectively teach students to develop their literacy, technological, social, and political skills to actively participate in society (Summer, 1995). Developing and maintaining cultural competence means that teachers utilise students' culture as a vehicle for learning, highlighting academic achievement and cultural competence can be combined. Culturally responsive teaching also fosters critical thinking skills amongst students allowing them to critique the "cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (Summer, 1995, p. 162). In the context of New Zealand, there are many culturally responsive frameworks available to teachers to help strengthen their practice. Mere Berryman et al., (2018) explains that the Mana Ōrite framework allows

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relationships to be central to culturally responsive pedagogy. Berryman et al. (2018) also investigates the impact of relationships on student learning, suggesting that learning is not merely an internal transformation preparing individuals for new relationships. Instead, they propose that learning is a change in the relationships with others that help individuals better understand their world and their role within it (Berryman et al., 2018). In addition, Russel Bishop (2003) believes that there needs to be a shift in pedagogies, a shift that is more holistic and flexible and rooted in cultural contexts thus giving a more meaningful learning experience for those students with diverse backgrounds. Although teachers may not realise it, many are cultural hegemonists as they expect students to behave according to the schools' cultural standards of "normality" sometimes depreciating the values and identity that they bring from home (Siope, 2011).

As mentioned in an earlier section, there is also a growing number of pedagogical frameworks that specifically cater to Pacific learners in the classroom. Many Pacific pedagogical frameworks have the underlying Pacific values of relationality, respect and meaningful engagement embedded within the practice. In *Practising Pacific Pedagogies* (2021), various PECA (Pacific Early Career Academics) explained just how important Pacific pedagogies were in tertiary classrooms during the pandemic. COVID19 and the consequential lockdowns meant that learning shifted onto online platforms which meant many Pacific teachers had to reevaluate what effective teaching looked like considering the unconventional ways learning was being delivered during lockdowns. PECA highlighted that there was an interconnection between equity issues and the ability to teach effectively in an online environment (Thomsen, et al., 2021). The need to nurture relationships on these online platforms was pivotal for effective teaching. Some PECA used strategies like making themselves

available to students beyond classroom hours in order for students to have access to academic counselling during hours that were more suitable for them. Similarly, the Va'atele framework provides guidance for educators to foster inclusiveness in the classroom so that students can "make meaningful connections between home and school funds of knowledge" so that students can "experience success in both domains" (Si'ilata et al., 2019, p. 46). Si'ilata et al. (2019) likens the va'atele (double hulled canoe) to the journey Pacific learners take in educational settings as bilingual/bicultural people. The two worlds that Pacific learners must navigate such as home and school are compared to the double hulls of the va'atele – one hull representing the cultural knowledge and being that one attains at home, and the other hull representative of the language, literacy, and worldview of school. Si'ilata et al. argues that the combination of these two hulls provides greater strength and a much safer passage through unknown seas but also a culturally responsive environment can help strengthen this passage. They argue that "in order for Pasifika learners to be successful in the dual (and often multiple) worlds they inhabit, effective teachers should acknowledge, strengthen, and build students' capacity and capability in both" (Si'ilata et al., 2019, p. 909). Teachers can also use indigenous theoretical frameworks such as tivaevae (Maua-Hodges, 2000) to inform their teaching practises in the classroom. The tivaevae model used in the context of research includes five core values: taokotai (collaboration), tu akangateitei (respect), uriuri kite (reciprocity), tu inangaro (relationships), and akairi kite (shared vision) (Maua-Hodges, 2000). In her proposal, Maua-Hodges (2000) suggested using tivaevae as a framework for education, though it did not emphasize the importance of culturally inclusive and high-quality education. With this said, tivaevae has been used as a metaphor which can be applied to educational settings to underpin teachers' pedagogical approaches. In a

symposium presented by Pacific academics at the American Educational Research Association's 2018 conference in New York, tivaevae was shown to be used in various classroom contexts (Hunter et al., 2018). Using teacher and student interviews and video recordings of classroom mentoring gathered over the period of three years, Pacific academics were able to illustrate how the five tivaevae values were implemented by teachers, teacher educators, and students with the aim to highlight examples that will be useful and enlightening for those working to address racial disparities and deficit views in schools (Hunter et al., 2018). These are just a snippet of the various frameworks specific for teachers of Pacific students that can help them effectively improve engagement within the classroom and overall educational outcomes for Pacific learners.

Conclusion

This literature review explores the educational challenges faced by Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa, New Zealand, highlighting the diversity within this population and the socio-economic disadvantages they encounter. It also critiques the Eurocentric values embedded in the education system and discusses initiatives like Tapasā, Action Plan for Pacific Education and Tivaevae framework, all aimed at improving outcomes for Pacific students. Emphasizing the importance of inclusive educational practices that value Pacific students' cultural identities, a shift towards culturally responsive pedagogy is important. The significance of ethnic and cultural identity in education, particularly for Pacific learners, and the fluidity and diverse nature of Pacific identity is important to note as well as it highlights the importance of understanding and celebrating these identities to avoid marginalization which, historically, has been an issue for Māori and Pacific learners in education in Aotearoa, New Zealand. This

is apparent in the achievement gap for these students. Furthermore, the potential of classrooms as spaces for affirming cultural identities and fostering inclusive learning environments calls for more holistic pedagogies that acknowledge students' cultural contexts and there are many specific frameworks and strategies to support Pacific learners in the educational system of Aotearoa, New Zealand. It is important for teachers to understand the migration history of Pacific peoples to Aotearoa, New Zealand in order to understand the differences of those whose identity is also grounded in their experience growing up in the Pacific diaspora. These are some of the nuances of Pacific identities which need to be addressed in classrooms. Pasikale explains that identity is a critical issue for Pacific students, stating that "understanding the issues can mean the difference to our positive cultural continuity and the alienation of a generation more comfortable with other forms of sub-culture" (Pasikale, 1999, p. 6).

Chapter 3: Methodology

"We need to write, paint, sculpt, weave, dance, sing, and think ourselves into existence. For too long other people have done it for us – and they've usually stereotyped us, or created versions of us that embody their own hang-ups and beliefs and prejudices about us. So we have to write our own stories!"

(Albert Wendt, 2012)

The quote above was shared at a New Zealand Curriculum Review of Achievement Standards Pacific Fono I attended in Māngere, Auckland in 2023. The quote spoke to me at a pivotal time in my writing – the start. Thus, this quote will stay with me for the remainder of my writing, encouraging me to remember the validity and significance of my voice and of the community whom I represent. Thus, I introduce my research design and unpack my chosen methodologies and methods - critical autoethnography and talanoa between texts - alongside my chosen theoretical framework, vā and third space, within this chapter.

Critical Autoethnography

Autoethnography is rooted in ethnography which is a qualitative method of collecting and describing peoples and cultures - specifically looking at their social and behavioural customs, habits, or differences (Reed-Danahay, 2017). Autoethnography extends ethnography as the researcher connects their own personal experiences to wider, cultural, political, and social contexts (Holman Jones, 2016). Critical autoethnography then provides narratives that shed light on intersectional experiences of marginalisation and investigate social injustices thus becoming a cultural analysis through personal narratives. Critical autoethnography also allows meaning making to occur by valuing and prioritising personal voice becoming a methodology of special

significance for minority groups whose voices historically were marginalised in traditional research. Critical autoethnography also challenges traditional research approaches that prioritise objective knowledge by "telling stories that are located, engaged and forged in solidarity with others" (Conquergood, 1991, p. 149; Iosefo et al., 2020). Fa'avae (2018) reflects on his own use of Autoethnography by saying:

> Autoethnography empowers the unheard voices. Its critical practice positions theory amongst my personal stories. It locates the "self" in and amongst others. It privileges Pasifika/Pacific voices and experiences. It highlights rigour through relevance, appropriateness and usefulness. Autoethnography heals and gives hope (Fa'avae, 2018, p. 126).

Critical Autoethnography has also been referred to as wayfinding (Iosefo et al., 2020). Wayfinding, defined in the context of navigation, is the process of travelling and orienteering - going from one place to another (University of Hawaii, n.d.). Fetaui Iosefo (2020) challenges traditional views of wayfinding which translates into a more scientific and literal understanding related to ideas of movement and inhabiting. Iosefo says that wayfinding can be viewed as a "relational practice with the earth and sky, one that is dependent upon respectful and intimate knowledge" and grounded in practice (Iosefo, 2020, p. 23). Wayfinding was used by our Pacific ancestors to find their way around, utilising their relationship and knowledge to the land and environment. For our Pacific ancestors, their reliability on the land to provide the tools and materials to help wayfinding was essential for their survival. Trees were used by families to shape their va'a (boat), thus the va'a builders would then craft their boat to hold their families and communities (Iosefo et al., 2020). Critical autoethnography in the context of research is a journey of discovery and transformation as it is an "embodied, practical, adaptive and relationally driven practice" (Iosefo et al., 2020, p.

23). Critical autoethnography as wayfinding prompts researchers to become wayfarers across new oceans that encompass time and space and geopolitics and inequities. As wayfarers we take our personal histories along with us as we use them to make sense of wider political, social, and historical issues.

Coupling critical autoethnography with talanoa, vā and third space, critical autoethnography is an opportunity to privilege personal voice and narrative. Forging my own wayfinding journey, I use critical autoethnography to share my own narratives, personal experiences and stories to highlight the negotiation, and at times re-negotiation, of my New Zealand born and raised Pacific identity in the classroom. Through critical autoethnography, I am able to analyse the power teachers and classrooms have in shaping our young Pacific learners' identities, a cultural analysis through my personal narrative.

