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## ***TalanoaMālie he Tauhi fonua ‘a e Faiako ma‘a Tongá: Exploring talanoamālie as a new research method for Tongan teachers of ECE in the Kingdom of Tonga***

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### **Diving into the deep**

#### **Excerpt in Tongan language**


*‘I he Ta‘u Fakavaha‘a Pule‘anga ‘o e Ngaahi Lea Tu‘ufonua ‘a Mamani 2019, na‘e fakaafe mai ‘a e University of Helsinki ‘i Finland ke u kau atu he‘enau Konifelenisi pea mo e Indigenous Writing Retreat ‘i Gilbbsjávri. Ko e faingamālie eni na‘e ue‘i ai hoku lotó ke tohi e fakamatala ni ‘i he Writing Retreat ‘o tefito he‘ema a‘usia ‘a e ngaahi fakakaukau ke fatu ai ‘a e fuofua mata‘itohi fakafaiako, ko e Bachelor of Education (Tongan Early Childhood Teaching) ‘i Tonga, ‘i he lea faka-Tongá ‘i he 2016. Ko e polokalama eni ‘oku lolotonga ako‘i ‘i he Kolisi Fakafaiako ‘a Tongá, Tonga Institute of Education ke teu‘i ai ‘a e kau Faiako ma‘a Tonga ‘i he Ako Tokamu‘á. ‘Oku tefito e fakamatala ni ‘i he taha ‘o e ngaahi Pepa ‘oku ako‘i ‘i he ta‘u hono tolu, ‘oku ‘iloa ko e Tauhi fonua: TalanoaMālie.*

*‘Oku humaki mai he fakamatalá ni, ‘a e mahu‘inga ke fua ukufi e koloa ‘oku fakalotó ke fakamaama fakalaumālie ‘a e ngaahi fakakaukau, ko e tefito ia e koloa ‘a Tongá. ‘Oku uho ‘i he Laumālie ‘o e ‘Otuá, ‘a e akó, ngāué mo e me‘a kotoa, pea tonu leva ke tomu‘a a‘u e lotó ‘o e Tongá, ki he Laumālie pea toki fano atu e fakakaukau mo e ngāué. ‘I he‘ema vakai, ‘oku tefito he Laumālié, mo e koloa ‘o e tauhi, ‘a e ngāue fakafaiakó – kamata pe mei he tauhi ‘Otuá; tauhi e longa‘i fanāú; tauhi e vā mo e ngaahi mātu‘á, kaungā ngāue, mo e kakai he nofó; tauhi e taimi, tauhi e lekoōti, tauhi e melino, mo e tauhi maau e me‘a kotoa pē. ‘E ma‘u sīpinga e Faiako ma‘a Tongá mei he talanoamālie ‘o e Kilisimasí mo e kau tauhi sipi ‘o e fonuá, ki he tauhi fonuá,*

*Ko e konga si‘i pe ‘oku lava ke tatala he fakakoloa kuó ma a‘usiá, ka ‘oku mālie fau ‘a e anga hono tatala ‘a e ‘iló mo e potó ‘e he Laumālie ‘o e ‘Otuá kiate kimaua, ko e me‘a ke hulungia e lotó mo e ‘atamai‘ pea fakaola mei he lolotó.*

### **Introduction**

This narration relates the writers’ experiences of developing the conceptual framework and writing the educational programme called the Bachelor of Education (Tongan Early Childhood



Teaching), BEd(TECT). The opportunity to write the narration arose when the leading author visited Finland and Sápmi in 2019, the International Year of Indigenous Languages. The Indigenous Writing Retreat in Gilbbesjávri/Kilpisjarvi took me to another space for the first time where I saw the striking landscape of the mammoth mountains of Sápmi in the nation-states lands of Finland, Norway and Sweden, and the ‘deep waters’ that connects them. In there, I was affirmed in my spirit that the ocean of passion and love has to be deep to be able to relate and connect people, like the participants who attended the Writing Retreat. It is the depth of love, ‘*ofa*’ in the Tongan language, that connects Indigenous peoples with their Gods, lands and waters. We co-write this narration as a space for our spirit to immerse in ‘*ofa*’, deeply, just how the deep waters of the Pacific Ocean and the lakes and seas of Finland, Norway and Sweden hold for each other.

