GIVING VOICE TO THE UNHEARD IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Critical autoethnography, Tongan males, and educational research

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Abstract

When considering higher education, the voices and experiences of minority researchers are often absent. Within educational research, in particular, the voices and cultural realities of minority teachers are rarely valued and are often ignored. This paper is my attempt to "be heard", particularly in relation to the education of Tongan males in Aotearoa. I am a Tongan teacher–researcher, and, through the autoethnographical approach, I have discovered a way to tell my story and, in doing so, legitimise my knowledge. This paper unfolds some of the competing discourses and articulates the relevance, appropriateness and usefulness of autoethnography as a method to understand my experiences as a Tongan male teacher and researcher within higher education.

Keywords

critical autoethnography, Pacific research frameworks, Pacific concepts, educational research, higher education, Tongan males

Introduction

As part of a Tongan kāinga and community, I view my own needs as of little significance compared with the collective's expectations. When considering research as a tool for knowledge contribution that leads to change and empowerment for those involved, which may

include the wider society and its groups outside of my own, studying myself was not often regarded as an appropriate practice—unless it was to be of use to others in my kāinga and community (Chang, 2008).

My use of the term *minority researcher* in this paper is associated not only with being part of a minority ethnic group within Aotearoa New Zealand, but also with being part of a minority group of teachers–researchers who are of Pasifika heritage within a dominant Western education schooling system, including higher education. In this paper, I seek to validate the use of autoethnography as a useful approach for a minority Tongan male researcher seeking to understand the educational experiences of Tongan males in Aotearoa New Zealand. Both Western and Indigenous researchers have defined the validity of autoethnography in exploring one's own experiences to understand a phenomenon or social problem as being based on relevance, appropriateness, and usefulness in relation to research impact (Le Roux, 2017; Taufeʻulungaki, 2003). I will further unfold a detailed description of *how* throughout this paper.

But before I do so, let me share a short poem to articulate in this paper my *intentionality*, a term utilised by Tagaloatele Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop (2015) to describe a deliberate and culturally affirming space and foundation purposefully developed to inspire Pasifika students in Aotearoa New Zealand. My poem depicts an imagery of healing and hope. It tells a story of how autoethnography empowered my practice and journey throughout schooling and higher education.

As a Tongan male teacher and researcher
moulded in a world that is often ignorant of
others and difference shaped by my Tongan
values and ideals seeking to fit into Western
schooling and academia broken down by
Western values and norms in schooling giving voice to the unheard is my purpose

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

For Tongan and other Pacific communities, *auto* or the *self* is not synonymous with collectivism. It is, however, often associated with individualism. In a Tongan context, the self exists in and amongst the kāinga. At a deeply philosophical and practical level, it is hard for Tongan individuals, and I assume the same for other collectivist societies, to think, presume, and position themselves as being of more significance than others. Initially, to engage in an autoethnographical study, it was a struggle—both at the epistemological (ways of knowing, doing, and behaving) and the ontological (ways of being) levels for me as a Tongan male raised as part of my kāinga.

My initial experience and attempt to use autoethnography was during my master's study in 2012. At the time, researching myself seemed narcissistic and self-centred. Previously, in my undergraduate education within the psychology discipline, empirical research and analysis had been heavily encouraged. Therefore, I had been taught that distancing one's self from research was an important factor in research rigour. Any attempts to include one's own views as a variable in an empirical study were problematic and counterproductive to the impact of the research. So when my master's supervisor encouraged me to use autoethnography, this challenged my preconceptions of what constitutes rigorous research practice.

My master's supervisor identified herself as a Pasifika, a term developed by the Ministry of Education to define and group all Pacific ethnic groups in Aotearoa New Zealand (Coxon, Mara, Wendt Samu, & Finau, 2002). Within her field, she was well respected by her peers and

colleagues. Despite her attempts to convince me, I was still unsure of whether autoethnography was a valid practice or not. In my mind, there were persistent questions such as "If autoethnography is an accepted research approach, why have I not heard about it in my research methods papers?" and "Why is autoethnography unheard of in postgraduate students' conversations, or even between lecturers and other academics at the faculty of education?" It was not until my supervisor sent me to a discussion group led by another academic at the University of Auckland that focused on autoethnography as a research practice that I began to realise the potential of autoethnography as a valid approach to research. Primarily, in seeking to understand the role of culture in the teaching of Tongan boys, exploring my experiences of "critical incidents" in my education and teaching experience was a useful data source for identifying pedagogical practices that were appropriate and effective for the teaching and learning of Tongan males in Aotearoa New Zealand (Fa'avae, 2012).