Talanoa

Talanoa is a word that has been used many times throughout my life growing up in a Samoan aiga, usually in conversation and to describe conversation. Talanoa in Gagana Sāmoa means to discuss, or converse about something. As a method though, talanoa reaches depths of conversation that prompts enlightenment and higher learning (Vaioleti, 2006). Talanoa is a qualitative approach to data collection as it provides space for people to talk and tell stories of their past, realities, and aspirations for their futures, thus producing more "pure, real and authentic" information for Pacific research (Vaioleti, 2006). Talanoa gives space for people to make meaning as they explore and examine the relationships they build with the world and those within it. Linguistically, "tala" means to command while "noa" can mean common (Vaioleti, 2016). In an encounter with talanoa, noa "creates the space and conditions" while tala

interweaves the "emotions, knowing and experiences" of the researcher and participants (Vaioleti, 2016, p. 24). In many cases, the space that is created through talanoa causes an upliftment of the spirits, becoming one of positivity and connectedness by what has been shared. In other cases, a spirit of contention and discomfort can also be felt if the talanoa does not bear good fruit. The uniqueness of talanoa is acknowledging the space between participants and knowing how to nurture it so that those within can share freely and safely. Talanoa holds similarities to narrative writing but differs in a sense that participants can provide a challenge or legitimisation to each other's shared stories and information. Instead of having a rigid standpoint on certain issues, talanoa involves talking through and over things. Vaioleti (2006) refers to this as a verbal negotiation "which have deep traditional roots in Pacific cultures" (p. 25). This is synonymous to the oral traditions of Pacific cultures. Tecun et al. (2018) also breaks down talanoa by explaining that talanoa navigates relationships as a "critical relational orality" and that "talanoa mediates conflict, rank, relation, or distance through wisdom inherited by place and people in the form of specific protocols that are diversely applied and adapted in various contexts and circumstances to access knowledge" (p. 162). Therefore, in talanoa, people are open, flexible, and adaptable to whoever is sharing and what is shared. This is the uniqueness of talanoa and why it is one of the leading Pacific methodologies used in Pacific research (Vaioleti, 2016).

I will be extending the use of talanoa as a means of not only being a conversation between people but also between things. Vaioleti's (2006) description of verbal negotiation is similar to the talanoa within this thesis, a conversation or discussion between ideas of Pacific literature and my personal journal excerpts that detail my experiences in education. This verbal negotiation I consider as a *talanoa*

between texts where each literature, journal entry and reflection lend its voice and meaning to the talanoa within this thesis. Mika (2017) states that all entities or things are intricately connected thus talanoa can weave and connect ideas and concepts together to form a talanoa between texts and a discussion within texts. The texts that are engaged in talanoa with each other present themes related to Pacific education and identity. Thus, the engagement of talanoa within this research can be described as a method where ideas between texts speak to each other identifying the relevant and appropriate literature to include in this thesis. The following data will be used in this talanoa.

My data consists of the following:

In this thesis I will draw on four main points of data to answer my research questions. These points of data provide insight on educational spaces from a range of positionings - as a student and a teacher. While I discuss these positionings separately, they are all interwoven within the rich tapestry of my identity. I explain these four main sources of data below.

- Personal Journal

This is an overview of my educational journey, detailing my experiences in the education system from the age of 5 years old to post graduate studies which is where I currently position myself. In this self-reflexive journal, I include my experiences schooling in South Auckland Primary schools, a South Auckland Intermediate School, a South Auckland Secondary School, and the University of Auckland. I write about my schooling at the University of Auckland both in my undergraduate and postgraduate journeys. I also touch on my time as a teacher but delve into this more in my teacher's journal. The journal entries explore my identity in the context of education and details

the to-and-fro's of negotiating my identity in the classroom. Through thematic talanoa I draw from various parts of this journal to include in my analysis. These experiences are detailed in italics to differentiate them as my voice and narrative within chapter 4 and 5.

- Teachers Journal

I have attended several Professional Learning (PL) opportunities throughout my time teaching in secondary school. Many of these seminars have had a focus around culturally relevant pedagogies to mitigate the inequities that Pacific and Māori students face within the education system. I have collated notes from these PL's in my teacher's journal. As a secondary school teacher of seven years, I have taught a range of Social Science classes - Classical Studies, History, Social Studies, and Pacific Studies to be specific. I reflect on the teaching of these subjects in this journal – specifically what topics I have taught in each course and the pedagogies that have been used to teach in each of these classes. I also reflect on discussions I have had with students and teachers in the context of my History and Pacific Studies classes. Through thematic talanoa I draw from various parts of this journal to include in my analysis. These reflections are detailed in italics to differentiate them as my voice and narrative within chapter 4 and 5.

- Literature/Policy documents/Journal articles

Through my thematic talanoa, I have carefully chosen the literature, policy documents and journal articles to include as data. These documents I have found to be relevant to the key themes of my thematic talanoa and lend their own valuable voice to the discussion.

- Supervision/Class Notes

My postgraduate journey has been one of enlightenment and magical moments - moments nurtured by my amazing supervisors and lecturers. I have collated some notes from my postgraduate journey that will also contribute to my thematic talanoa. These notes have been generated from my three taught papers and the many fruitful and cup filling supervision sessions throughout my postgraduate journey. I reference these meetings throughout my writing as part of my reflexive process. Talanoa also becomes a way of writing where themes and ideas speak to each other forming a discussion. In saying this, I continue to extend my use of talanoa as it transcends multiple spaces within my study. An example is thematic talanoa, which is similar to thematic analysis.

Interweaving through Thematic Talanoa

Papata pē ka na'e lalanga. I start this section off with a Tongan paloveape (proverb) which means "it may be coarse in texture, but it was woven well" (Scheyvens, 2013, p. 24). As I explain the interweaving of ideas through thematic talanoa, I acknowledge that the intentional naming of 'Thematic Talanoa' is not evident in research literature. However, it has been used in studies by Pacific researchers where they had incorporated thematic analysis as a process within their employment of talanoa as a method used to gather their data (Thomsen et al., 2021). Thus, the use of thematic talanoa in this introductory phase of its existence may be course but woven well. My naming of thematic talanoa, foregrounding the process of thematizing, is to highlight how ideas or themes shape the way talanoa is carried out in the study. More specifically, as I talanoa with literature and sources that detail my reflexive narratives, thematic talanoa is a particular form of analysis that forces me to consider how ideas from the literature and sources also influence the way I talanoa with them. From an Indigenous Pacific eco relational worldview, non-human entities including what we

perceive as material objects (i.e., text) have life of their own (Mika, 2017; Vaai, 2021). Naturally, through talanoa with text from literature and narratives from my journal, this has influenced my ways of analysis.

Thematic talanoa is based on the reflexive thematic analysis method (TA). Thematic analysis itself is a method which is used to explore and interpret qualitative data and attempts to make meaning by looking at patterns that come out of the data (Joy et al., 2023, p. 155). Subjectivity of the researcher thus becomes the core of the approach as what they bring to the process is essential to the purpose of the research. Thematic analysis is a method that unpacks and repacks a dataset by developing deep insights of the data and by making connections and patterns between the data. These connections are led by the interests of the researcher thus coding and themes are created and tagged to data by what the researcher deems important or meaningful. The researcher is at the centre of the thematic analysis as their familiarity with the data, their skills, and their contextualised knowledge shapes what they make out of the data (Joy et al., 2023). An important step to achieving this is by the process of reflexivity in which we question who we are and the knowledge and experiences we bring to the analysis process. Because of this personal standpoint, thematic analysis cannot be performed robotically because it is an interrogative process influenced largely by who the researcher is, each theme becoming almost like markers in a personal journey.

Thematic talanoa is grounded in the thematic analysis process but also in Pacific epistemologies and describes a more holistic engagement with ideas and themes. Through thematic talanoa, I analyse the qualitative data collected through various sources and look for patterns or themes that relate to my research questions. Thematic talanoa allows a more meaningful communication between the ideas and

themes within my data. The talanoa between the themes allows this process to be more authentic as the talanoa is grounded in cultural wisdom therefore the various sources of data will provide a thematic talanoa in which key concepts, ideas and themes will interweave with each other like a conversation. The process of talanoa between texts also informs the process of thematic talanoa.

Vā

When analysing my data sources, it was important that I chose a theoretical framework that was relevant to my research questions, allowing me to unpack my data thoroughly and intentionally. Thus, the combination of vā and Bhabha's (1994) third space were introduced to me by my supervisors and also through the works of Fetaui Iosefo (2014) who's Masters Thesis also explored concepts of identity, culture and education. I chose vā because of its Samoan origins which is linked to my personal fa'asinomaga and my position as the researcher and the sole participant of my research. Because of this, I nurture and cherish the vā immensely as I identify vā as a defining element of my methodology and an integral part of my research context. Iosefo uses vā and third space to unpack her journey through higher education. My engagement of vā will be in the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors of education but with a bigger emphasis on the secondary space. I will unpack both vā and third space separately in this methodology chapter.

I acknowledge that there are also many vā; according to Tuagalu (1998), there are 37 different vā spatial relationships, thus I refer to various vā throughout my writing that are relevant to the classroom space specifically. In saying this, one of the first known recorded attempts at defining the vā was by George Pratt, one of the first European missionaries in Samoa who worked together with recently converted

Samoans to help compile a Samoa-English dictionary in 1862. The two definitions given of vā are 'a space between', or 'to have a space between', and as a verb meaning 'to rival' (Tuagalu, 2023, p. 38). In the modern context, Tuagalu explains that Pacific academics are "striving to express a unique Pacific worldview based on home-island understandings of vā but transposed to the new homelands to which Pacific peoples had migrated" (Tuagalu, 2023, p. 39). Thus, the vā is ever present in spaces where it is recognised. One of the most widely used descriptions of vā is by Albert Wendt (1996) who says:

> Important to the Samoan view of reality is the concept of Vā or Wā in Māori and Japanese. Vā is the space between, the between-ness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships/the contexts change. A well-known Samoan expression is 'Ia teu le vā.' Cherish/nurse/care for the Vā, the relationships. This is crucial in communal cultures that value group, unity, more than individualism: who perceive the individual person/creature/thing in terms of group, in terms of Vā, relationships. (Wendt, 1996, para.14)**.**

Wendt explains that the concept of vā is central to the Samoan view of reality and that space - the betweenness - is not empty but has the potential to unify as a space that relates rather than separates (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009). Furthermore, the mutual and relational space of the vā is built on values such as respect, service, love, and even hospitality. These values help maintain and retain a socially well-located family (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009). It even asserts the significance of one's relationship with other living and non-living things. Thus, my engagement of vā in my methodology
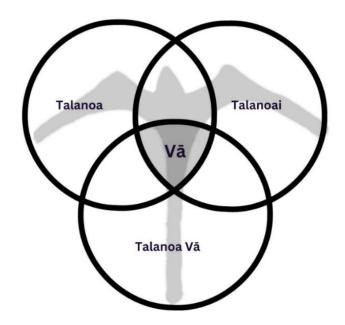
and as a feature of my research context means that vā traverses multiple spaces within this thesis. I examine this closer in my next section.