Setting up the new and groundbreaking degree of Early Childhood Education in Tongan language and culture, in the Kingdom of Tonga, is an innovative practice, or put simply, a work that decolonizes and counters deficit thinking in the education of Tongan peoples in the homeland. The degree prepares Tongan students to teach in early childhood settings throughout the Kingdom. To accomplish this, a deliberate decision has been made by the Tongan Government to write an original, visionary conceptual framework and programme structure in the vernacular. While the work is transformative, it is also deeply spiritual, insightful, and highly intellectual.


The conceptual framework and programme structure of the new Bachelor of Education (Tongan Early Childhood Teaching), BEd(TECT) is called the *FatuManongi ‘o e Loto’iTongá & Fakamonū ‘o Tongá*. Conceptually, *FatuManongi ‘o e Loto’iTonga* frames the intellectual ideas, spiritual knowledge, languages, and specific knowledges of Tongan people and *Fakamonū ‘o Tonga* constructs the framework of all works and practices, that is, the application of ideas to practices in the field. There are twenty-one (21) papers developed in the programme structure and six of them are innovative papers which we use to go beyond the ideas pertaining to Early Childhood Education. Since many Tongan concepts do not have equivalents in the English language they are not easily translated into English and the meanings are often lost in the translation. What is provided here are some English terms which provide some windows through which to visualise the ideas in the papers.

In developing the innovative papers of the Programme, two concepts, *Fungani* [Above all] and *Tauhi Fonua* [Protection and guardianship of peoples' values, languages and beliefs] are used to conceptualise the six papers, with three papers under each concept. With the concept of *Fungani*, the first year paper is called *Koloa 'a Tonga* (Virtues and Richness of Tonga), *Fakakoloa 'o Tonga* [Enriching Tonga from within] in the second year, and *Tofi'a Koloa'ia* [Inheritance in abundance] in the third year. The three papers under *Tauhi Fonua* are called *Nofo melino* [Peaceful co-existence] in the first year, *Talatalanoa* [Critical Spirit, Thinking, and Dialogue] in the second year, and *TalanoaMālie* (Good Tidings) in the third year. They offer a range of perspectives and in-depth understanding of *loto'i Tonga* [the identities of Tongan people].

The writers of this narration who are also the writers of the conceptual framework and all the papers of the programme structure including the six innovative papers, use the metaphor of 'diving into the deep' to discuss the spiritual knowledge and depth they experienced and drew upon in the thinking and writing process. We take one of the papers, *Tauhi Fonua: TalanoaMālie* to demonstrate some of the ideas, the wisdoms of *tauhi fonua*, guardianship of people, women and children and provide in-sights into *talanoamālie*, spiritual-led guardianship of people. In addition, the paper offers ideas for conceptualising *talanoamālie* as a new and enriching research method in education.

### **A Tongan metaphor of moana loloto**

The Kingdom of Tonga with its numerous islands is situated in the Pacific Ocean. The vast ocean is known to Tongan people as *moana loloto* [deep waters]. The Indigenous Māori of Aotearoa refer to this ocean as Te Moana Nui A Kiwa [deep waters belonging to Kiwa, a Māori chief]. We use the metaphor *moana loloto* to refer to the place where Tonga islands, our home, are located in the world and also as a reference to a source of knowledge. Furthermore, *moana loloto* is conceptualised as spiritual depth called 'ofa, aroha, passion, and love. The experience of a spiritual-led transformation is thus a change from within the heart, where it is said to be overflowing with 'ofa and passion. The metaphor, diving into the deep, is a reference to experiencing 'ofa, aroha, passion and love upon a transformation from within. The writers acknowledge that talk like this may be beyond people's mental comprehension if they do not acknowledge the power of the Spirit and spiritual knowledge.