Through talanoa with my supervisor and others who had used or were pondering the use of autoethnography as a research tool, I started to connect more with the approach through the aspect of *ethnography*. For instance, I started looking at my own story as experiences that were shaped by others—and the contexts in which I was socialised. Looking at my own experiences was not necessarily an act of self-indulgence, but rather it was to identify pedagogical practices that were useful in Tongan boys' learning. Centring the goal of finding ways to improve Tongan boys' and their families' educational experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand schooling as the primary focus of my master's study positioned my *own experiences* as the secondary means (source of data) to unfolding teachers' culturally responsive practices and their impact on Tongan boys' learning. As a Tongan male who was taught to serve others and place their needs before my own, autoethnography became a tool of

healing, hope, and empowerment for me while I sought to find ways to improve the educational outcomes of Tongan students and their families in Aotearoa New Zealand.

What is autoethnography?

Autoethnography is a relatively new qualitative inquiry research method. Its origin can be traced back to Hayano (1979) and it has been in use for almost 40 years in a number of qualitative studies. Numerous studies fall under the broader category of autoethnography. While not extensive, this category includes autobiology, ethnobiology, autobiographical ethnography, evocative narratives, first-person accounts, interpretive biography, lived experience, personal essays, reflexive ethnography, and personal narratives (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This blurring of genres has the possibility of creating some confusion. Further, researchers such as Ellis and Bochner (2000) use the terms self-narrative and autoethnography interchangeably while others create a more rigorous form of inquiry by linking concepts from the literature to their narrated personal experiences (Holt, 2003).

Ethnographic approaches are evolving in the 21st century and are more acceptable in the post-structural academic context. The desire to discover and accommodate the worldviews of others that have previously not been articulated suits a postmodern sensitivity in which no one right form of knowledge exists and multiple viewpoints are acknowledged and valued (Ellis et al., 2008). The narrative approaches typical of ethnography are evolving into forms that facilitate a more personal view by emphasising reflexivity and personal voice and, more importantly, recognising the researcher as representative of a multi-layered life-world, itself worthy of expression (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Mykhalovskiy, 1996).

According to Maréchal (2010), autoethnography is a form or method of research that involves

self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic field work and writing. Other well-known autoethnographers (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) define autoethnography as research, writing, storytelling, and a method that connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political. Consequently, it has been difficult to reach a consensus on the term's definition. For example, in the late 1970s, autoethnography was more narrowly defined as insider ethnography, referring to studies of the (culture of the) group of which the researcher is a member (Hayano, 1979). Definitions and use of autoethnography have since evolved over time in a manner that now makes precise definition difficult and allows for more opportunities to be critiqued.

Contested views of autoethnography

According to Wall (2008), autoethnography can be used by minority researchers to legitimise their knowledge and their lives within their own cultural and ethnic contexts. It is a method that draws on the experience of the author to extend understanding about a societal phenomenon. Traditional scientific approaches require researchers to put bias and subjectivity aside and promote objectivity as the only way of understanding social realities and ownership of their own individual knowledge.

With the rise of postmodern philosophy, and the growing awareness that reality and knowledge are socially constructed and based on people's experiences, autoethnography provides a method of thinking differently about what constitutes reality and what constitutes valued knowledge. This process allows for "many legitimate ways of knowing and inquiring [in which] no one method should be privileged" (Wall, 2006, p. 147). While a growing number of scholars use autoethnography in their research, conflicts remain over the subjectivity of evocative styles of writing (Ellis & Bochner, 2006) versus analytical and interpretive styles of writing in autoethnographic research (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008).