Talanoa and Vā

Coupled with vā I also engage with talanoa to conduct deep analytical discussions in my thesis. In this vein, I wanted to foreground how I engage with the Samoan concepts of talanoa and vā as part of my theoretical framework. The oratory traditions of Samoa inspire me to use talanoa as a tool for analysis and as a method. My engagement with talanoa aligns with a broader, holistic "oceanic perspective" promoted by scholars like Hauofa and Samu, which views entities and ideas regarding their interrelationships. When reconceptualising the Pacific islands from islands in a far sea to a sea of islands, Hauofa (1993) stated that they should be viewed in "a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships" (p. 7). Samu (2010) refers to this as an "oceanic perspective". Talanoa also traverses various spaces within this thesis, a process that is not clear cut and easily categorised as certain Western theories. One of these spaces is the vā. My use of different forms of talanoa and vā is represented in the diagram below:

Figure 1

Talanoa transcending spaces (authors own creation)

When thinking about how I could best represent my use of the different forms of talanoa and vā in this thesis, I chose the Venn diagram based on its overlapping circles. The diagram above represents three interlocking circles corresponding to different phases of talanoa used in this research and thesis: talanoa, talanoa'i, and talanoa vā. These circles intersect to reveal the vā, a sacred and relational space central to all the phases, signifying continuity and an absence of distinct beginnings or ends. The vā can also be described as a space in between the intersections in which we must interrogate power, privilege, and oppression (Fa'avae et al., 2022). The Venn diagram's traditional purpose is to illustrate the logical connections between two or more aspects which coincides with my use of the diagram to highlight the relationship between the different forms of talanoa, all connected by the vā. The use of circles also symbolizes the non-linear, encompassing nature of these indigenous concepts, which defy the rigid compartmentalisation typical of Western theoretical frameworks. Thus,

the vā and talanoa cannot be confined and constrained to predefined categories but can be integrated into numerous aspects of life and applied in diverse settings.

The philosophical basis of talanoa lies in its conversational, narrative-sharing practice that deeply integrates the concept of vā—interconnections among people and entities, enhancing the depth of dialogue and critical analysis within the thesis (Fa'avae et al., 2022). This depth of critical analysis can be described as talanoa'i. Talanoa'i is also used to allow conversation within this thesis to involve analysis and evaluation, a critical relational orality. David Fa'avae (2016) unpacks talanoa'i by describing it as "talking which involves analysis and evaluation" (Fa'avae, 2016, p. 148). Vaioleti (2013) expands on talanoa'i by explaining that in talanoa'i "the researcher is not a distant observer but is active in the talanoa process and in defining and redefining meanings in order to achieve the aim of what is being talanoa'i" (Vaioleti, 2013, p. 203). To talanoa'i is to be engaged in critical discussions. Similarly, talanoa vā has been described as "a critical analytical framework for interrogating and unpacking the intimate yet intricate ethical relations and distinctions between entities within the vā" (Fa'avae et al., 2022). People and ideas in the temporal and spiritual spaces can be considered entities. This approach is seen as a decolonial endeavour, fuelled by a postcolonial incentive to innovate in theorising, representing, and expressing the aspirations, preferences, and practices that drive outcomes for Pacific peoples. Talanoa'i and talanoa vā can reach depths in conversation, and in this context, highlight cultural phenomenon that can hopefully inform teacher practise of Pacific students. Just like the infinite nature of circles and the interweaving and interconnectedness of the Venn diagram, my use of the different forms of talanoa is weaved together in this thesis to form a critical discussion or analysis.

Lastly, my intentional use of the fa'agogo bird motif which is in the background of the diagram represents the idea of journeying. The fa'agogo bird, or an arctic tern, is a common bird found in Samoa. This motif is used in Samoan tattooing to signify journeying and a safe return. Arctic terns make their way across the ocean and back safely without ever losing their path. The tern also never passes the night at sea. If navigators followed terns, they were sure they would spend the night on land (Gemori, 2018). My intentional use of the fa'agogo reflects my identity journey in various educational spaces and locations. Location had a profound impact on my identity journey. Lilomaiava-Doktor (2020), argues that place enhances learning, deepens understanding of subjects, fosters holistic understanding through the exploration of place stories, and facilitates social renewal. The importance of storytelling, particularly within Pacific cultures, is highlighted as crucial for maintaining connections to place and space. Thus, I adopt talanoa, a method and form of storytelling, to explore significant locations in my educational journey and identity formation. This approach is likened to the oral tradition of tala le vavau, as mentioned by Lilomaiava-Doktor (2020), illustrating the connection between identity and geography. The themes of journaling, journeying, and location are central to this thesis, highlighting the intricate relationship between place and personal identity. Furthermore, I use the tern to signify the journey that my thesis not only captures, but also takes the reader on as I navigate ideas, concepts, theories, and themes related to my research questions.

Third Space

I also engage Homi Bhabha's (1994) third space as part of my theoretical framework to critically analyse my data. Third space was introduced to me by my supervisor who used third space in a similar context for her own research and who also introduced me to Iosefo's (2014) application of the concept in the higher education context. After

becoming familiar with some of its concepts, third space coupled with vā became a theoretical framework I could use to unpack themes and ideas relevant to my educational journey. Bhabha's (1994) postcolonial theory of third space, mimicry and hybridity are processes which I unpack in the following sections as an analytical tool to make sense of my experiences within the classroom space.

In Bhabha's *Location of Self* (1994), he discusses a change in how we view and understand identity which emphasizes a shift from viewing class or gender as the initial or primary frameworks for analysis. Instead, there's an increasing recognition of multiple intersecting factors such as race, gender, generation, institutional settings, geographic locations, and sexual orientations which shape individual and collective identities. This acknowledges the nuances of identities that are formed at the intersections of culture. It is in the spaces "in between" where cultural differences articulate and interact, creating fresh expressions of identity. These spaces and processes are essential in redefining society itself, emphasizing the importance of looking beyond traditional narratives of origin and focusing on dynamic processes that continually shape identities and social structures. Thus, the Third Space can be described as a liminal space, an ambivalent site where culture and identity have no primordial unity or static state but instead are fluid in nature and have no existing boundaries. In comparison, the "first space" represents the dominant culture or identity, while marginalised or minority cultures sit in the "second space". It is in the "third space" that Bhabha recognises processes of hybridity, ambiguity and resistance occur and where individuals and communities can challenge dominant narratives. This is also a space where people can create alternative forms of belonging and representation as it is a space for negotiation, contestation, and creativity, allowing for the expression of diverse cultural voices and experiences.

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Within this space, processes of mimicry and hybridity can occur as new forms of culture and identities can be created within the productive and liminal third space. In postcolonial discourse, the idea that culture and identity is pure is highly disputable. Cultural hybridity within the third space can be defined as an individual having the ability to access two or more ethnic identities (Bhabha, 1994). Cultural hybridity is grounded in the idea that cultures are not static or pure, but dynamic and ever changing through interactions with other cultures. It is a process that takes place in the liminal third space and occurs when different cultural elements blend creating new forms of identity and meaning. Bhabha (1994) argues that in our interrelated world, cultures are constantly in a state of exchange, influenced by various factors such as migration, colonisation, globalisation, and technology. This concept challenges more homogenous views of culture as fixed or static, highlighting instead the complexities and diversity of culture. It emphasizes the porous and fluid boundaries of culture which allows the emergency of hybrid cultural forms to occur, reflecting the interplay of various social, historical, and political forces. In many cases, cultural hybridity is a mix between the cultures of the coloniser and of the colonised and is a result of the negotiation of identities within the third space. Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity emphasizes the richness and dynamic nature of culture and highlights the importance of recognising and embracing diversity in all its forms.

Furthermore, the process of mimicry also occurs within this space and is a process where members of a colonised society imitate or mimic the culture of their colonisers (Bhabha, 1994). Mimicry is often associated with contexts related to postcolonial identities. It is a process that is often viewed negatively as it is associated with those who are perceived as adopting the behaviours or attitudes of the colonizing culture, thus betraying their own. This comes with its own derogatory terms as in many

cases, mimicry can be applied to individuals who are exposed to Western cultures for the first time and are seen as pretentious or culturally confused when they return home. For colonised and postcolonial societies, these terms reflect the tensions around identity and belonging. However, Bhabha (1994) also argues that mimicry can also be nuanced and possibly subversive. Mimicry can expose the constructed nature of cultural power dynamics and that by imitating the colonizer, the colonised might emphasize the absurdity of colonial aspirations. Such subversion through mimicry is seldom documented in literature possibly because more direct forms of resistance are available and more effective. Mimicry is crucial in understanding the dynamics between colonisers and the colonised, highlighting the struggles of individuals trying to navigate different cultural identities.

Reflections

Reflexivity is crucial for maintaining rigor in qualitative research, involving ongoing self-examination and critical evaluation of the researcher's own background and its influence on the research process (Patnaik, 2013). Unlike reflection, which is retrospective, reflexivity occurs in real-time, engaging researchers in a continuous internal dialogue about their positionality and how it affects their research questions, focus, and interactions within the research setting (Patnaik, 2013). This process enables researchers to critically assess their decisions and acknowledge the impact of their multiple identities on the research. It is in this reflexivity process that I too acknowledge the possible limitations of my research design which is largely influenced by my personal positionality and narrative.

Although qualitative research has its strengths, the subjective nature of this approach means that the researcher can be influenced by his or her own theories,

experiences, and beliefs, possibly producing skewed research. This has the same sentiments as perceived limitations of critical autoethnography which also focuses on personal experiences. Critical autoethnography exposes the researcher's feelings and thoughts making them vulnerable and open to interpretation. Ethical questions might arise which may make it difficult for the researcher to answer. These ethical considerations of critical autoethnography are something to be wary about when I engage with it for my research. This can be the same for the process of self-reflexivity - traditional methods may not fully uncover the subtle biases and preconceptions that researchers bring to their work. This is especially true for insider researchers, who must navigate additional complexities due to their pre-existing knowledge and relationships within the communities they study.