The invitation to develop the conceptual framework for the new Bachelor of Education in Tonga Early Childhood Teaching in the Kingdom is a significant moment in history. The work has involved reaching a *moana loloto*, depth, where the writers have to experience ‘*ofa*’ that fills their hearts with ‘*ofa*’, in coming to know the values and meanings of ‘*ofa*’, and, to understand the ideas and knowledge that are required for original, intellectual work.

The Kingdom’s dictum, *Ko e ‘Otua mo Tonga ko hoku Tofi’a*, [God and Tonga are my inheritance] is an example of a *moana loloto*. Here, it is a metaphorical ocean in which diving into the deep is possible. The dictum, thus, is a source of spiritual wisdom, knowledge and ideas for the conceptual framework. In the writing process, the writers ask the questions: How do Tonga people relate with God? What is the knowledge of this relationship? These questions enable the writers to deepen their thinking about the Tongan cultural and social constructs of *loto‘iTonga*, Tongan identities, *fonua koloa’ia* [living in abundance], *tauhi*, [guardianship], *tauhi kakai* [leadership], *ako* [to learn and teach], *‘ilo* [knowledge], *poto* [application of knowledge for the benefit of the collective], *mālie* [spirit of transformation] and *māfana* transformative [energy] among many other concepts. Furthermore, if Tongan people (men, women, and children) are to inherit God and Tonga, then, they must become heirs to both the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Tonga. In Tonga, heirs or rightful heirs are the people who inherit land. Metaphorically speaking, the dictum allows all people of Tonga to claim their inheritance.

Diving into the deep enables the writers to experience spiritual knowledge, to become insightful so as to discern the deficits, and the hindrances to be educated. There was no time for impediments, only the liberty to think creatively. Furthermore, the writers have had to be courageous, to think differently as ‘evidence’ of an informed perspective that understands decolonisation and oppression. It felt like there is nothing to fear or doubt.

Writing in the vernacular is ‘evidence’ of decolonising the heart and mind. In the writing process, there were many times where the words and phrases just came. Re-reading some of the papers that we wrote for the degree brought a lot of smiles when we could not believe the great sentences and expressions, right there before our eyes, in print! The depth of thinking, the wisdoms, and ideas proposed are delightful when unpacked. The exercise has been one of

unpacking the contexts and meanings through questioning Tongan lived experiences and what has been normalised or taken for granted.

Working tirelessly becomes a new norm where the writers are energized through *talatalanoa*, [critical discussions] and on-going writing. The writers' spirits soar with an overflowing of energy together with a kind of power to recall, rethink and re-imagine a new Tonga with children, parents and teachers who truly understand their spiritual and cultural identities. There was tremendous energy in the duration of the process. That energy was always experienced by the colleagues in the Tonga Institute of Education, and they often described the lead writer as a person who is inspirational and highly energized.

The poetry and lyrics of church hymns are also sources of spiritual knowledge which the writers often drew upon for in-depth insights of the spirit in transforming people's lives. The well-known Hymn (number 114) (Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, 1826) in the Tongan Methodist Church is an example of how the people's thinking are transformed by the powerful usage of Tongan language. Tongan people across the world sing this hymn. The most spectacular performance of the hymn was televised during the Rugby League World Cup tournament that was played out in New Zealand in 2017. The singing of hymns at the rugby sport fields has influenced the way the world thinks about the value of the Tongan supporters. What we have is the spirit of *'ofa* for our rugby team and the supporters which translates through singing our hymns and drawing ourselves in big crowds that fill the rugby space.

The text for this hymn says:

'Eiki ko e 'ofa 'a'au,

Ko e moana loloto


Pea ngalo hifo ki ai

'Eku ngaahi angahia

Pea kuo 'ufi'ufi

'Eku kovi kotoa pe.