Ellis and Bochner's (2000) definition of autoethnography focuses on autobiographical description and the importance of ethnographic explanation. Anderson (2006) and Chang (2008) refer to autoethnography as an approach that must combine cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details. This means that autoethnographers are expected to reflect upon, analyse, and interpret their stories within their cultural context. Researchers who engage in autoethnography cannot study themselves without referring to their positioning in respect to others (Chang, 2008). Self-discovery in a cultural sense is intimately related to understanding others. If *others* refers to members of one's own community, the self is reflected in others in a general sense. However, if others refers to members of other communities, understanding the similarities between self and others captures only a portion of an understanding of them.

What is valuable in such cases is studying others intimately through comparing and contrasting, which inevitably brings differences to light (Chang, 2008). Therefore, the purpose of studying others is not only to gain a deeper understanding of their culture but also to understand one's own position within one's own culture or ethnic group. For me as a Tongan male teacher, autoethnographic reflection involved placing the practices of other teachers in the same context I occupied, and comparing and contrasting those practices with my own to bring salient aspects of culture and ethnicity to the fore.

According to Anderson (2006), in autoethnography, the autoethnographer is expected to satisfy the following conditions: (a) be a member of the social world under study, (b) engage in reflexivity and analyse data on one's self, (c) be visible and actively present in the text, (d) include other informants in similar situations in data collection, and (e) be committed to theoretical and critical analysis.

Atkinson (2006) agrees with Anderson's analytical, theoretical, and objective approach to autoethnography. In contrast, Ellis and Bochner (2006) as well as Denzin (2006) position themselves at the opposite end of the continuum, advocating for evocative, emotionally engaging, and subjective autoethnography. The analytic approach leans towards the objective analysis, whereas evocative autoethnography aims to achieve empathy and resonance within the reader and may even manifest itself in literary styles such as poetry. Maréchal (2010) points out that evocative and emotional genres of autoethnography have been criticised by mostly analytic proponents for their lack of ethnographic relevance due to being too individually focused and personal. Subjective ethnographers are criticised principally "for being biased, navel-gazing, self-absorbed, or emotionally incontinent, and for hijacking traditional ethnographic purposes and scholarly contributions" (Maréchal, 2010, p. 45).

Holman Jones (2016) claims that critical autoethnography is an approach that links the concrete and the abstract, thinking and acting, aesthetics, and criticism. Specifically, researchers who use autoethnography actively tell their stories alongside/by/within theory or theories. The "'critical' in critical autoethnography reminds us that theory is not a static or autonomous set of ideas, objects, or practices. Instead, theorizing is an ongoing process that links the concrete and abstract" (Holman Jones, 2016, p. 1). Like Holman Jones (2016), in this paper I employ *critical autoethnography* as an ongoing process of theorising whereby I draw upon my reflections of the reasons why and how autoethnography was useful in my master's and doctoral studies, supported by theory as developed by other researchers.

In light of the contested views and the diverse definitions of autoethnography, only a small number of Pasifika education researchers employ the autoethnographic approach (Iosefo, 2016b; Togiaso, 2017; Wendt Samu, 2014). Fetaui Iosefo (2014, 2016a) employs critical autoethnography as an approach to story her experiences and constructions of identity based on her worldviews as a Samoan woman born and raised in Aotearoa New Zealand. She utilised vā from a Samoan perspective to understand the relational and conceptual spaces in between whereby her sense of self in relation to others within her collective in Aotearoa New Zealand is constructed and understood. Joeana Togiaso (2017), also of Samoan descent, used autoethnography as a research method to support her study that focused on the lived experiences of seven Samoan women in the establishment of an a'oga amata in Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand. For Togiaso (2017), autoethnography was used as a research method that was predominantly centred on Pasifika methodologies—that of talanoa (Vaioleti, 2006) and teu le vā (Airini, Mila-Schaaf, Coxon, Mara, & Sanga, 2010). Iosefo (2016a), however, centred her study predominantly on autoethnography as a research methodology and vā as a supporting concept.

