TĀ-VĀ KĀINGA, TIME-SPACE RELATIONSHIPS THEORY OF REALITY AND TONGAN STUDENTS JOURNEY TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN NEW ZEALAND TERTIARY EDUCATION

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Tongan students' academic achievement results when the different contexts of *kāinga tā-vā,* time-space relationships intersect or interact disharmoniously or harmoniously within and between the Tongan and Western cultures, especially between the students and the bureaucracy *(pule'anga),* their families *(fāmili)*, church (*siasi*), and wider group (their *fonua/kāinga*). Furthermore, inflexibility or flexibility within the two cultural relationships in terms of *tā* (time) and *vā* (space) by all parties could release social tensions, which can, if left to their own devices, provide obstacles to critical learning, or by mediating them through sustained harmony, can consequently enhance academic achievement. Supporting a two–way process, which allows Tongan students to move freely yet carefully within the two cultures, especially if they understand how varying senses of tā and vā are manifested in tensional kāinga relationships and meanings within their learning environments, enhance educational achievement.

Introduction

HŪFANGA PROFESSOR MĀHINA (19 AUGUST 2005), A TONGAN ACADEMIC, introduced me to the "*Tā-Vā*, Time-Space Theory of Reality" when I explored the views of twenty-five Tongan-born participants on the sociocultural aspects that impact on their academic achievement in New Zealand

tertiary education. My interest in the tā-vā, (time-space) theory of reality (see Ka'ili 2008; Māhina 2008) recommended to use it as one of the theoretical frameworks or lens to interpret the Tongan students' intercultural learning experiences at two levels of reality: the students' individual and social/global realities. The students' individual realities include their individual attitudes and choices based on their cultural worldviews that impact on their academic achievement. The students' social/global realities include the trends of postmodernism,[1] biculturalism,[2] multiculturalism,[3] modernization and globalization,[4] development and governance, and persistance and change that are beyond the students' control. The data interpretation was conducted through exploring the students' universal, group and personal cultures and the manifestation of tā-vā time-space within the relationships between the Tongan students and their supporters in the bureaucracy, their families, churches, and the wider group (*kāinga*). The significance of the extension of the tā-vā time-space theory of reality in this context is to endorse the addition of kāinga relationship to what I refer to as tā-vā kāinga time-space relationship theory of reality' that arises from my research. This is because a thorough understanding of the discourse of *kāinga* in its multifarious but conflicting meanings and relationships at various levels is seen to be very important for Tongan students' academic achievement.

The Tā-Vā Time-Space Theory of Reality

Māhina (2008) and leading proponents of the tā-vā, time-space, theory of reality (for example, see Ka'ili, 2008 among others) similar to other Tongan researchers, such as Thaman (1988, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2002), Taufe'ulungaki (2000, 2002, 2003), Mafile'o (2005), Manu'atu (2000a), Koloto (2003b), and Vaioleti (2001, 2003, 2006), believed that the recognition and use of a Tongan worldview in education enhance Tongan students' academic achievement. Most of the research in Tongan education deals with the "what is education", whereas the "what does of education" deals with utility (function) of education. Māhina (2008) and Thaman (1988) argue that the quality of education is more important than the utility of education. The push for the recognition and utilization of Tongan culture and language in the curriculum has been popularised by Thaman (1988, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2002), in the field of education. Finau and Finau (2006) in the field of health have a "cultural democracy" view stating the notion that Tongan education is predominantly Western in form, content, and function. Māhina explains that:

> In Tonga we emphasize the collective more than the individual while in the West generally speaking they emphasise the individual more than the collective and this impacts on education and how we make use of that reality, the reality of education. All of us, from different cultures are here to do education in just one country, New Zealand (one reality). We approach education from different cultures because we were brought up in different ways where we organise time and space differently ('O. Māhina, pers. comm., August 19, 2005).