Literally translated as God Almighty, whose love is deep and profound where all my wrongdoings are being sunk and all my troubles have been covered.



Much of what we are saying, here, reflects the experience of diving into the deep, a kind of *moana loloto* which we believe is a spiritual-led transformation from within. The title of the late ‘Epeli Hau‘ofa’s collection of work entitled, “We are the ocean” (Hau‘ofa 2008) is an endorsement of the concept of *moana loloto*. Like the ocean is the spirit of greatness upon which the spirit of the people is enlivened, and in the Spirit of ‘Ofa, people are transformed in profound and connected ways. These are the profound wisdoms whereby the writers have developed the conceptual framework and the contents of the papers.

### **Tauhi Fonua: re-positioning a new role and meaning for Tongan teachers**

The expression, *tauhi fonua* is derived from Tongan language and culture and is comprised of the verb, *tauhi* which means to tend, to care, to guard, to look after, to attend to, to keep inviolate, to carry out a person’s duty, to serve, to be faithful to, to take possession, to preserve, to observe. *Fonua* has many inter-related meanings. It refers to the wholeness of God, king and country. In everyday talk, *fonua* refers to dry land, deep waters, the cosmos and the underworld. Culturally, *fonua* refers to the placenta, the land on which we dwell, and also the burial ground. *Fonua* is conceptualised as a concept of abundance (Manu‘atu 2004, 2019).

So *tauhi fonua* literally means the work of caring for and guarding the *fonua*. In the hierarchical structure of the Kingdom, the work of *tauhi fonua* is collective (Tu‘itahi 2009). The label, *ha‘a tauhi fonua* is specific and thus refers to clusters of *tangata*, men who are guardians of their particular space and place of the land. The men are actually fathers, uncles, grandfathers, ancestors, and include the nobles. Like the other Indigenous cultures in the Pacific and Aotearoa, *tangata* refers to both men and women. The Tongan term, *to‘utangata* refers to generations regardless of the gender and *tauhi fonua* means a living spirit and values that are moved through the *to‘utangata*. There are the ethics of practice for *tauhi fonua* and are informed by spiritual and cultural knowledge of *tauhi ‘Otua* [spiritual] relationships expressed as *loto tō*, *loto faka‘apa‘apa* and *loto mamahi‘ime‘a*, *tauhi kakai* [leadership], *tauhi fa‘ē mo e fānau* [caring for mothers and children, being faithful to women and wives], *tauhi vaha‘a ngatae* [unaltered relationships with the neighbours, God, King, and country or unbroken duties to serve the kāinga, community].




In the context of *tauhi fonua*, the women represent the *fonua* and the men are tasked with the role of *tauhi*, guardianship. The relationship of men and women is linked to the story of *kava* [*Piper myhysticum*] and the connection provides a spiritual meaning to the positioning of men and women in the evolution of Tongan society. In Tongan oral history, the *kava* plant grew out of the body of a woman who was killed and baked by her parents for the Tu'i Tonga [the King] at an island called 'Eueiki in the Tonga group. When the King understood what happened, he ordered them to bury the body. Two plants grew from her grave, *kava* at her head and, sugarcane at her feet. From that time, *kava* has been ordered by the King to be used as a ceremonial drink, such as, the *Taumafa kava*, the King's kava circle of Land, Culture, Power and Politics where the social hierarchy are ranked through the seating and the order of serving.

The *kava* story provides a Tongan perspective of the significance of women and their place in society. The *kava*, body of women, provides a spiritual meaning of land that is profound and deep like *moana loloto*. Land, like women, is not to be objectified, exploited, or cut up for sale; rather, women and land are to be loved, shown peace and kindness, cared for, and protected. Women ought to understand the spiritual basis of the knowledge that provides their meaning and significance. There is no stronger ground upon which to fight the social, economic, and political issues Tongan women face. The way the world is treating both land and women and girls is deprived of spiritual wisdom and know-how.