For me, the journey from viewing autoethnography as a methodology only suited to understanding my own educational experiences to the use of an Indigenous or Tongan methodology in my doctoral study to explore my role in relation to Tongan kāinga is a reflection of the shifts in my identity and confidence in my heritage language as an emerging academic within higher education. For example, I utilised autoethnography in my master's study as a research methodology and talanoa as a method of exploring my lived experiences as teacher–educator. From 2012 to 2016, a period of five years, throughout the master's and doctoral journey, my engagement with autoethnography gave me the strength and hope to predominantly use a Tongan approach that privileges the stories and reflects on Tongan males' lived experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand and Tonga during my doctoral study.

Pacific research frameworks and autoethnography

Critiques of Pacific research from within a Western research paradigm may result in judgements of it being both unscientific and speculative. Western research is often regarded as a linear process of "literature review, theoretical application through some form of methodology, and ending in relatively specific results amounting to knowledge" (Ferris-Leary, 2013, p. 11). Pacific research, however, is different. Pacific research is not only far less specific, but includes such processes as talanoa (critical discussion leading to consensus). This leads not only to an "ongoing circular process of *talanoa*-knowledge-*talanoa*-knowledge-*talanoa* and so on, but also to an holistic and flexible result which, by its nature, is far less specific" (Ferris-Leary, 2013, p. 11). Pacific research is a socially mediated outcome developed and expressed using Pacific ideas and concepts rather than a more "individualistic Western goal oriented process leading to a more specific materialistic result" (Ferris-Leary, 2013, p. 11).

Pacific research paradigms are framed based on ideas, concepts, values, and practices unique to the individual Pacific ethnic cultures themselves. Such ways of thinking are symbolic of the ontological (ways of being—reality of their lived experiences) and epistemological (ways of knowing, ways of acting and behaving) underpinnings unique to their people and context. As a Tongan male researcher, researching the self is about understanding my position and responsibility within my wider community, which includes not only my kāinga but also the community in which I live and serve in Aotearoa New Zealand. Although I present accounts of my experiences—through my own voice, which may seem intimate and personal—they are expressions of how I understand my place and duty within the contexts in which I occupy and serve. Autoethnography and Pacific research frameworks provide an approach for me to express my concerns and sense of commitment that lead to empowerment.

Autoethnographic research also raises crucial issues about the consequences of stories and their ability to empower not only researchers but also others around them (Wall, 2008). Consequently, Pacific research guidelines through talanoa (Vaioleti, 2013) and kakala (Johansson Fua, 2009; Thaman, 1988) underpinned my master's study and, by engaging with these frameworks, my use of autoethnography is validated as significant in understanding the cultural and ethnic realities of being a Tongan male researcher.

Reflexivity is a key aspect of autoethnography and talanoa. Engaging in autoethnographic research in my master's study (Fa'avae, 2012) gave me the confidence and hope to carry out a deeper investigation of Tongan Indigenous knowledge in my doctoral project (Fa'avae, 2016). In my master's study I used talanoa as a method of ongoing reflection based on my educational experiences, observations, and interactions as a Tongan male teacher that had already taken place. The depth of my understanding and practice of talanoa as a research method at that particular time was still developing, but it gave me the confidence to further utilise and unfold talanoa in my doctoral study as a way to understand the kinds of cultural knowledge and practices transmitted from generation to generation and how such knowledge could be mobilised in schooling (Fa'avae, 2016). The complexities of using talanoa as a method to gather stories from three generations of Tongan males across four kāinga in Aotearoa New Zealand and Tonga deepened my understanding and cultural practice of talanoa (see Fa'avae, Jones, & Manu'atu, 2016). So instead of treating talanoa in my doctoral study as though it was the same as semi-structured interviews, reflecting and engaging with the extended families' stories and experiences required a more intimate process whereby the main focus was not on gaining data but rather on learning their knowledge and imparting it to other

Tongan males in appropriate and meaningful ways (Faʻavae, 2016).

Vaioleti's (2006) talanoa model is a Pacific research framework that allows researchers to story their issues, realities, and aspirations. Talanoa allows for more "*moʻoni* (pure, real, authentic) information to be available" (Vaioleti, 2006, p. 21) for Pacific research than data derived from other research methods. Using talanoa as a framework has enabled me to understand and appreciate my experiences as being of value in education (Faʻavae et al., 2016).