This means that Tongans organize time and space differently from other cultures, which can affect their social relationships in all educational contexts. The tā-vā theory of reality advances a view that is based on the ontological (philosophy of existence) and epistemological (philosophy of mind) organization of time and space (Māhina, 2008; Māhina, Ka'ili, and Ka'ili 2008). Ontologically, Māhina (2008) suggests that tā and vā are the common medium of all things that exist, in a single level of reality, that is, nature, mind, and society. Epistemologically, he also believes that time and space are arranged differently within and across cultures (Ka'ili, 2008; Māhina, 2008). For example, New Zealand is one way of arranging tā and vā (epistemological), and Tonga is another way of arranging tā and vā (epistemolgical). Tongans living in New Zealand share New Zealand as one reality, and we create and recreate our lives in New Zealand in our own respective cultural ways (ontological dimension of time and space). This implies that Tongan students' social–cultural realities are based on how they culturally relate to tā and vā in contemporary New Zealand. Therefore, the problems for Tongan students in tertiary education stem from these cultural differences in tā-vā time-space relationships between the Tongan and New Zealand cultures. Hence, the Tā-Vā Time-Space Theory of Reality makes sense of why Tongan students from a culture that is predominantly plural, collectivistic, holistic, and circular in character struggled in a New Zealand Western education system, dictated by a dominant culture that is generally linear, individualistic, singular, technological, and analytical in nature (Mahina, 2008).

However, while using the tā-vā time-space theory of reality in the process of data analysis in my research, the concept of kāinga "meanings" and "relationships" emerged very strongly throughout. Therefore, I believe that an extension of the tā-vā time-space theory of reality to embrace kāinga deemed fitting on a number of distinct yet related levels in this educational context. First I will discuss the relevant concepts of tā, vā, and tā-vā kāinga relationships, then the methods used for data collection, and finally the findings of this research.

The Significance of the Extension of the Tā-Vā Theory of Reality into Tā-Vā Kāinga Theory of Reality

Tā (Time)

Callender and Edney (2001), believed that time is as much a mystery now as it was for St. Augustine in AD354–430 where science and philosophy have largely contributed to it, stating that time might be absolute, relational, conventional, tensed or tense less, or unreal. Einstein (1938 cited in Siegfried, 2008) believed that time is illusionary where the separation between past, present, and future is only an illusion. Anderson (2007) and Hawking (1988) believed that time (and space) is inseparable entities in that space is three dimensional (length—*lōlōa;* and width—*maokupu/fālahi;* height/depth—*māʻolunga/loloto*) and time is the fourth dimension. That is, typically three spatial dimensions (length, width, height) and one temporal dimension (time) are required. They argued that in space-time, a coordinate grid that spans the 3 + 1 dimensions locates events (rather than just points in space), that is, time is added as another dimension to the coordinate grid. This way the coordinates specify where and when events occur. They took the image of time (and space) to be the ontological reality. This is where time is one dimension and space is three dimensions (Māhina, 2008). Nevertheless, time is, in one instance, associated with social activities and is thought to be socially constructed (Birth 2004; Lippincott, Eco, and Gombrich 1999; Mackenzie, 1997). This is where, epistemologically, time (and space) are organized differently across cultures. Therefore, "not all cultures define or experience time in the same way, [because] nearly every major culture on Earth seems to have a unique understanding of what time is" (Lippincott, Eco and Gombrich 1999, 17). Jonsson (1999) states that people believe they are becoming less able to control their time-keeping because human creativity increasingly has to adjust to the demands of machinery and technology. Furthermore, he stated that Western capitalist democracy and scientific technological culture have been largely responsible for the shift in Western sense of time and space toward a singular, techno-teleological, individualistic, analytical, and linear mode of living. The Western relationship with time is the keystone in the structure of human lives. Jonsson (1999, 28) also suggests that:

> In the past, time was sovereign in nature. Its rule was a wonderful way of preventing disorderly events. Nowadays, it is as though the ordering function of time has been cancelled out by demands

that almost everything should happen simultaneously. The invisible pressure, which used to sort the temporary from the lasting, has lost its effectiveness. . . . Our attempts to speculate about the distant future seem irrelevant now, because the distance in fact seems so short (28).