*Tauhi fonua* is work for all *kakai Tonga* [Tongan people] and, therefore, is inclusive of women; although, the cultural reference to *tauhi fonua* has been configured in the domain of men for generations (Tu'itahi 2009). The realities of collective living that face both men and women, today, are indeed central to the experiences that are unpacked, questioned, and require rethinking for transforming teaching and learning for the better in the Bachelor of Education degree (Tongan Early Childhood Teaching).

Over time, the meaning of *Tauhi Fonua* has changed. The new degree recognises *Tauhi Fonua* as central to teaching teachers and the wider population about ethics, the spiritual wisdoms, and in-depth knowledge pertinent to understanding Tongan people, their homes, and their place in the world. In other words, *Tauhi Fonua* is reconceptualised and teachers of early childhood and young children are re-positioned in their roles and responsibilities to enrich their knowledge and their lives.





So, diving into the deep is intellectual work where creative and original thinking are combined to develop approaches to meaning-making for teachers as *tauhi fonua*. *Tauhi fonua* will now require a spiritual as well as conceptual framework where they learn to rethink and refresh ways of being and doing in new roles and responsibilities. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the ways of *tauhi fonua* today. Suffice to say that the idea of the narration, *Tauhi Fonua: Talanoa Mālie* allows the men and women teachers to decolonise their hearts and minds and to be creative in unpacking the underlying values and qualities useful to re-think, re-create and re-imagine their purpose, and place, in the work of *tauhi fonua*, in the Kingdom, in the twenty first century.

Having said this, there are questions pertaining to *tauhi fonua* that are worthwhile to explore and extrapolate, such as the ways of researching knowledge of colonised people to inform their ways of loving, caring, and guarding people and land. *Talanoa Mālie* is helpful in developing a method of re-researching spiritual wisdoms to inform the the teachers' new role of *tauhi fonua*.

*Talanoamālie*: . . . Fear not, Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people (the Christmas story according to Luke 2: 8 – 20) (The Holy Bible in Tongan 1966)

Currently, in the field of educational research, *talanoa* [to talk, the talk, talking, storying, the story] is a developing research methodology with many different methods such as *pōtalanoa* [open conversation], *talatalanoa* [on-going dialogue, critical dialogue], *talanoa māfana* [talking from the heart] *talanoa tatala* [analytical talk], *fokotu'u talanoa* [talking to initiate], *fakatalanoa* [starting up a conversation], *fakataufolofola* [talking with the king], *feme'a'aki* [talking with chiefs and nobles], to name a few. There is an emerging number of Tongan academics who are developing the *talanoa* methods and methodology. This narration offers another method known as *talanoamālie*.


In Tongan language and culture, *talanoa* means to talk, to tell stories, to relate experiences, to talk about. As a noun, *talanoa* refers to the talk, the story, the conversation, a tale. A good *talanoa* in Tongan culture is called *talanoa mālie*. *Mālie* means good, pleasing, pleasant, interesting, advantageous, helpful, splendid, fine, commendable, admirable, or very satisfactory. In conceptualising *mālie*, it can be talked about as a spiritual wisdom that is experienced in the heart (Manu'atu 2000). When a person experiences *mālie*, as in *talanoamālie*, the words and meaning touch the heart and inspire the person. *Mālie* has power

to move and transform people from within. There is another Tongan concept that goes with *mālie*, known as *māfana* [a spiritual warmth] that enables and moves a person to act. *Mālie* and *māfana* are enablers of transformation in the heart, mind, and body of Tongan people (ibid, p. 39). This discussion considers the underlying spiritual meaning in *talanoamālie* as a central tenet in proposing talanoamalie as a new research method in researching Indigenous and spiritual knowledge.