One significant way in which I engage in talanoa is the ongoing supervision dialogues that have taken place between my supervisors and me. Also, the dialogue was mediated between my supervisors and me with the literature and our own experiences as students and educators. As well, in the course of my master's and doctoral studies, I had the opportunity to present my work in progress as part of the Building Research Communities in Social Sciences talanoa series for emerging Pacific researchers. Since then, I have also connected with other Tongan postgraduate students who are researching secondary education as I am. Currently, I am a fellow at the Institute of Education as part of the University of the South Pacific. As part of our service to the Pacific region, we engage in ongoing talanoa with educational leaders that inform appropriate and relevant research practices and initiatives for each small island nation.

Seuʻula Johansson Fua (2009), with the guidance of her mentor, ʻAna Maui Taufeʻulungaki, critiqued and further developed the kakala research framework based on Konai Helu Thaman's (1988) original kakala framework. The metaphor of kakala, in the Tongan culture, refers to a collection of fragrant flowers, woven together as a garland for a special person or a special occasion. The steps involved in kakala making are similar to those used in the research process and comprise "*toli* (materials selection), *tui* (making of a *kakala*) and *luva* (presentation of a *kakala* as a sign of respect and love)" (Thaman, 2009, p. 5). With Thaman's permission, and with reference to the seminal work of Linitā Manuʻatu (2000), māfana and mālie were added to the kakala research model. Therefore, each step involved in kakala, and similarly in the research process, is important because each has deep cultural significance and contextual appropriateness.

Specifically, in terms of research practice, the kakala research framework consists of the following stages in research: teu (conceptualising research idea, rationale, and assumptions); toli (data collection methods and process); tui (analysis of data); luva (reporting the outcomes); mālie (relevancy and worthwhileness); and māfana (application, transformation, sustainability) (Johansson Fua, 2009, p. 204). It is worth noting that the making of a kakala or garland is a valued practice amongst Tongan females themselves. In the case of the kakala research framework, Tongan women were responsible for its conceptual and methodological development (Johansson Fua, 2009). Although I do not engage in the making of kakala as a Tongan male, it is appropriate for me to wear and embrace it for its beautiful fragrance and intricate design.

I embrace kakala because of the efforts, love, and commitment that our Tongan female academics have applied to its construction. In my doctoral study, I drew upon kakala as an overall research approach to appropriately contextualise *Tatala ʻa e koloa ʻo e toʻutangata Tonga i Aotearoa mo Tonga*—the storying of the intergenerational education experiences of Tongan males in Aotearoa New Zealand and Tonga (Faʻavae, 2016). As knowledge creation and theorising of Pacific people's stories have traditionally been developed by outside researchers, the talanoa approach and kakala framework allows Pacific researchers to construct and make meaning of their own stories, thus validating their ways of knowing as legitimate knowledge (Johansson Fua, 2014; Vaioleti, 2013).

The benefits and limitations of autoethnography

The choice of an autoethnographical method was made despite the criticisms in the literature. I was interested to find out how, or whether, the autoethnographic method can empower one to act in a more informed manner (Kincheloe, 2005). It also allows the researcher to "engage in critical action that transforms not only one's own life but also the lives of others" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 155).

The use of autoethnography as a method and framework was beneficial for me as the researcher in collecting rich and reflective qualitative data on lived experiences of Tongan culture together with my student and professional education experiences. As a teacher–researcher, this framework allowed me to reflect on my own teaching as a Tongan male and my observations of other teachers and students in schools in which I had taught. As a result, I wanted my own teaching and observations to provide information and insight for other teachers that they could incorporate into their own thinking and practice.

Autoethnography is subjective but, if carried out rigorously, it may satisfy the conditions of sound qualitative research within the constructivist–interpretivist or critical–ideological paradigms (Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). Evocative autoethnography may never fulfil the requirements of the positivist paradigm as a research method, although critical or analytic autoethnography may have some scope within the remit of post-positivist research (Holman Jones, 2016). The aim is not to overstate the case for autoethnography but to emphasise it as one credible way to conduct reflexive research (Ponterotto, 2005). The ideas of "relevance, appropriateness, and usefulness" were argued by Pacific and non-Pacific researchers as central components of research rigour (Le Roux, 2017; Taufeʻulungaki, 2003). Critical autoethnography allows for talanoa whereby my experiences in higher education are reflected and critiqued using the research works of others—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) claim that the main critique of autoethnography and qualitative research in general comes from the traditional social science methods that emphasise the objectivity of social research. In such a critique, qualitative researchers are often called journalists, or "soft" scientists, and their work, including autoethnography, is "termed unscientific, or only exploratory, or entirely personal and full of bias" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 4). Many quantitative researchers regard the materials produced by the softer, interpretive methods as "unreliable, impressionistic, and not objective" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 5).