That is, the world is becoming very complex and busy, and Western concept of time (clock time) is becoming very important (Peace 2001). This Western concept of time (clock time) is problematic for the Tongan students in their struggled within the Western educational context that differs from their own Tongan physical, mental, social reality.

In the Tongan language, time according to Kaʻili (2008) tā means to beat, to mark, to form, or to perform as in the heart beat marks the time, rhythm, pace, and frequency of the pulse; *tā nafa* (beating drum), rhythmic beating of drums that is marking time through drum beats; and *tā sīpinga* (setting examples), marking time through social acts or behavior for others to follow. The indivisibility of tā and vā, where the former is the "definer" of the latter, such tā nafa (tā, time; *nafa*, space, that is, tā-vā, time-space), and tā sīpinga (tā, time; *sīpinga*, space, that is tā-vā, time-space), which is pointing to their existence, as well as to their being four-sided dimensionality (Māhina, 2008; Kaʻili, 2008). Tongans as Pacific people are renowned for doing things late or dragging and prolonging occasions according to clock/Western time. And the expression Pacific Time or Tongan Time *(taimi faka–Tonga)* is alluded to in any problem with time, especially when things are late according to Western time (Bain 1967, 1993; Māhina 2004a). Nevertheless, Tongan people have their own perception of time, where:

> [I]n a circular style, people walk forward into the past, and walk backward into the future, both in the present, where the seemingly fixed past and elusively, yet-to-take-place future are constantly mediated in the conflicting, ever-changing present. . . . It is paradoxically yet philosophically, like looking forward into the past, and looking backward into the future. . . . [T]his is reflected in Tongan thinking which allegorically characterises the past as *onoʻaho* (age-of-light) and present as *onopō* (age-of-darkness), pointing to the respective actual, yet opposing, states of enlightenment and ignorance (Māhina 2008, 79).

There is also a Tongan perception about *ako* (educating/schooling or formal education) and time whereby it is believed there is a time to study or attend formal schooling. That is, people can only go to school (formal

education) when they are still young and single. Once they get married, then they need to stay home and look after their families. The many responsibilities expected of an adult Tongan toward their kāinga mean that they would not have enough time to study successfully. This attitude about only going to school or formal education while one is still single has changed, and today married people are going back to formal education/schooling again to better themselves. However, some of these students can find it difficult to complete their courses because they have their family commitments on top of their study. For many Tongans, this justifies the belief that it is better to finish tertiary education before one gets married because Tongan students can achieve better when they do not have too many responsibilities and cultural obligations *(fatongia)*. This is a conflict between Western, linear and Tongan, cyclic ways of thinking, that was introduced by Western contact with islands of the Pacific (including Tonga).

Vā (Space)

Space is the boundless, three-dimensional extent in which objects and events occur and have relative position and direction (Richardson and Jensen 2003). Rightly three dimensional, in the case of Tonga: lōloa (length); māʻolunga/loloto (height/depth); and maokupu/fālahi (width), collectively referred to as *uho* (content). In spatial practice with reference to places there is a:

> relationship of local and global; the re-presentation of that relationship; actions and signs; the trivialised spaces of everyday life; and, in opposition to these last, spaces made special by symbolic means as desirable or undesirable, benevolent or malevolent, sanctioned or forbidden to particular groups (Lefebvre 1974 cited in Richardson and Jensen (2003, 10).

Isaac Newton (1953, 1968) viewed space as absolute. The philosopher, Gottfried Leibniz (1987) believed that space was a collection of relations between objects, given by their distance and direction from one another in the world. Similarly, Bourdieu (1991, 230) stated that agents or groups of agents in the social world are "defined by their *relative positions* in space [where] each of them is confined to a position or a precise class of neighbouring positions." Therefore, even in Western constructions, space is constructed in different ways by different people (Richardson and Jensen 2003).