There are also perceived limitations of Talanoa. Talanoa involves dialogue where people can speak from their hearts with no plan or agenda to be followed. In saying this, Tongan academic Semisi Prescott (2008) claims that talanoa is guided by predetermined agendas of the researcher as the researcher engages in talanoa to seek to understand a certain problem. Thus, unknowingly, researchers might guide the conversation. Applying this to my own personal engagement of talanoa between texts, if not done authentically, I as the researcher might be guiding the processes of choosing literature which is appropriate to use rather than allowing the themes and ideas to speak to each other. This is something to be mindful of as I engage with talanoa in my research and that the talanoa between texts is authentic and natural. I also highlight personal challenges regarding the engagement and employment with my chosen methodologies and methods. The weaving together of frameworks that engage indigenous concepts such as talanoa and vā with other frameworks like critical autoethnography and third space, and within a Western educational framework is not

an easy process. The conceptualisation of the indigenous concepts and theoretical frameworks, coupled with the act of weaving them together, requires deep knowledge and understanding. As an educator I have spent most of my time in the classroom, thus stepping into this space of Pacific philosophy, theory, and research which I deem a sacred space, and the process of understanding, engaging, and using these concepts and frameworks effectively has been quite challenging. Furthermore, the compulsory research methodology paper that I undertook as part of my Masters programme, did not give enough time or space to learn about indigenous methodologies in a depth that is required for proper engagement in research. This lack of support within formal education highlights a broader issue of how indigenous knowledge systems can be marginalised in academic settings. Thus, there were many times where I doubted my ability to understand these frameworks enough to use them in my research and constantly asked myself whether my personal narrative was enough. I am very fortunate that my supervisors were able to provide mentorship regarding the use of indigenous frameworks in research and were able to reassure me of the value of my personal voice and experiences in education. This underscores the importance of guidance and representation of Pacific scholars in academia, which can be pivotal for emerging researchers in similar fields. It is in the reflection of these challenges where I remember Wendt's quote which preludes this chapter as motivation to continue to engage with these frameworks to give value to my own experience and to bring my story into existence. This will unfold in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4: Identities

Time is everywhere linking everything. To alter it in one place is to change the whole of it. There is no time past or time future. Only an ever-moving present. Our vā with others defines us. We can only be ourselves linked to everyone else and everything else in the vā, the unity that is all and now.

(Wendt in *Ola,* 1991: 307)

I start this chapter with another poem by Albert Wendt who has contributed much to Pacific philosophy and thinking. Wendt addresses the vā, a sacred and relational space that is between and that holds potential to give meaning. I refer to vā throughout this chapter to describe the relational space within the classroom that allows and prompts the important negotiation of identities to occur, as Wendt puts it, "we can only be ourselves linked to everyone and everything else in the vā" (Wendt, 1991: 307). Alongside the exploration of vā in the classroom, vā also acts as a lens through which I explore and analyse my personal experiences within education as depicted in my journal entries below. I also employ talanoa alongside vā to critically engage with my journal entries to highlight the significance of educational spaces to the negotiation of identity. There are two main sections to this chapter headed by titles which capture the essence of each talanoa. The first is "Location of Self". I found that whilst exploring themes throughout my journal, although there was an obvious emphasis on space, just as equally present in my reflections is the concept of location and the influence this had on my identity – especially when stepping into unfamiliar spaces where I struggled to make a connection to my environment based on the lack of cultural representation. The second section is "The Sacred Space of the Classroom". When I refer to the classroom in this chapter, I refer to any educational

space where learning occurs. I also refer to the classroom as sacred, as I unpack what the vā looks like in the classroom. Se tatou fa'aauau le talanoa (let us continue with the conversation).

The Location of Self

I begin this section by sharing a piece of my personal journal focused on my experience of schooling in a Primary School in Australia, when my family decided to move over when I was six years old. Within this educational setting, I experienced a lack of cultural value which in turn affected my confidence as a Pacific learner.

Out of the six years of my Primary School education, I attended two in South Auckland, New Zealand and a few in Sydney, Australia during a brief move over the ditch. I can't remember exactly how many schools we attended over there as we moved around a lot, but I do remember how I felt about schooling in Australia – I hated it. If I could pinpoint an exact moment where I became aware about the concept of culture it was in one of the various Australian primary schools I attended. Most of the students who attended this school were Caucasian. There were a few others that were non-Caucasian, but as for Pacific Islander's, my sister and I were it. I distinctly remember feeling like I was not like the others in my class. All the Caucasian girls played together – and then there was my crew. The non-Caucasians. We weren't exactly a crew, nor were we even friends. We just existed on the outskirts, pretty much loners. I'm sure my young brain made it more dramatic than it seemed - but it really felt like to be "in", you had to be part of a certain demographic. I remember trying to teach a fellow outcast some Samoan words as a way to make friends with her. It didn't work. It wasn't cool to be cultural - it wasn't cool to be different. At the tender age of 6 years old, I was beginning to understand that cultures make you different and that my culture wasn't

very common at this particular school. I became highly aware that my skin colour was brown and that my name was different to the other little girls at my school. Despite my impromptu lunchtime language lessons, when we moved back to New Zealand, I could barely speak my mother tongue...

The above text was taken from a personal journal entry that explored moments in my educational journey that prompted the awakening, and eventual denial, of my cultural identity. It was an awareness that came at a young age, prompted by my family's migration to another country where I quickly realised that I was part of the minority. My time at this Primary school confirmed two things for me: I was not part of the majority; therefore, I was different. Not only did this contribute to the loss of my ability to talk Gagana Sāmoa, but there was also a loss in confidence in who I was as a Pasifika learner, and on a bigger scale, as a Pasifika person. I claim the latter because even as an adult writing this, I reflect on how I carry this trauma into any space where I feel that my culture is questioned or not valued. This cultural awakening is important to highlight as it establishes the significance of educational spaces to the negotiation of not only identity, but social place and positionality.

Lei (2006) talks about the classroom as a space where students and teachers come to understand their social positioning, especially when it comes to their own cultural and ethnic groups in wider society. The classroom becomes a place that establishes the order of society which in turn influences students and how they see themselves in the world. For Pacific learners especially, Lei insists that there is a "greater need to understand how the…order manifests itself within the education system…[and] how...Pacific Islanders are positioned in classrooms" (Lei, 2006, p. 93). She goes on to question how Pacific Islanders are perceived in the classroom - as model minorities, 'honorary whites', cultural or racialised persons, outsiders, or merely

unseen. This space was key to how I positioned myself in the world as a young learner, and from what I could perceive as a six-year-old in that Australian classroom, my place was located on the fringes within this order of society. The schools that I entered as a child represented colonial institutions that endorsed values and cultural practices that were disparate to the identities and culture that I brought into these spaces. Thus, a result of my experience in that Australian Primary school, meant losing a bit of myself to fit in with the dominant culture.

The lack of cultural representation in this new space meant that culture was slowly becoming removed from my sense of self. This was not necessarily a choice but rather a process that gradually occurred over time due to the interactions in educational spaces that influenced my perception towards my own culture. This can be compared to Bhabha's (1994) postcolonial theory of mimicry. Mimicry is where members of a colonised society imitate the language, dress, politics, or cultural attitude of their colonisers. Those in power integrate new elements into the culture, while the indigenous populations introduce their own cultural distinctions into the colonisers culture. The aim of these exchanges is to gain access to the power held by the dominant individual, culture, or group (Bhabha, 1994). My loss of language, or suppression of my Samoan language within schooling in Australia can be understood as me engaging in the process of mimicry, as I felt I had to put aside certain aspects of my cultural identity to fit in with the dominant culture of the school. Using it to make friends in school only got me so far, they were only interested in hearing the swear words which in hindsight, I wish I used at them rather than to bridge a connection with them. I saw my language as something that was of no use to me in educational settings which in reflection is a sad realisation. A report by the Auckland Languages Strategy Working Group (2018) states that trends in education suggest a decrease in the

number of students continuing to use and learn their family heritage languages. Furthermore, the report also states that there has been a 18.5% decline in the number of secondary students taking languages as a subject at school. The report outlines the effects this decrease in engagement with heritage language learning has on students. Firstly, they make connections between heritage languages and students overall wellbeing, stating that the use of their heritage language enhances their wellbeing. Furthermore, learning and strengthening language also strengthens identity and creates inclusion by providing insight into cultures and ways of thinking which improves intercultural understanding.

The processes of mimicry were a big part of the negotiation process of my identity in this Australian primary school. The processes of mimicry also indicated to me that the vā that could potentially foster positive cultural identity was weak. Lilomaiava-Doktor (2009) states that the vā refers to the space between any two entities, including people, and that it is a space that promotes "mutual respect in socio-political arrangements that nurture the relationships between people, places, and social environments" (p. 150). This social space is important because the Samoan sense of self is ultimately relational or communal, rather than individualistic (Wendt, 1991). As a young Pacific student, I was seeking cultural familiarity within those educational spaces, whether it was through people or through other cultural manifestations. Instead, the relationship I formed with that educational space was negative and lacked mutual respect. When the cultures that students bring into the classroom are not valued, the space becomes disharmonious making it difficult for students to locate themselves in schools where the majority culture is not representative of their own. It wasn't until we moved back to South Auckland, New

Zealand where I was able to locate myself again through the cultural representations I experienced in high school.

The Sacred Space of the Classroom

Amongst my return to New Zealand, aspects of my culture were not necessarily a priority for my sisters and I growing up, such as staying connected with our Gagana Sāmoa. It wasn't until high school where I started to learn more, and even reconnect, with aspects of my culture. In this section I analyse the process of identity negotiation within educational spaces, specifically in high school, where I was exposed to different aspects and representations of culture.

