Reflections on the PhD Journey

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A Talanoa about sifting through the clutter and finding myself through the research process

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University of the South Pacific
Step 1. Finding a research worthy topic

I think I am now ready to do the Ph.D but what topic do I choose? How do I know if this is worth researching? Who is going to care? Will my research make a difference? To whom?

- Education
- Sustainability
- Indigenous knowledge
- Creative writing
- Teachers
- Pacific ??

2007
The l-o-n-g and winding road

2007
Writing a concept note on a topic I know I can do without much effort.

Finding another topic that interests me and writing another concept note.

Finding a 'really' worthy topic and writing a full proposal.

Getting some feedback on the proposal and being frustrated by 'friends' who want me to study what 'they studied'.

Reading around possible topics.

2008
Finding another topic and writing another proposal.

Sitting on the proposal.

Beginning to ask the right questions: What knowledge do I value?

Reading around possible topics.

Why am I doing this? What research could I do that would add value to the existing body of Pacific knowledge?

Knowing what it is I want to do, and submitting a proposal.

Finding renewed inspiration and tackling literature like a man in the desert who has found water.

2009
Beginning to ask the right questions: What knowledge do I value?

Reading around possible topics.

2010
Knowing what it is I want to do, and submitting a proposal.

Final draft approved and submission.

More writing and editing.

Writing, fieldwork, writing, reading, editing, writing, fieldwork, editing, writing, and more of the same.

Fine tuning the conceptual framework and methodology.

2011
Finding renewed inspiration and tackling literature like a man in the desert who has found water.

Knowing what it is I want to do, and submitting a proposal.

Final draft approved and submission.

More writing and editing.

Writing, fieldwork, writing, reading, editing, writing, fieldwork, editing, writing, and more of the same.

Fine tuning the conceptual framework and methodology.

2012
Final draft approved and submission.

More writing and editing.

Writing, fieldwork, writing, reading, editing, writing, fieldwork, editing, writing, and more of the same.

Fine tuning the conceptual framework and methodology.

2013
Final draft approved and submission.

More writing and editing.

Writing, fieldwork, writing, reading, editing, writing, fieldwork, editing, writing, and more of the same.

Fine tuning the conceptual framework and methodology.

The real hard work

Eating & breathing the research or: the sleep deprivation and no social life phase.

Grounding myself in the project, remembering who I am and where I come from.
The research project

**Research Aims:**
The research set out to show that:

1. The Pacific ESD Framework (PESDF) is a direct derivative of UNESCO ESD conceptions;
2. PESDF treats Pacific indigenous knowledge systems (PIKS) superficially without specific commitment;
3. There is a critical need for Pacific theorization of ESD based on Pacific understandings of ESD, sustainability and education;
4. PIKS are comprised of multiple culturally situated epistemological sites critical to the contextualization of the ESD movement in the region.
5. Pacific heritage arts (PHA) are examples of such sites offering pedagogical worthiness in ESD mainstreaming; and,
6. As significant culturally situated epistemological sites PHA are largely neglected in educational discourse.
7. Understanding these sites may deepen our understanding of indigenous conceptions of education, sustainability, and ESD.
Research questions as multiple sites of inquiry or: entry points into the project

What can we learn about the notion of sustainability (sustainable living) & resilience from tapa and tatau?

What implications do the findings have for: Future regional responses to global educational initiatives; Educational Policy & Planning; School curriculum in PICs?

How are core value(s) embedded in these conceptualizations?

To what extent are these Pacific conceptualizations (of ESD) and value underpinning similar to or different from, the conceptualizations of SD manifested in the PESDF (2006)?
Tackling the literature

Mapping Global ESD Movement

Mapping Pacific ESD Movement

Pacific Education

Pacific Heritage Arts

ESD Global Education Agenda

IKS Indigenous Education Agenda

Education for Sustainable Pacific Societies

Natural Heritage

Political Systems

Economic Systems

Social Systems

Technological Systems

Cultural Heritage

Select Pacific Heritage Arts (PHA) Tapa and Tattooing

What I really wanted to find out
Theoretical Framework

- The theoretical framework is meant to emerge as a result of the literature review but I was lost in a maze of theories.
- I realized that a single theoretical lens would not adequately serve this project.
- **Solution?** *Bricolage as ‘Complexity’* – seeing phenomena as operating in a ‘whole’ rather than through an isolated lens.
Research Framework