However, vā space in the Tongan language means the "distance between [or] distance apart; [or] attitude, feeling [or] relationship, towards each other"

(Churchward, 1959, 528). This definition shows that space is related to people's physical and social place with respect to one another and is "not isolated and bounded entities, but material and symbolic constructions that work as meaningful and practical settings for social actions because of their relations to other spaces and places" (Richardson and Jensen 2003, 11). Therefore, the concept of space is connected to relationships. In terms of the social context, according to Ka'ili (2008: 16–17):

> *Vā* is a space that is formed through the mutual relations between persons or groups, and it is also an indicator of the quality of the relationships [where] *vālelei* refers to harmonious and beautiful social space between people, and *vātamaki* signifies a disharmonious social space between people [italics added].

The words *vālelei* and *vātamaki/vākovi* are indivisibly made up of vā (space) and tā (time); for example, vā (space) and *lelei* (good) and vā (space) and *tamaki/kovi* (bad) are temporally defining a certain vā (space), deemed as "good" and "bad", respectively. Vā, as in keeping good relationships among the Tongan people, is very important. It is important for Tongan students to understand how to keep their vā space with their *fāmili, siasi, pule'anga*, and *fonua* so that they vālelei (have good relationship) all the time which could enhance support for their education.

Kāinga (Relationship)

Relationship when translated into Tongan means kāinga;[5] *fetu'utaki*;[6] *fetu'utaki'anga*;[7] *kaunga*;[8] *kaungā*;[9] vā;[10] or *vaha'a*;[11] *fekau'aki*;[12] *felāve'i*;[13] *fekāinga'aki*;[14] or *toto*[15] as in relative (Churchward 1959, 753). Some additional words that carry relationship connotation are *fe'ofa'aki*;[16] *fekitengaki*;[17] *fevahevahe'aki*;[18] *fefua'aki*;[19] *fetoli'aki*;[20] *feveitokai'aki or fevatoka'iaki*;[21] *fefalala'aki*;[22] *fetokoni'aki*;[23] *fefaka'apa'apa'aki*;[24] *fengāue'aki*;[25] *fe'aveaki*;[26] *femelino'aki*;[27] *fe'alu'aki*;[28] and so on. Because I am Tongan and my research was on Tongan students, it is essential to theorize in Tongan cultural patterns of thinking so the word kāinga meaning relationship—and a common term for people to whom one is related is also kāinga—is fitting in this discussion. This is because the Tongan society and civilization is based on Tongan relationships within their kāinga (Bain 1967, 1993; Blamires 1939). Kāinga as a Tongan construct of relationship is based on a communal extended lifestyle and is uniquely different from the Western construct of relationship; therefore, it is fundamental to understanding Tongan students' academic achievement (Blamires 1939; Bott 1982; Campbell 1992; 2001; Crane 1978).

The importance and impact of relationships in this research on Tongan students' academic achievement in New Zealand tertiary education resonates with the literature on Pacific and Tongan students in New Zealand by researchers such as Anae et al. (2002), Bishop and Berryman (2006), Coxon et al. (2002), Fletcher and et al. (2009), Fusitu'a (1992), Fusitu'a and Coxon (1998), Kalavite and Hoogland (2005), and Manu'atu (2000b). This foregoing research strongly indicated that the normal life of the Tongans and Pacific Islanders, more widely, is their cultural reciprocal roles in keeping good relationships among themselves through fatongia (Farmer 1976; Gailey 1987; Gifford 1985).

Fatongia is "fulfilling cultural obligations" and is a significant part of students' relationships with the bureaucracy, their families, church, and the wider group. Ka'ili (2008), for example, critiques collective, circular values mentioned above through the exchange of fatongia (social obligations) by means of *tauhivā* (keeping sociospatial relations), where conflicts are mediated or the lack of it can amount to either vālelei (good sociospatial relations) or vātamaki/vākovi (bad sociospatial relations). This means that it is difficult for them to achieve educationally because there is a mismatch between the ways they keep Tongan kāinga relationships and how they are required to keep kāinga relationships in the Western education system. This research found that kaīnga, relationships at different levels, are very important for Tongan students' academic achievement because people's lives are interwoven within their spiritual, social, and physical environments. Relationship, kāinga, therefore, is the core of the Tongan culture that amalgamates all aspects of their human existence.