The dynamics of my homelife was a little different than those from more traditional Pasifika households. An example of a more traditional household I can think of is the family portrayed in the 2018 New Zealand movie Hibiscus and Ruthless. Although fictional, the portrayal of family dynamics and situations in this movie was a reality for many Pacific families which made the movie highly relational to Pacific viewers. The movie portrayed a strict Samoan Mother who forbade her daughter to have any type of social life outside of her studies, church, and family obligations. The Mother-daughter relationship was strained because of the high expectations that the mother had of her daughter. She wanted her to be successful and live a good life whilst still fulfilling her family and cultural obligations – a story I know resonates a lot with Pacific families and the migrant dream. My childhood differed a lot from the traditional Samoan family presented in the film. My parents in a sense were strict in what they expected from us in school, but in other ways were quite lenient. We were never expected to relearn Gagana Sāmoa and/or learn and practise traditional customs. I remember I could put my chores on hold if I had an assessment due. This was not the

case for many of my Samoan peers. What we learnt about being Samoan did not extend that much beyond the nuclear family. Church, village games, community sports were aspects of our Pacific community that I learnt about once I started high school as they were not necessarily my experience of culture growing up. I remember one of my best friends said to me "you are one of the only Samoans I know who doesn't go to church". At the time I remember feeling insulted because it was distinguishing me from a certain Samoan identity. High school was a time where I was slowly becoming aware of the different aspects of my identity, specifically my ethnic and cultural identity. This became more apparent when I shared stories with my peers and listened to their journeys - it felt like I was waking up to different experiences of culture in high school. High school was the first time I heard the word "kilikiti" (Samoan cricket). I was amazed at how many Samoan students knew about this sport and played it. I remember thinking it was like cricket, just not as boring. It was also the first time I heard about the freezing works that I grew up the road from but had never actually understood what it was until a friend of mine told me his father had to wake up early every morning to go to work there and that the work was extremely laborious. That was the first time I heard about factory work and that it was a common vocation amongst my peers' families. I was clueless to the Pacific experiences around me and the more I was exposed to other students and their stories, the more it helped me make sense of my own community. When I was Year 11, I decided to join the Samoan Polyfest group with my older sister. In my later years I joined the Niuean group. Those instances of learning and performing the different cultural dances were my only experiences with Pacific dance as there was no other space where I was exposed to this art form outside of school. High school was the first time I also heard the word "plastic " be used in reference to students who didn't speak their mother tongue or weren't in touch with

their "cultural side" such as myself. I always felt conflicted especially when my brown skin, my hair, my facial features, even my name were all stereotypical of a type of cultural identity. Inside though, I always felt like the complete opposite. The more I was exposed to cultural representations at school, the more I felt apologetic for not knowing that much about my culture.

My five years of high school was a life learning experience. My cultural and ethnic identities were being moulded by not only those who I met in those five years, but also what I was being exposed to within the educational space. I was starting to understand what my own cultural and ethnic identities looked like by understanding the cultural and ethnic identities of those around me who were also Pacific, thus, I negotiated my identity based on what I perceived to be strong Pacific identities around me. Lilomaiava-Doktor expands further on communal aspects of identity, "there is myself and yourself. Through you, my being is contextually meaningful and whole" (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009, p. 149). I was able to develop pride in my culture, seeing how positively Pacific cultures were being represented and celebrated in my school. I also developed pride in my community by the examples of struggle and resilience that was shared with me by my peers. I was also able to see how culture and community connected through my experiences in high school. This made me turn inwardly to reassess and renegotiate how I saw my own Pacific identity.

Through the cultural experiences I was exposed to in high school I was able to make parallels between my home and school life, making connections between personal family dynamics and the wider Pacific community. Polyfest taught me not only the aspect of Pacific dance, but also what it was like to learn in a Samoan setting with a large group of students who shared the same ethnic background as me. It validated my experiences with my own family. Although my parents weren't as strict

as the tutors in the Polyfest Samoan group, my family were, and are, very patriarchal, which meant it was led heavily by my father who was authoritative and always had high expectations of my sisters and I especially in school. Seeing the Polyfest Samoan group being led by an authoritative male in a cultural setting enabled me to make connections between my family hierarchical dynamics and that which was being displayed in the Polyfest Samoan group. Lilomaiava-Doktor (2009) states that the vā refers to the space between any two entities, including people, and that it is a space that promotes "mutual respect in socio-political arrangements that nurture the relationships between people, places, and social environments" (p. 150). The vā allowed me to make connections between the socio-political arrangements across different social environments – that of my home and school. Freeman et al. (2022) states that the vā allows cultural identity to be constructed around "relationships and spaces between people, and their spiritual and physical environment. Its value is in understanding Pacific Peoples relationships, and for us, Pacific children's space-culture relations" (Freeman et al., 2022, p. 471). Polyfest served as a cultural medium that bridged my home experiences to that of school – allowing the two spaces to connect through culture.

In saying this, part of the negotiation of my identity also equated to feelings of cultural inadequacy - or feeling "plastic" - especially when comparing myself to New Zealand born and raised Samoan students who were fluent in their mother tongue. "Plastic" is a term that means you aren't quite fully Samoan or strong in your identity as a Samoan because there's some aspect of your culture you don't quite understand. It is a term that is often used in a derogatory way to exclude people because of their lack of understanding or cultural participation. For me, it was the lack of understanding of my mother tongue and the lack of experience in attending church that made me feel

plastic. In retrospect, I may have been hyper aware of these aspects of my identity due to my schooling experience in Australia, struggling to find my place as a young Samoan in a school where I was a minority. Although the scenario was flipped in high school, where I was part of the majority demographically, feelings of cultural inadequacy remained. Kirsten McGavin (2014) explores Pacific diasporic identities in Australia and states that Islander identity is strengthened as they abide by a set of behaviours typical of Pacific cultures. She argues that there is an acute awareness if those sets of behaviours are not adhered to, and almost a disappointment if one deviates from these cultural expectations. In this sense, "Islander identity is perceived as being authenticated and negotiated through certain behaviours" (McGavin, 2014, p. 137). Making sense of my "Islander identity" was largely dependent on my interactions with others. It was also dependent on the spaces I entered that had the potential to strengthen and foster identities such as educational spaces. In high school I was constantly interacting with versions of my culture and ethnicity, whether it was through the people I met or the sports or cultural activities I participated in and was introduced to, at school. These expressions of culture and ethnicity either validated my Pacific identity or aided me in negotiating it by exposing me to alternative versions of my culture and ethnicity that I had not previously encountered.

The vā that I acknowledge in this space that allowed for the negotiations of identity to occur is the vā tapuia. Efi (2018) describes the vā tapuia to mean sacred relationship. The vā tapuia is the relationship between man and all things, animate and even inanimate which implies that all things are interconnected through a sacred essence - "a life force beyond human reckoning" (Efi, 2018, p. 230). The productive potentiality of the vā tapuia means that the classroom can too be a sacred space where interactions and relationships not only with other students, but also with experiences,

can lead to the negotiation of identity. Lilomaiava-Doktor describes the Samoan vā as a social space, that "engages the power within and between spaces and places arrayed in opposition to each other" (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2009, p. 1). Within the vā tapuia of my high school, I was able to identify what aspects of my ethnic and cultural identity were similar and dissimilar to others. This in turn gave me a better sense of who I was as a Pacific person and highlighted aspects of my Pacific identity I could strengthen and aspects that I was content with.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses the concept of "vā", a relational space within Pacific philosophy, emphasizing the interconnectedness of time and identity. It begins with a poem by Albert Wendt, highlighting the importance of vā in understanding relationships and identity negotiation by looking at my personal experiences from primary school in Australia and high school thus illustrating how my cultural identity was influenced by these educational spaces. I explore the struggle of maintaining my cultural identity in environments lacking representation and how this impacted my perception of self as I participated in the process of mimicry. I also reflect on my cultural awakening and the process of negotiating identity within educational spaces, particularly focusing on high school experiences and the presence of Polyfest and cultural activities which provided opportunities for cultural validation and connection between home and school environments. The talanoa in this chapter is framed within the concept of vā tapuia, highlighting the sacred relationship between myself and my surroundings, emphasizing the potential for identity negotiation within educational spaces.

Chapter 5: Power in Education

"...while good courses and teachers get the job done, great courses and teachers have the potential to liberate and heal" (Anae & Peterson, 2020. p. 38).

I start this chapter with a quote from Melani Anae who has contributed extensive research to the topic of New Zealand born Pacific identities, and to the Pacific Studies discipline at the University of Auckland. This quote comes from an article where Anae and Peterson talk about *Pacific 300: NZ-born Pacific Identities*, a third year Pacific Studies course offered at the University of Auckland which explores the complexities of ethnic and cultural identities. Anae allows the classroom to become a space for students to safely explore their identity using relational and relevant curriculum and pedagogies. This quote by Anae inspires my journey in the classroom, with the potential of shaping identities at the forefront of my mind. It talks of the potential of great courses in liberating and healing young people. Just like the previous chapter, I continue to refer to the classroom as any space where learning occurs. Within this chapter I also look at how identity is influenced by what is taught and how it is taught. I continue to employ vā and third space to critically engage with my data to make sense of how educators can address the classroom by being critically conscious of the following themes: power and positionality, power in curriculum, and power in pedagogy. I will expand on these themes in each section of this chapter, starting with power and positionality. Se tatou fa'aauau le talanoa (let us continue with the conversation).

Power in Positionality and Pedagogy

In this section I analyse the concepts of power and positionality in the classroom using vā as an analytical tool to unpack my personal experiences as a teacher within the classroom. I begin here by sharing an excerpt from my teacher's journal, where I reflect on how my positionality influenced my pedagogy which in turn affected the learning of those within the classroom vā.