Validity is important in qualitative research. Appleton (as cited in Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999) maintains that the process of triangulation increases the accuracy of qualitative research findings in that data from different sources can confirm the truth. Furthermore, if, as post structuralists maintain, there is no objective truth or realities, my experience of truth and reality is equally as accurate as the experience of truth and reality of any other teacher. In addition, so-called objectivity is partially strengthened through my taking a critical analytical stance and following a social justice empowerment agenda. This was the case during my master's and doctoral studies because as a teacher–researcher, I was constantly focused on questioning the current educational inequalities and I was engaged in social action to improve academic achievement for Tongan boys. These were the key drivers in my master's and doctoral studies.

Chang (2008) argues that data sources are a limitation in autoethnographic research. In other words, caution must be adopted when researchers rely exclusively on their own memory. Reliance solely on memory is a definite limitation. Scepticism is an issue in autoethnography. As described by Chang (2008), to guard against this, there are potential limitations that researchers must avoid. She further argues that

researchers using a self-study must avoid as far as possible (a) excessive focus on self in isolation from others, (b) a lack of balance between the stories and analysis and cultural interpretation, (c) exclusive reliance on personal memory and recollection as a data source, (d) negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives, and (e) application of the label autoethnography being used in a very uncritical way.

Despite the limitations, I used autoethnography because I believed it to be the best research approach to meet the demands of a reflexive study in exploring the role of culture and ethnicity in the teaching and learning process (Fa'avae, 2012). Making timely journal entries and using other sources, such as talanoa with my supervisors and cultural conceptual frameworks, as well as theoretical frameworks from literature, added strength to the validity and accuracy of the data gathered.

I would contend that, as a Tongan male, I have no cultural or ethnic option of focusing on myself in isolation from others as identity is socially defined. My stories are valid because they are grounded in my experiences and are developed from my own cultural background, and my community will not allow me to become isolated or disconnected. Autoethnographic researchers use storytelling and introspection, critical analysis, and cultural interpretation as important principles. Therefore, autoethnography should reflect the interconnectivity of self and others and must "dig wider into the cultural context of the individual stories comingled with others" (Chang, 2008, p. 54).

It is impossible to evaluate and validate autoethnography in the same manner as one would with more traditional frameworks of research. However, through introspection and a focus on critical analysis and cultural interpretation, and following strict guidelines as outlined by Chang (2008), my master's and doctoral studies proved as far as possible to be trustworthy, ethical, and meaningful. The mindfulness of Pacific research guidelines through talanoa and kakala further validates my use of autoethnography as significant in comprehending the issues and realities of being a Tongan male teacher, and in comprehending my culturally embedded views of the world and my interpretations of experience, connectivity, and relationships.

Chang (2008) reminds researchers that their autoethnographic stories are interconnected with the stories of others. Therefore, it is vital to protect the confidentiality of other people in the story. I used autoethnography in my master's study and, therefore, there were no requirements for participant or ethical considerations. I did, however, use pseudonyms when describing my observations of other teachers and did not name the schools I attended as a student or in which I taught. The primary source of data collected for the master's research came from my professional journal, consistent with the practice of a reflective practitioner. They were accounts of interactions between teachers and Tongan students. Reflecting on my educational experiences through the professional journal, influenced by key themes from the literature, led to a closer consideration of critical incidents mentioned in my professional journal.