Tā-Vā Kāinga Time-Space Relationship Theory of Reality

Epistemologically, tā-vā (time-space) is a boundless, four-dimensional continuum where everyone moves serially and sequentially from one stage to the next over time and space, through building upon and absorbing each preceding stage, which is thereafter reproduced throughout the joint influence of heredity and socialization (Wilson 1999). Sociologically, Kant (1929) described space and time as elements of a systematic framework that humans use to structure their experience; and Einstein and Infeld (1938), in their theory of general relativity proposed that space and time should be combined into a single construct known as spacetime, pointing toward the inseparability of time and space. Siegfried (2008) stated that nobody has ever noticed a place except at a time, or a time except at a place. In that sense, time and space are joined not because that is the way the world is, but because that is the only way that humans can comprehend it, ontologically in a single level of

reality (that is, the one and only reality in which we all live). Furthermore, in this postmodern world (after the modern age), the information network and the social network overlap and intertwine with time-space (Gotved 2006). Spaces and places are not isolated entities because they are material and symbolic constructions that work as meaningful and practical settings for social action. This is because of their relations to other spaces and places through time (Richardson and Jensen 2003).

The eminence of extending the Tā-Vā Theory of Reality into Tā-Vā Kāinga Theory of Reality (for example, see Ka'ili 2008; Māhina 2008) in this research on Tongan students academic achievement stem from five significant reasons. First, kāinga, which is a plural, collective, and communal tā-vā arrangement in the Tongan society, is a very important concept in the Tongan culture. This is because the overarching core value in the lives of Tongans is *mo'ui fakatokolahi* (living together in a cooperative lifestyle) and *fetokoni'aki* (help each other) where they *tauhi vā* (keep good relationships) toward each other among their kāinga (family or social relationships), through the cultural reciprocal roles of faifatongia (cultural obligations). Thus, the Tongan students are nurtured through a close knit extended family kāinga where they are mould to tauhi vā (keep good relationships) within the practice of the Tongan core values of fetokoni'aki, *toka'i,* and feveitokai'aki (cooperation, consensus and maintenance of good relationships); *'ofa*, *fe'ofo'ofani* or fe'ofa'aki (mutual love, caring, and generosity); faka'apa'apa or *fefaka'apa'apa'aki* (mutual respect); *fatongia,* faifatongia, *fua fatongia,* or *fua kavenga* (responsibilities and commitments to fulfilment of mutual prescribed obligations); *mamahi'i me'a* and *talangofua* (loyalty, commitment, and obedience); and *Falatōkilalo* (humility and generosity). These core values are the breath of Tongan society, in the homes, the churches and the schools. They were expected to live these core values and believed that commitment to them would benefit their kāinga. Therefore, for us Tongans, the goal for our education is to be able to help our kāinga. Education then, is a journey that suggests tauhi vā (keeping good relationships) and fetokoni'aki (helping each other) or *ngāue fakataha* (working together) through fulfilling certain fatongia (obligations) toward academic achievement for the collective benefit of everyone in the kāinga (extended family) (Wood 1943; Wood and Ellem 1977). This is an expression of collective/communal tā-vā which according to Māhina (2008), the purpose of education is to gain knowledge ('ilo) and that the higher the quality of knowledge the better you are in helping your kāinga.

Second, research to date suggests that Tongan tertiary students are trying to be successful in their learning in New Zealand, which has a different tā-vā (time-space) configuration to as Tongans in this contemporary age. This is where the Tongan students learn through the construction of knowledge

within their sociocultural contexts that is heavily based on their relationships within their kāinga. They are constructing and coconstructing knowledge within their sociocultural context or kāinga where they position themselves in multiple realities. This multiple positioning is where they operate in tertiary education and this has a profound impact on their achievement.