At Aroha High School, teaching had its rollercoaster moments. Aroha High School is a decile one school in South Auckland and has a student body composed of mostly Māori and Pacific students. Because of my cultural background, a few times in my teaching career others have assumed I would have it easier in the classroom considering most of our students were Pacific and Māori. I agreed with this statement to an extent. I am comfortable to say that I understand the lingo, humour, and certain nuances of our students not only because of my cultural background but also my upbringing and schooling in South Auckland. But these were only some aspects of my identity – my identity, as everyone's identity, is multifaceted. My relationality with my students leans heavily into my New Zealand born and raised Pacific experience. I talk like my students because I once sat in their seat. My teaching style is a mix of traditional and contemporary. I do enjoy teaching from the front, almost like a lecture, if what I am teaching and saying is in a relational and reciprocal manner. My approach to teaching is what I would describe as lenient but firm and fair. I do have high expectations of students, but I do understand that there are some things out of their control. Talanoa is important for me to understand what is truly going on in their world/their perspective. What I found complicated when I first started teaching was growling but I have managed to let students know my expectations of them without

raising my voice or projecting my anger in authoritarian ways. I managed to establish my own rhythm and rhyme to effective teaching and classroom management which reflects who I am as a person, my identity and positionality. This was relational to an extent. There have been numerous occasions where my teaching methods did not always resonate well with students. I found that some students responded better to the strict, authoritative teaching of our older Samoan female teachers. These teachers demanded respect and had Gagana Sāmoa and knowledge of fa'a Sāmoa to support them, almost using them as tools for effective teaching and behaviour management. Students in their classroom dared play up as a growling would almost be worse than corporal punishment if that was still a thing. In one of my senior history classes I had a female student who was also Samoan, and I felt the vā between us wasn't particularly strong. I didn't take it personally, but I was worried about her progress in my class as she barely responded to me with more than a few words. I reached out to one of her other teachers who was also Samoan and female and whom she had a better relationship with. From this talanoa, I realised that perhaps it was my approach to teaching that she didn't respond well to. That perhaps she responds more to stricter authoritative approaches to teaching. This experience made me reflect a lot on how much our positionality affects our pedagogy as teachers and how this doesn't always resonate with Pacific students.

The journal excerpt above details my reflections on positionality and pedagogy within the classroom space. Within my personal classroom vā, I was able to reflect on my own positionality and how it affected the vā between my students and I. Tuagalu (2008) states that there is already an existing vā relationship between teacher and student and refers to it as the vā of learning and teaching. I recognise this as the vā fealola'i, a space where meaningful relationships and connections are made between

people. The vā fealola'i between teacher and student allows more meaningful learning to be had, especially in courses that have the potential to influence students and the way they see themselves in the world such as Social Sciences.

In saying this, although strong relationships with students are memorable, it is always the tensions in relationships with students that stand out to teachers the most. These tensions or breakdowns can be referred to as 'soli le vā' - when there has been a transgression or disregard of the social space (Ka'ili et al., 2017). In order to teu le vā - restore and nurture the relationship or space - deep reflection needed to be done (Anae, 2010). To teu le vā is to first identify that the state of things is not ideal and then to try to make things right or mend the broken space. The vā is also described as a space in between the intersections in which we must interrogate power, privilege, and oppression (Fa'avae et al., 2022). Similarly, when we look at the space in the classroom as a vā, the vā reveals power dynamics within, which is core to Samoa's power relations (Tui Atua, 2018).

The vā between my student and I was not exactly broken but the space between us was not strong enough for her to feel comfortable, ultimately affecting her learning journey. This was evident as she became less forthcoming with her progress in class making it harder for me to glean how much she was taking away from my lessons. The tensions with my student detailed above, prompted my own self-reflection in my approach to teaching and how this might be influenced by my positionality, especially when comparing the relationship this student had to another Samoan, female teacher who seemed to share the same positionality as me. It is in the word "seem" that I started to question, that perhaps we are all not the same and that even for Pacific educators, our identities are also homogenised. I realised that my approach to teaching and to relationship building leans heavily into my positionality as

a New Zealand born and raised Pacific person. For Pacific students who may not share the same diasporic identity as me, this might be an approach that may seem undesirable to them within a learning environment. Bishop and Glynn (2003) reflect on power and positionality in the context of education. They argue that to create a world of understanding one must first understand one's own culture, which is made up of their values, beliefs, and preferred practices, and how they may differ from those whom they teach. Despite sharing the same ethnicity, our experiences of our culture and ethnicity may vary due to the environments and interactions with ethnicity and culture throughout our lives. While there are specific markers that might characterise aspects of our Pacific identities, it is our unique experiences with these markers that distinguish us from one another.

This dispels the myth that being of the same ethnic background as those you teach makes it easier to teach those students. *All* learners are different. In this same vein - *all* teachers are different. This difference arises from the intersectionality of identities that students and teachers bring into the classroom, leading to variations in how teachers relate to their students. Our identities are complex and multifaceted, which influences our preferences in what we find relatable. Within this reflexive process I was able to recognise the power dynamics within my classroom and peel back the layers of the experiences of my life that influenced my positionality and my approach to managing the classroom vā. Because I was not brought up in a strict Samoan setting, I wasn't strict in a Samoan sense. I did have high expectations of my students though, just like my father had of me especially in my schooling. I viewed my upbringing as one that was specific to being Samoan but being born and raised in Aotearoa, New Zealand. We used Samoan and English interchangeably at home, leaning more on the latter language as our main form of communication the older I

got. I took this into the classroom as well. I rarely used Samoan to bridge a gap between my Pacific students and me. From interactions with other New Zealand born and raised Pacific students, there was more of a relatability between my approach to teaching. To those who were raised in stricter Samoan households, this approach may have been viewed as lenient and casual.

This reflexive approach prompts educators to become critically aware of their personal impact in the classroom and how in some cases, they can represent the dominant culture in the classroom based on the natural power dynamics between the authoritarian teacher and the student. Lei (2006) argues that all teachers need to critically reflect on their own positionality within the system of whiteness and how their cultural lenses affect their pedagogy. There is no successful conclusion to relationship tensions or breakdowns between educators and their students but the acknowledgement that there is a breakdown is a good start to teu le vā - to repair the vā fealoala'i. This allows reflexivity to occur, an opportunity for teachers to identify how the vā was broken or weakened.

Power in Curriculum

In this section, I analyse the concepts of power and curriculum by looking at how curriculum has the potential to shape how Pacific learners perceive their own personal histories, strengthen connections to their ethnic heritage, develop their personal identities and position themselves in the world.

As a Social Science teacher, I gained some insight into the power of curriculum in shaping students' perceptions of self. From my experience, curriculum also aided students in the development of innate qualities like resilience, empathy, compassion,

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and pride in their identities. I realised that teaching Pacific history to Pacific students was more than just retelling stories/history - it was empowering Pacific students as they developed deeper connections to their ancestral roots. It was also validating their ethnic, cultural, heritage knowledge that they brought into the classroom. From teaching topics like the Dawn Raids and the treatment of Pacific peoples in the latter part of the twentieth century in Aotearoa, New Zealand, to reading about Blackbirding in the Pacific and the families that were coerced and torn apart by slavers - these topics became more than just curriculum but tools that aided students in their learning and development of self. These topics added layers to how my Pacific students viewed their personal histories and their perceptions of their diasporic homes ultimately leading to a deeper evaluation of self. When I started teaching Pacific Studies, I saw this as an opportunity to teach contemporary issues that Pacific peoples face in the islands and within the Pacific diaspora. I found that contexts with themes of injustice, resilience, and social justice resonated more with my Pacific students. These themes seemed to echo their own personal experiences, either confirming or validating their own dealings with issues affecting their communities. We looked at topics such as the gender pay gap, specifically in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and how Māori and Pacific women were, and still are, getting paid significantly less than their Pākeha counterparts. We also looked at gender in tattooing, specifically the tatau, and learnt about an online movement called "My malu, my rules" which calls for a more liberal approach to the customs and "rules" of the malu. The debates that we had about these controversial topics were always fruitful. On one side students expressed more conservative views that supported old traditions and customs. On the other side, more tolerant and progressive views were shared that supported the more liberal approaches. Students were going back and forth and even changing their stance on

issues once they heard differing perspectives from each side. In these educational spaces, students were learning from each other, refining and redefining what they thought they already knew as truth. For many of my Pacific students, this space where we challenged traditional views on what would be considered taboo topics of the Pacific was unprecedented. There were many instances where there were clashes in thought and feelings, but students understood that the Pacific Studies discipline itself was not a space where ideologies, theories and even feelings were fixed but where concepts were fluid, and boundaries were carefully examined and questioned. I realised the power of Social Science subjects like Pacific Studies which provides a space for Pacific students to explore topics that are specifically relevant to them and in a way that validates their experiences and opinions.

The journal excerpt above details an example of how the classroom can foster positive negotiations of identity for students through curriculum. This was through the willingness to explore topics that were culturally relevant to my students thus presenting them an opportunity to not only learn about their ethnic histories but also contemporary knowledge of Pacific peoples, thus shaping how they see themselves in the world. Pacific Studies was a subject that taught more than the recommended curriculum but offered the potential to validate student's experiences and opinions through the teaching of culturally relevant contexts. These contexts include controversial topics that students may not have safe spaces to explore, marinate and form a stance on outside of the classroom. Aspects of culture can be viewed as stagnant depending on those who practise it. That is what makes certain stances on aspects of culture controversial when you compare them to more traditional perceptions. The power of the classroom is you can allow it to be a space of fluidity rather than one that reinforces fixed notions of culture and identity. This allows

students to formulate their own perspectives on issues using their personal experiences. Bishop & Glynn (2003) explain that schools are agents of individual change as they analyse power relations between teacher and student. Traditional method classrooms privilege the teacher, giving them the power to shape students' perceptions of other people in society, including their own. This is identified as a power imbalance. When educators realise the potential of subjects, or the power in the curriculum they teach, the classroom space is transformed into something more than just a curriculum learning environment - it changes perspectives and perceptions of self.

The concept of identity being influenced by culturally relevant curriculum in the classroom can also reflect a space that is "in between", or the third space (Bhabha, 1994). The third space refers to the interstices between cultures and allows for the collaboration of cultures, or creation of new cultures to occur. Thus, within this space, new cultural identities are formed. Bhabha (1994) states that this hybrid third space acknowledges that culture and identity are not fixed or static concepts but are ever changing - there is no 'primordial unity or fixity' for these concepts. Within this space, meaning making occurs, which also can result in the negotiation, and sometimes, re-negotiation, of identities. In this space, identities are reformed and continuously in a state of becoming. Thus, the third space engenders countless possibilities as an interruptive, interrogative and enunciative space. When teaching culturally relevant contexts within this third space of the classroom, teachers are influencing how students form and reform their identities. Leslie Maniotes (2005) explains that in an educational context, the third space has powerful potential as a learning tool. Maniotes findings showed that students co-constructed knowledge and "negotiated learning that extended outward from the traditional boundaries of school and crossed over to

personal, community and world issues" (Maniotes, 2005, p. 4). Maniotes (2005) looked at literature classes as part of her research and particularly focused on the "blending between school knowledge and out-of-school knowledge within the context of literature discussions" (Maniotes, 2005, p. 5). For my Pacific Studies students in particular, it was great to see them engage in topics that were relevant to their everyday lives and formulate and express their own opinions on issues that affected them. They were also able to draw on their home knowledge funds to make sense of what was being taught to them about Pacific peoples in this in-between space.