Autoethnography and the education of Tongan males

To study myself as part of research, it was important to gather as much data as necessary to effectively engage in autoethnographic writing, from a variety of sources of qualitative data (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In my master's study, there were periods of structured reflection and periods of spontaneous recollections, both associated with various emotional experiences through journals about my teaching practice and observations of teacher interactions with Tongan males. To facilitate my reflections, I used critical questions that had the capacity to enable other practitioners to consider how their values and background influenced their

practice. Examples of questions used were: Where do your values and beliefs come from? How do your family, your gender, and your multicultural background affect your expectations of students and values of teaching? (McIlveen, Beccaria, du Preez, & Patton, 2010).

As described by Chang (2008), analysing the relationship between self and others is fundamental to autoethnographic interpretation. Others can be referred to as *others of similarity* or *others of difference*. The others of difference in the master's study represented communities of practices, sets of values, and identities that were different from the researcher's. Others of difference in the study related to teachers from different ethnic identities. The ability to reflect related to the extent to which I identified with other colleagues as well as the ways in which I did not identify with them, and I articulated this apparent contradiction. My areas of similarity with other teachers included my qualifications and training, the ethical standards required of me, and the policies and education regulations I was required to follow as a professional.

To understand the implications of culturally inclusive practice for Tongan males, I compared and contrasted my pedagogical practices with my views of other teachers' practices. Autoethnographic researchers cannot study their own experiences without studying the "experiences of others . . . through comparing and contrasting" (Chang, 2008, p. 33). The aim of comparing and contrasting with other teachers was not only to understand their cultural practices but also to contextualise my identity as a Tongan teacher. Accordingly, this led to consciousness raising of my own identity as a Tongan male, a father, and a teacher who is passionate about the learning and achievement of Pacific Island students. Equally important were my observations of other teachers' interactions with Tongan boys and the ways in which I interacted with them.

Critical theory is important in understanding and analysing the concepts of knowledge and power. In Aotearoa New Zealand, kaupapa Māori is an Indigenous research framework that seeks to understand and legitimise Indigenous knowledge (Smith, 1999). Smith (2000) argues that kaupapa Māori research enacts what critical theory offers to "oppressed, marginalised, and silenced groups" (p. 229). This means that understanding the ways in which one is oppressed enables one to take action to change oppressive forces. Critical theories are thus normative; they serve to bring about change in conditions that affect our lives. Researchers working in this tradition align themselves with the interests of those opposed to the existing dominant order of society. They ask questions about the ways in which competing interests clash and the manner in which conflicts are resolved in favour of particular powerful groups.

My own experience of power and agency and powerlessness within the Aotearoa New Zealand education system raises critical questions as to who is benefiting from the dominant educational framework within which I engage. Critical questions arise as to where the power lies in the schooling context because statistics, supported by my own autoethnographic data, show marginal benefit for students derived from this existing Western system of learning (Coxon, Marshall, & Massey, 1994). The point made here is that, for Tongan students, educational outcomes are less optimistic than for other groups. This inevitably has a negative impact on their self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Given that I am a teacher–researcher from an ethnic minority working within a dominant Western educational framework, my educational experiences both as a student and as a teacher were important in identifying these competing interests between Pacific Island students and school settings that are unequally constructed and perpetuated. Reflecting on my own experiences and use of theoretical frameworks from the literature within higher education allows for analysis and interpretation of the conflicts in schooling for Pacific Island students.

Conclusion

Primarily, this paper focused on the use of autoethnography in educational research by a Tongan male teacher–researcher. Personally, autoethnography gave voice to a minority teacher in the Aotearoa New Zealand schooling and within academia where his voice was often unheard, unappreciated, and ignored. This paper argued for critical autoethnography as an appropriate and relevant research approach that validates the lived experiences of minority academics in higher education. It also articulated the competing discourses that have continued to be advanced by researchers. The relevance of autoethnography for minority researchers is within the context of Pacific concepts of knowledge creation and articulation through the use of talanoa and kakala as examples for Tongan academics.

Glossary

aʻoga amata	licensed Samoan early childhood centre
kāinga	extended family
kakala	garland, garland making
kaupapa Māori	Māori based topic/event/enterprise run by Māori for Māori
luva	to present a garland with love and respect
māfana	inwardly warmth
mālie	passion and joy
talanoa	critical discussions, to talk
teu le vā	cherish, nurse, care for the vā
toli	to pick, to select
tui	to make
vā	relational space, conceptual space

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