Third, some people understand that Tongan culture impacts on education, but fewer people understand that social relationships kāinga among the society are the focal point of Tongan culture that impact on students' academic achievement. None have stressed the importance of working within certain cultural limits of practicing cooperation to maximize academic success that my research on Tongan students has found. There is a certain tā-vā, time-space within the kāinga blood/kin relationships of which those involved need to be aware of. The important question that remained unanswered was, "What is the nature of the impact of kāinga relationships on academic achievement?"

Fourth, Tongan students' academic achievement in New Zealand tertiary education is vested in their capababilities to cope harmoniously within the interface of the Tongan and New Zealand cultures. The harmonious interface between the two cultures depends on Tongan students' judicious practice of keeping good relationships within their personal, group, and universal cultures, especially within their kāinga. When tā-vā kāinga, time-space relationships are in serenity with both cultures, they support Tongan students' academic achievement; but when they are not, they become constraints. This means that, although Tongans primarily engage in tauhi vā to create harmonious beauty, and experience feelings of warmth, joy, or honour as Ka'ili (2008) stated, if students and their supporters do not perform tauhi vā within the students' limits or boundaries with relationships to their studies, then it creates confusions and tensions that can jeopardize their education.

Finally, throughout my research on Tongan students, I have related Māhina's (2008) and Ka'ili's (2008) existing tā-vā time-space theory of reality to Tongan tertiary students' academic achievement in New Zealand, in a more practical way. This is by exploring the relationships kāinga between the Tongan students and their Tongan and non-Tongan supporters. My research has enriched this theory because it has attended to common and necessary relationships between Tongan students, their families, and non-Tongan professionals who create the context for their relationships (kāinga) in their New Zealand homeland.

These reasons are the rationale for the extension of the tā-vā time-space theory of reality to a new theory of tā-vā kāinga time-space relationship theory of reality unique to my study. This new theory gave meanings to the perceived social cultural aspects that impact on Tongan students' academic achievement in New Zealand tertiary education. These meanings are

discussed in the Research Results section, after the research methodology in the following section.

Research Methodology

Because culture counts in education, the theoretical framework, paradigm or "net that contains [my] epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003b, 33) are sociocultural with an orientation toward postmodernism within the Tongan framework of tā-vā (time-space) theory of reality.

The methodology used is described as Tongan, Pasifika, qualitative, phenomenological, ethnographic, and auto-ethnographic. It involves Tongans, as participants (phenomenological ethnography) and also includes the Tongan researcher's experiences as one of the participants (auto-ethnography). Therefore, although the research is driven by Tongan and Pasifika methodologies, it has also borrowed from Western methodologies of qualitative, phenomenological, and auto-ethnographical methodologies. Using both Tongan and Western methodologies was appropriate, as the Tongan participants are operating within a New Zealand context and this provided insights into the different cultures. The Tongan research methodologies are just emerging in academia and the significant works of Tongan researchers such as Thaman's (2002) model of *Kakala*';[29] Ka'ili's (2008) and Māhina's (2008), model of Tauhi Vā;[30] Manu'atu's (2000a), model of *Mālie–Māfana*;[31] Vaioleti's (2003, 2006) and Prescott's (2008) model of *Talanoa*,[32] were used and discussed in the research. In the same research on Tongan students, I also introduce a model of *Toungāue* (working together) as a contribution to Tongan research methodology (Kalavite 2010).

The research method for data generation in the research was basically talanoa, through semistructured and unstructured interviewing in a formal and informal situation. Formal talanoa is where a time and place is set for the particular talanoa to be conducted on a particular topic. Informal talanoa occurs when the topic under investigation has emerged from a talanoa, or the topic is initiated during a gathering that was not meant for the purpose of discussing the research topic. For example, a discussion at a birthday celebration or at a conference where the issues about the research topic emerged. The Tongan method of talanoa led the research but was anchored within the Western methods of semistructured and unstructured interviewing. In other words, talanoa worked alongside semi- and unstructured interviewing and was integral to the interviews (Kalavite, 2010). Talanoa is the preferred means of communication because it captures the traditions and protocols of Pacific islands including the Tongans (Prescott 2008). In Tonga, talanoa