- Epistemology
  - Constructionism

- Theoretical Perspective
  - Bricolage
  - Interpretive Paradigm
  - Critical Paradigm

- Methodology
  - Bricolage
  - Phenomenology
  - Ethnography

- Methods
  - Talanoa
  - Talanga
  - Focus Group
  - Document/Policy Analysis
  - Visual Ethnographies

Theoretical Framework
Methodological Considerations
The garland as methodological framework

Kakala + Ula = blended model

(Adapted from Johansson-Fua 2011, pp.8-9).

(Adapted from Sauni 2011, p57).

(Koya, 2013)
Methods + Sample

Methods
1. Document/policy Analysis
2. Culturally informed research methods – Talanoa, Tālanga
3. Visual Ethnographies (*photographs, art, artefacts, videos, etc*)
4. Field-notes

Sample
Sample 1. Cultural producers
Sample 2. Teacher Educators
Sample 3. Teachers/Teacher Trainees
Research design

Phase 1
- Personal Interest in Samoan Heritage Arts
- Professional Experiences in Education & ESD
- Research Interest in Pacific Research Methodologies, Rethinking Pacific Education, Pacific Understandings of ESD and sustainability

Phase 2
- Framing the Research
  - Literature review
  - Developing theoretical & methodological frameworks
  - Mapping the bricolage
  - Textual analysis
- Theoretical Framework
  - Bricolage
  - Interpretive Paradigm
  - Critical Paradigm
  - Indigenous Paradigm

Phase 3
- Research Ethics
  - Determining country/culture specific protocol
  - Obtaining permission
- Data Collection
  - Field work in Tonga (July - August 2012) & Samoa (November 2012)
  - Interviews, talanoa, Talanga, visual ethnographies, field notes

Phase 4
- Transcription & Data Analysis
  - Collating/coding of data
  - Consolidating findings
  - Critical analysis of patterns, revalidated by participants
- Discussion of findings
  - Revisiting literature & textual analysis
  - Returning to & refining research scope, frames and raw data patterns
  - Development of a Pacific ESD model

Implications & Conclusion
- Review of lines of inquiry/research questions
- Tapa & Tattoo as culturally situated epistemological sites
- Indigenous notions of ESD
- Indigenous Research
- Reclaiming/rethinking Education
- Contextualized Policy making
- Educational Reform
- Bricolage
- Sustainability-thinking development
- Future research
Research process
Making sense of what I had uncovered...
Findings (a brief summary)

1. A Life-philosophy of relational spaces:
   \textit{Vā is not a metaphor for sustainability.} It is a sustainability-thinking worldview that provides guiding principles for sustainable living.

2. Pacific Heritage Arts such as Tapa and Tattooing are \textit{significant epistemological sites} of knowing and learning, being and belonging.

3. Samoan and Tongan IKS include \textit{indigenous pedagogies} which are critical to understanding the ways that we teach and learn.

4. These philosophies and ways of doing and being \textit{can tell us a lot about notions of sustainability} and education for sustainability/ sustainable development.
Sustainability principles & Core Values

1. **Continuity and survival**
2. **Resilience (adapt/thrive)**
3. **Spirituality**
4. **Agency**
5. **Commitment & participation**
6. **Education/life-long learning**
7. **Indigenous pedagogies**
8. **Decolonization of IKS and IE**
9. **Self-determination**
10. **Knowing where we come from (to inform where we would like to go)**

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<tr>
<th>Value/Guiding Principle</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 Spirituality</td>
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<td>2 Sacred covenant between male/female</td>
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<td>3 Respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Love/Compassion</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Contribution/gift of women</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Contribution/gift of men</td>
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<td>7 Self-restraint</td>
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<td>8 Respectful Relationships</td>
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<td>9 Good behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Duty/Service/Responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 Unity/Social Cohesiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Mutual respect/ obligations/reciprocity</td>
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<td>14 Generosity</td>
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<td>15 Hope</td>
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Resilience Literacies (RL) are theorized as: A set of attributes and competencies that enable an individual/community to:

- **Believe** in the personal ability to effect positive life changes;
- **Respond** to unpredictable life challenges (i.e. adversity and stress);
- **Resist** change that may bring about instability;
- **Appreciate** change as inevitable but manageable; and,
- **Thrive** (do well).
Attributes & Competencies required for building resilience in Pacific education

What I learned from the research:
Attribute 1: Self-esteem – sense of self-worth and pride in self and abilities
Attribute 2: Self-efficacy – belief that you are the master of your own destiny
Attribute 3: Self-determination – ability to make decisions for yourself, to reason these choices without feeling pressured to think, be, do a certain way
Attribute 4: Agency – to make choices and to enact these choices

What I drew from literature and combined with the research findings:
Competency 1: Beliefs, Attitudes, Values (affective domain)
Competency 2: Knowledge (cognitive domain)
Competency 3: Logical Reasoning (cognitive domain)
Competency 4: Skills (psychomotor domain)
Competency 5: Contextual Application/ Synthesis (combination of all three)
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<tr>
<th>PESDF Action-Plan</th>
<th>This study</th>
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<td>Participatory and people-based approaches will be used for ESD promotion.</td>
<td>The life-philosophy of Vā promotes and is premised on people in community actively participating in ensuring continuity and survival of the whole.</td>
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<td>Appropriate cultural and sustainability elements will be incorporated into educational curriculum.</td>
<td>The guiding principles/values of Vā are culturally derived and comprise a holistic understanding of sustainability that offers pedagogical worthiness to curriculum reform.</td>
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<td>Pacific people and communities will be treated ethically in their participation in ESD activities</td>
<td>Vā is a people-centered philosophy that is founded on ethical and respectful engagement within/between communities, with the environment and the wider cosmos.</td>
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<td>Within the mix of ESD activities, priority will be given to a wide range of stakeholders emphasizing life-long education.</td>
<td>PIKS/IE is about life-long education</td>
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<td>In curriculum development and teacher education, ESD will be recognised as being principally about “learning by doing”.</td>
<td>PIKS/IE is based on a pedagogy of ‘learning by doing” – i.e. praxis</td>
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Despite their noble intentions the two policy documents (PESDF, 2006 and its Action Plan, 2008) essentially promote *learning-about* rather than *learning-for* and *learning-through* sustainability.
Core question: How can we transform teaching and learning in the Pacific so that we are promoting education for sustainability/SD and not education about sustainability?

Four intertwined concepts that emerged as critical to indigenous pedagogies:
Knowing, Learning, Belonging and Being

Relational spaces
The four key components are the primary ideas that have emerged through dialogue with participants in Samoa and Tonga about tapa, tattoo, education and sustainable education.

1. **Knowing** – ‘ilo/ iloa - knowing and knowledge (ontology/epistemology) Thaman (2009) ‘Ilo “refers to both the process of knowing and to knowledge itself” (p71)
2. **Learning** – ako/ A’o – teach(ing) and learn(ing)
3. **Being** – koau, o a’u - the self (personhood/identity) [Lit. “it is I” – or the self]
4. **Belonging** – kainga/ aiga – family, community (socio-cultural context/ civics)
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<th>Binary 1a: Knowing – learning (Learning to know/do)</th>
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<td>This binary is a curriculum strand that brings together the foundations of education (philosophy, sociology and psychology) in particular ontology, epistemology and pedagogy.</td>
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<th>Binary 1b: Being – belonging (Learning to be)</th>
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<td>The third binary reflects the positioning of the self within the broader socio-cultural context of the family unit (extended) and the wider community. It represents the negotiation of the individual sense of purpose and connectedness within society imbued with a sense of connectedness – as being part of an active, evolving whole system.</td>
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<th>Binary 2c: Learning – being (Learning to learn/unlearn/relearn)</th>
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<td>This binary culminates in the process of self-realization/actualization where the learner becomes (through the teaching – learning process) aware of his/her sense of self, strengths, weaknesses, abilities and is able to articulate a person sense of self-worth through active participation in the teaching and learning process.</td>
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<th>Binary 2d: Belonging – knowing (Learning to live together)</th>
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<td>The final binary is a follow on from the community standpoint, in which collective knowledge becomes accessible to the individual (insider knowledge) and through practice and experience, s/he is able to access a deeper level of knowledge as a privileged insider of the wider community.</td>
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Tuli – a transformative learning theory