The term *talanoamālie* appears in the Gospel of St Luke 2: 10 as a translation for the expression, ‘good tidings’. In the history of Christmas, the angel said to the shepherds, “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people”. The writers then draw upon this biblical text to provide insights into *talanoamālie*; also, inspiration for rethinking a new research method meaningful for *tauhi fonua* teachers, to research their Indigenous and spiritual knowledge. In our view, there may be values and ideas that keepers and guardians in different cultures might share or have in common (Manu’atu & Kepa 2005).

The writers, then, consider the story of Christmas, the birth of Christ, the Lord as a *moana loloto*. To unpack the wisdoms of the story would require a different frame, since the story is spiritual and involves God and human beings (represented by the shepherds). To us, this frame is called *talanoamālie* and *mālie* provides the spiritual knowledge to understand the in-depth meaning of the story and history of Christmas. In Tongan language, *mālie* is a philosophy (Manu’atu 2016) and *talanoa*, together with the different kinds of *talanoa* that are mentioned, above all share the philosophy of *mālie*. So, the depth of the story of Christmas as we alluded to in the Gospel of Luke is *mālie*, and that *mālie* can be experienced if and when the readers ‘dive into the deep’ to understand the spiritual meanings.

In the new degree, the writers have to be creative to come up with new approaches to thinking. In this case, the writers think creatively when considering *talanoamālie* as a possible research method, by picking up the ways (methods) of conveying wisdoms and values throughout the story. The unpacking of the *talanoa* of Christmas reveals the wisdom of ‘*ofa*, love and passion as the underpinning value and thus provide the meaning of Christmas. So, the *mālie* of the *talanoa* of Christmas lies in the method(s) of showing God’s unconditional love and passion to all people.



Throughout the story of Christmas, love as a value is revealed in different ways. For example, at the beginning of the story, love is shown to the shepherds as light, as glory of God. Love is the assurance through the words of the angels to the shepherds not to be afraid. Love is great joy and that is assured by the angel that the message of great joy is for all. Love is shown as Saviour, and the new born baby is the Saviour. Love is shown through a collective and that is the multitude of the heavenly host joining the angel and celebrating the good tidings. Love is shown as guidance and the shepherds were guided by the star so that they are not lost. Through love, there is no delay. Love is shown as prompt action by the shepherd that without delay they seek to find out what the angel has told them. Love is happiness and that is shown by the stories the shepherds told the world about what they have heard, seen, and experienced. Love is truth and the true story of Christmas is about God's love to all people. For Mary, love is shown as an act contemplating where she kept all the things she hears and ponders upon them. Love is critical, and the story of Christmas is critical of our world without love.

In brief, the wisdoms in the story can be used to inform the *talanoamālie* method. The values are made clear. Like the shepherds, the researchers must be enlightened and seek to understand and affirm the purpose of the research, listen well, and talk among themselves to reaffirm their shared meaning of what they have been told. The method as clear guidance is important to guide the researchers to the right place and to find what they are looking for. The research method also enables the researchers to relate the findings to other people at home and abroad. The method of *talanoamālie* is critical contemplation of what the researchers see, hear, believe, observe, and follow.

In closing, the narration has been a dive into the deep. A new research method, such as *talanoamālie*, opens up new perspectives to unravel the unequal power relations in societies so that *mālie* and *māfana* change the hearts of the leaders, teachers, and people who advocate for transformative education for Tongans in the Kingdom.

We think that Indigenous peoples out there are also experiencing tasks and activities where they are required to decolonise their ways of being and thinking. Furthermore, Indigenous peoples who are engaged in research today may not continue in their familiar ways, but rather seek to 'dive into the deep' for new thinking and knowledge just as *tauhi fonua* in Tonga requires extensive spiritual knowledge, wisdoms, fresh perspectives of the land, people and

practices that are beneficial for all people. In the new degree, the research method allows the spirit of the researchers (teachers) to be enlightened by the glory of God. What would enlighten or inform the spirit of Indigenous scholars and researchers today? Perhaps the spirit of the Indigenous Writing Retreat in Gilbbesjávri / Kilpisjärvi offers some ideas for the researchers to reach some depth in order for their work to make an impact.

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