This in-between space can also be likened to the vā. The vā within the classroom is important as the careful cultivation of the classroom vā by the teacher allows for a positive and safe learning environment. This becomes more apparent where there is an exploration of topics where strong oppositional opinions may be expressed. The careful managing of classroom vā allows the discourse between students and teacher to be more easily interwoven, allowing for rich learning to occur. This learning not only influences perspectives but also influences identities. When you nurture the vā in the classroom, you are trying to create a safe learning environment where students can feel comfortable to contribute their opinions and ideas. When this is the case, students are controlling the discourse, thus becoming the contributors and facilitators of the talanoa. They begin to co-construct their ideas and learn from each other as they each contribute their thoughts to the space.

Curriculum bridges a gap between teacher and student. Tuagalu expands on this as he recognises "a third party in the relationship" between teacher and student which is the subject that the teacher teaches (Tuagalu, 2008, p. 122). The subject is part of the nexus and acts as a medium which connects the teacher and the student. Furthermore, Tuagalu (2008) states that education is a gift from teacher to student,

the teacher making education accessible to the student by using concepts and tools, learning styles and critical thinking. The teaching of Pacific Studies for Pacific students allowed me to conduct deep conversations with and between my students. They were able to develop their own perspectives on issues that they felt affected them. I was able to use the Pacific Studies subject to create a safe space in the classroom by acknowledging that topics which affected Pacific peoples were worth learning about thus validating the experiences, knowledge systems and cultural identities that my Pacific students brought into the classroom.

Power in Identity

The journal excerpt below is something that I wrote in my eighth year of teaching and amid my postgraduate journey. I wrote this as a final reflection in my educational journal having reached a point in my life where the negotiations of my identity led me to a place where I was content with how I viewed my "Samoanness" or "Pacificness". My awareness of my positionality and my confidence in my New Zealand born and raised Pacific identity, in my opinion, helped me improve on aspects of my pedagogy.

So, what does the New Zealand born and raised Pacific identity mean to me? The New Zealand born and raised Pacific identity is complex. One that is subjective and differs according to those who live within the Pacific diaspora. It is an identity that merges traditional and contemporary aspects. Honouring those who came before us, but also acknowledging and honouring the experiences, beauty, and struggle of living within the diaspora. Resilience is a large part of it, especially for first, second and third generation New Zealand born and raised Pacific peoples who had to learn the ins and outs of a Western world whilst trying to stay true to the values and culture of our ancestors. It is also regional and honours the place we call home - the region we live

in and the towns we grew up in. This reflects in the pride we take in our area codes. This identity also comes with struggle because what comes with living in two worlds is a sense of not "truly belonging". The struggle is feeling like we are never enough accompanied by labels that make us feel less than such as "plastic" or "fia Pālagi". It prompts an internal dialogue where we ask questions like how can I be more Samoan? What is the perfect balance between the two worlds? Does enough mean be fluent in our mother tongue? Should effort amount to being enough? Living within the diaspora also comes with expectations. Most of our parents came to New Zealand for better opportunities, not for themselves, but for us - the future/their future. While we navigate the world we find ourselves in, we sometimes get lost. In this confusion we question ourselves and second guess ourselves, asking who's dreams we are supposed to be fulfilling. Most of us just want to make our parents proud and many of us associate our happiness with theirs and in many cases their happiness means more than our own. The essence of this identity can be seen in the changing nature of our traditional art forms. Traditional art forms now hold different meanings such as the tatau. Tatau is now used to mark younger generations of Pacific peoples for different reasons than those traditionally used. Changes in traditional practices, such as the evolving meanings of tatau, symbolise the dynamic nature of the Pacific identity in Aotearoa, New Zealand, reflecting a culture and identity that is continuously evolving with time and location.

I wrote this definition of what the New Zealand born and raised identity means to me having reflected on my experiences with culture within the various educational settings I found myself in throughout my life. I wrote this definition into my educational journal in the staffroom at the high school I currently work in, a vā very dear to my heart and a space that encouraged the reflexive processes of critical autoethnography

to occur. This was a school that understood the potential and power within its own classrooms and prioritised culture, utilising, and privileging students' cultural identities as a tool for success. As a teacher, the negotiation of my identity continued within this space especially the more I taught subjects like Pacific Studies, History and Social Studies. My time teaching at this kura allowed me to understand the teacher's role in managing the classroom space so that it became a safe space for identity negotiation to occur. Not only this, seeing how curriculum influences the negotiation of the identity of my students also contributed to how I saw myself. My New Zealand born and raised Pacific identity is one that I slowly came to terms with throughout my life. The older I got, the more spaces I found myself engaging with culture, the more I met others like me, and the more my identity was confirmed. When analysing Pacific identities, Ka'ili (1997) shares a Tongan proverb which translates into "skilful at snaring pigeons, skilful at cooking them". Ka'ili elaborates on the proverb by explaining that "it is ... only when a child is grounded and rooted in his or her native culture that he or she is able to shift back and forth among different cultural contexts" (Ka'ili, p 190). Ka'ili proclaims that Pacific peoples inhabit a liminal space - one that sits between the traditional culture that they emigrate from and the Western location that they immigrate to. To inhabit this space means Pacific peoples must exist in multiple cultural worlds or contexts to sustain their survival, especially for those living in the Pacific diaspora. How people interact with culture and identity in any given situation reinforces a space that is in-between like Bhabha's (1994) liminal third space which has the potential to transform and allow meaning making to occur. He explains that there is some sort of instability required to enter this Third Space and challenge dominant perceptions of culture that views things as fixed or unified. In this productive space, processes of hybridity can also occur where elements of both cultures can intertwine. Identity profiles or sub-

cultures such as the New Zealand born and raised Pacific identity are able to form and be nurtured within this third space. In this same sentiment, Ka'ili challenges the notion of "native culture" arguing that this concept becomes complicated as Pacific peoples emigrate to centres of Western society. Ka'ili's talanoa looks at redefining native culture which adds another dimension to the negotiating processes that Pacific students face in educational settings. The fluidity of culture and identity make them concepts that are ever changing thus for Pacific peoples living within the Pacific diaspora, being Pacific means and looks different to what being Pacific looks and means in their homeland.

The vā is crucial to understanding the negotiation of identity because vā is essential to social existence (Tuagalu, 2023). Tuagalu (2023) argues that "quite often diasporic explications of vā are inextricably intertwined with ideas of Pacific identity, that is, they render vā-relatedness as unique to Pacific peoples, forming Pacific communities in the new countries to which they have migrated" (Tuagalu, 2023, p. 38-39). For Pacific peoples within the diaspora, unique identities are formed that accommodate cultural aspects of both worlds they occupy. The identities that Pacific students bring into educational spaces are influenced by their motherland and their diasporic homes. Institutions and organisations they find themselves in within diasporic countries are spaces that are representative of Western values and norms but within educational institutions, teachers have the power to influence that space so that it may foster positive identity constructions and negotiations by students. Iosefo (2021) describes it as a space "where identity is fluid in its formation…It is sites of negotiation where you no longer have to hold onto ideologies that once paralysed you. Instead, it is a site where you decide what you believe best fits you. The rest of the clutter you flush" (p. 15). The classroom can easily be a negative space if teachers

don't acknowledge the potential it has for students to understand social positionings and develop their sense of self. In saying this, the diasporic vā is different to those in the Pacific islands.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights the complexities of power, positionality, and pedagogy within educational settings, using the Samoan concept of vā and third space (Bhabha, 1994) to explore the relational space between teachers and students using my personal reflections from teaching at Aroha High School, where most students are of Māori and Pacific descent. Despite assumptions that shared ethnic backgrounds between teachers and students might ease classroom dynamics, my personal experiences reveal that teaching efficacy and student responsiveness are influenced by a multitude of factors beyond ethnicity. By examining my personal pedagogical approach, informed by my New Zealand-born and raised Pacific identity, I realised that my approach sometimes clashed with the expectations of students accustomed to more traditional, authoritative methods. These reflections highlight the importance of understanding the vā, or relational space, in the classroom as a dynamic interplay of cultural, linguistic, and personal identities. The concept of teu le vā, or nurturing this space, emerges as crucial in addressing tensions and fostering meaningful connections. Recognising and reflecting on one's positionality can reveal power dynamics at play and inform more inclusive, responsive pedagogical practices. Furthermore, the necessity of acknowledging diverse student identities and experiences, suggests that a deep understanding and respect for these differences can enhance educational outcomes and classroom relationships.

Chapter 6: Faaiuga

Kidnapped

I was six when

Mama was careless

She sent me to school

alone

five days a week

One day I was

kidnapped by a band

of Western philosophers

armed with glossy-pictured

textbooks and

registered reputations

'Holder of B.A.

and M.A. degrees'

I was held

in a classroom

guarded by Churchill and Garibaldi

pinned up on one wall

and

Hitler and Mao dictating

from the other

Guevara pointed a revolution

at my brains

from his 'Guerilla Warfare'

Each three-month term

they sent threats to

my Mama and Papa

Mama and Papa loved

their son and

paid ransom fees

each time

Each time

Mama and Papa grew

Poorer and poorer

and my kidnappers grew

richer and richer

I grew whiter and whiter

On my release

fifteen years after

I was handed

(among loud applause

from fellow victims)

a piece of paper

to decorate my walls

certifying my release

(Ruperake Petaia, *Kidnapped,* Western Samoa)

To faaiuga (end) this thesis, I start with a poem about a child who compares his time in education to being kidnapped. The poem narrates the experience of a child who feels they are being 'kidnapped' by Western philosophers and ensnared in the grips of Western education. The child is held captive in a room dominated by historical figures such as Churchill, Gibraldi and Hitler. In every academic term, the child's parents pay the ransom in the form of fees while they themselves get poorer and the child becomes more 'whiter' as the result of their education. After fifteen years, the child receives a piece of paper upon their release, as well as a sense of loss of self and identity from being kidnapped and imprisoned by a Western education. Similarly, Wendt (1982) talks about this also in which he critiques the education system that he says is geared towards creating individuals suited for serving colonial administrations rather than fostering development within Indigenous communities. Through the process of education, Indigenous people are left feeling passive, lacking in confidence and almost ashamed of their own cultures. This poem captures the detrimental effects of a Western education system on the identity and self-esteem of minority groups. I liken this poem to the themes of this thesis which not only explores the loss of identity but also the misconception of identities in education. I come back to my research questions below to highlight my overall findings from the talanoa between my literature and data:

- What does the New Zealand-born and raised Pacific identity mean for me as a Pacific learner and teacher?

- What messages from the literature and autoethnographic narratives would help secondary school teachers understand ways to appropriately address Pacific learners' identities in the classroom?

- How can talanoa as a valid Indigenous Pacific method be weaved-well together with critical autoethnography to appropriately capture Pacific ways of knowing, being, and becoming?

New Zealand born and raised Pacific Identities

The literature in talanoa with my findings highlights the evolving identity of Pacific peoples in Aotearoa, New Zealand, particularly among the people born and raised here. This New Zealand-born Pacific identity is unique and varies from individual to individual, shaped significantly by the experience of living in the diaspora. In many of the perspectives highlighted in my literature review, New Zealand born and raised Pacific people struggle to find their place within society, and within the classroom. This is even more so with Pacific people finding success as Pacific people within education. This highlights the importance of recognising and honouring students' identities and the cultural wealth they bring into the classroom, fostering an environment where they feel appreciated, heard, and visible.

The concept of "third space", drawing on Bhabha's (1994) theory, describes a liminal area without fixed boundaries and acts as a space where Pacific individuals can explore and define what being Pacific means to them. This space is likened to the Polynesian concept of the vā, a relational space that fosters connections and meaning making. Within this space, culture, and identity are not fixed but can be influenced by various aspects and experiences. Wendt (1982) and Ka'ili (1997) argue against the notion of static cultural purity, promoting instead the celebration of cultural evolution, particularly in educational environments where Pacific identities can be continually negotiated and reshaped. Bhabha (1994) merges both space and the concept of cultural plurality by arguing that in the liminal third space, processes of cultural hybridity and mimicry can occur which are processes in which identities are being

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negotiated and formed. This vā can be both influential for students and teachers to negotiate their New Zealand born and raised Pacific identities.

People, location, environment, and experiences have influenced my personal identity all within educational spaces. It is an identity specific to where I have been for most of my life, as well as my cultural heritage, thus I had to make sense of what it meant to be Pacific in Aotearoa, New Zealand. During my upbringing, I encountered educational environments where Pacific cultures were prominently represented, while in other spaces, there was a notable absence of cultural diversity. These factors influenced my prioritisation of culture growing up which affected the way I viewed my identity as a Pacific person. When I was younger, culture wasn't an important aspect of my identity but as I entered high school, the negotiation of identity in that space allowed me to revisit and renegotiate my perspective of culture. The process of self-reflexivity as a teacher allowed me to reflect on my identity based on my experiences within educational spaces too. It was through the interaction with Pacific students where I was able to reflect on my personal identity and how this influenced my pedagogical approach in the classroom. In both instances, as a student and teacher, I was able to negotiate what my New Zealand born and raised Pacific identity meant to me as a child, as an adolescent and as an adult. The potential of educational spaces, where concepts like the third space and vā were present, allowed for the negotiation of identity.

Pedagogies and Practises

The literature in talanoa with my findings explores the impact of teacher positionality on pedagogy, emphasizing how teachers' awareness of their own positionality can influence their teaching approaches and classroom dynamics. Whether they are aware of it or not, personal positionality can affect teachers' approaches to teaching and the

contexts they choose to teach as well. Positionality is described as one's location within shifting networks of relationships, influencing power dynamics and social change (Takacs, 2002). Takacs (2002) explains that "understanding positionality means understanding where you stand in respect to power, an essential skill for social change" (Takacs, 2002, p. 169). As a teacher, becoming aware of how my positionality affected my pedagogy meant becoming aware of the power I held as a teacher in the teacher-student relationship. This power also entailed the managing of the energy in the classroom space and how my positionality contributed to this. Preconceived notions that as a Pacific teacher of Pacific learners I was more relatable to my students was dispelled, as I came to realise that my positionality, and identity, was relatable to some, but not all. It was from this experience with a Pacific student that I realised the influence positionality and identity has on pedagogical approaches. It also showed that self-reflection for teachers can help us identify aspects of our pedagogical approaches that can be adjusted to enhance the educational experiences of Pacific students in the classroom.

Thus, the classroom is depicted as a sacred space where the teacher's power is essential in managing the dynamics and energy – a space where culturally responsive pedagogical frameworks, such as Tapasā (Ministry of Education, 2018), are highlighted as tools for supporting teachers in valuing students' identities and informing their teaching practices. In addition to pedagogy, curriculum can also change the dynamics of the classroom as culturally relevant curriculum can help Pacific students not only learn more about themselves but can also facilitate Pacific students' self-discovery and assist them in situating themselves within the broader global context. There is no single solution or pedagogical tool that can help solve all the issues Pacific students face in the classroom but understanding how your positionality

affects your pedagogy and overall approach to teaching Pacific students is a reflective start.

Weaving of Methodologies

The literature in talanoa with my findings highlights the utilisation of talanoa within this thesis. Talanoa, described as a method where individuals share their experiences and aspirations, is seamlessly integrated with critical autoethnography due to their shared narrative nature. The flexibility of talanoa enables it to transcend various spaces, similar to the concepts of culture and identity, without a fixed point of reference. In this thesis, talanoa is used as a tool for deep analysis, particularly in addressing complex topics like intersectionality. Furthermore, talanoa is also used as a method to identify the relevant texts to use in this research. This is based on the idea that all entities or things are deeply interconnected, allowing talanoa to intertwine and unify ideas and concepts between texts as if they are engaged in a dialogue with each other (Mika, 2017).

Talanoa intertwined with critical autoethnography can provide narratives that shed light on intersectional experiences of marginalisation. It is a method that can be used as a cultural analysis through personal narratives which also investigates social injustices. Critical autoethnography also allows meaning making to occur by valuing and prioritising personal voice. Thus, it is a methodology of special significance for minority groups whose voices historically were marginalised in traditional research. The weaving together of talanoa and critical autoethnography allows for a holistic exploration of ideas and concepts within the thesis, similar to a conversation or talanoa that privileges personal voices and narratives that are usually not heard. The weaving together of these talanoa and critical autoethnography captures Pacific ways of knowing, being, and becoming by privileging the stories and voices of Pacific peoples.

Limitations and Strengths

Due to the autobiographical nature of my chosen methods, there are many strengths to this method such as advantaging personal voice and narrative, but there are also limitations. The main limitation is the issue of validity. My own possible bias and prejudices within my personal narratives questions the validity of my research. The issues related to writing about my own personal memories puts into question the accuracy of my memory, especially when talking about a lived experience that occurred years ago (Ellis et al., 2011). An example of this is my detailing of an event which occurred when I was five years old, relying on my memory of an experience that happened over 25 years ago. Furthermore, the cultural phenomenon I wanted to highlight from my personal experiences in educational spaces were not particularly highlighted as issues at the time, rather than phenomena specifically related to today's time.

Furthermore, the narrative nature of my study also allows objectivity to be an issue. Within some of my personal journal excerpts I include what I believe is an account of my students' experiences. The truth is, I cannot speak for my students, I can only provide a personal interpretation of how they experienced my teaching which can be influenced by my own biases, values, prejudices, and experiences. Therefore, my critical autoethnographic narrative of my students' experiences could be viewed as generalisations, personal observations, or assumptions especially as they are viewed through the lens of a teacher who typically holds the power when considering the traditional power dynamics of the classroom. This runs the risk of teachers harshly simplifying "the complex identity of a person, thus eventually reducing the plurality of a multidimensional concept of identity of the variables, as well as that of the potential of a variety of societies due to excessive subject analysis from only an insider's

perspective" (Rowlands, 2022, p. 5). Being an insider in my research means there are limitations to my findings, but being the sole subject of my research adds another layer to its questionable validity as my findings become only my interpretations of events. Furthermore, Sparkes (2000) highlighted the contentious nature of autoethnography, criticizing its focus on the self as narcissistic and self-indulgent. This focus inwards means this method can be viewed as something that is more therapeutic rather than analytical which some deem as not ideal for research. In addition, I acknowledge that my personal excerpts do not represent all experiences of New Zealand born and raised Pacific people in the classroom. They represent a snapshot in time - one view on things - but just like the nature of identity and culture, experiences are all different and continuously changing. The cultural phenomenon I highlight through my personal experiences may not be applicable to everybody but a phenomenon that affects a certain group of people.

However, the nature of Critical Autoethnography as privileging one's own lived experiences can also be seen as a strength-based approach. Voices and lived realities of those that are usually marginalized in society can be heard and privileged through this method. This adds to the strength of qualitative research methods which is to "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (Méndez, 2014, p. 3). By adopting frameworks rooted in decolonisation or indigenous epistemologies, Critical Autoethnography seeks to challenge conventional research paradigms that historically marginalised minority voices. This approach is deemed crucial for addressing and filling the gaps left by traditional research methodologies. In this vein, I wanted to fa'aiuga o le talanoaga – conclude this talanoa - with a poem that I wrote at the end of my thesis journey, tying up what I learnt in various educational spaces.

Let's talanoa about identity.

At a young age

We think we know ourselves

But we only know ourselves

In relation to others.

*If she is **this**, then I am **that***

She is authentic, I am plastic.

Then when we're older

We step into non brown spaces

And those who own this space

See us as authentic

But inside you've already told yourself

"Your plastic"

Then when we're grown grown

We start to realise

That we can traverse multiple spaces

All at once

And that we can make sense

Of the confusion

By accepting the confusion

And making the confusion our own

By becoming authentic

In our own way.

Temukisa Chantelle Pasese, *Navigating Identity*, 2024

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