literally means to talk or to tell stories or relate experiences (Churchward 1959). It is also "consistent with the conveyance of knowledge, stories, views and feelings both in the personal and formal sense" (Prescott 2008, 128). Using talanoa, which is a collective/communal expression of tā-vā as a Tongan research method, meant that the conversation with the participants was more meaningful. In particular when Tongan cultural protocol was followed as well as when Tongan language is being used for clarification of concepts and ideas. The experiences on the research topic were able to be comfortably shared without cultural impediments. During the talanoa, I tried to draw from participants' in-depth knowledge of factors about my research topic (Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight 2001; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2000; May 2001; Neuman 2000). However, the research methodology and methods of data generation informed my understanding on the extension of the tā-vā, time-space of reality into tā-vā kāinga, time-space relationship discussed in the following section of research results.

Research Results

My study found that, as Māhina (2008) argued, Tongan students' academic achievement is vested in their capabability to cope harmoniously at the interface of the Tongan and New Zealand cultures. What is unique to my study that adds to our knowledge is that, to cope harmoniously at the interface of these two cultures, relationships kāinga at different levels of the Tongan society are very important. The findings also give support to the position that a Tongan worldview, similar to other Pacific epistemologies, provides a relevant pathway for understanding Tongan students' academic achievement in New Zealand tertiary education (Mafileʻo, 2005). Therefore, the key points of the findings are expressed in three Tongan relationship metaphors of *fakatoukatea, moʻui fetokoniʻaki*, and *moʻui fakapotopoto* discussed in the following paragraphs.

Fakatoukatea in the context of this research refers to Tongan students who are skilful in both cultures; that is, the Tongan and the Western have become bicultural. Fakatoukatea also means "when two people or things are compatible in every way" (Māhina 2004b, 57). Mafileʻo (2005) also referred to fakatoukatea as the diversity of skills and knowledge across the Tongan and the *Pālangi* contexts. Diversities stimulate, challenge, and increase the range of possibilities and responses to enhance the intellectual enterprises (Stiehm 1994). Alternatively, although previous research has strongly proposed that Tongan students need to retain their Tongan cultural knowledge (group) for academic success, what emerged strongly in the findings that is unique to my research is that there is a need for Tongan students to understand the New

Zealand academic culture and other cultures (universal) to become bicultural so as to enhance their learning. One of the comments made by one of the participants with a doctoral degree who is a successful Tongan in academia with a doctoral degree said:

> In terms of western culture I came to New Zealand seeking for western knowledge and basically I did that. Everything I did at the university, there was hardly anything Tongan about the institution. Therefore, I had to learn the ways of interacting with other students in my class as well as my lecturers. Socially, like going out for dinner and developing my social skills that I required to learn to deal with that situation. The other thing is like talking in class, like class discussions I had to participate, study skills such as time management, computer skills and so on. These were not Tongan, and I think I need to acquire the skills necessary to survive in a tertiary institution.

Therefore, those who are fakatoukatea are harmoniously positioned within the interface of the Tongan and New Zealand culture where they *"Tā ki liku tā ki fanga"*[33] as they move fluidly within the interface of the two cultures using the best of both worlds for academic achievement. The Tongan students who appeared to be able to move fluidly between the two cultures said they found it easier to commit to their studies and be successful. Hence, a proposed way forward is for the Tongan students to be versatile, flexible, and do things efficiently. For example, for Tongan students to pass their courses, they have to be adaptable and multipurpose in terms of their time so that they could efficiently commit to their cultural obligations as well as commitment to their study. This could be done by just showing up at cultural events such as funeral, weddings, and so on for a short period of time and then leave to attend to their assignments. One of the parent participants stated that:

> Keeping good relationship is good but students have to understand that they have study commitments and they need to make time for it. It was the students themselves to make the decision because from my own experiences families and communities do not put that much pressure on students if they front up and explain why they could not attend certain occasions. So I think it is down to the individual to make their own choices. But yes it could be culture thing as not letting families and friends down and to keep good relationships and feeling obligated to our *kāinga*.

This means that students allow space for both events to be accomplished for their own benefit. There are also evidences of a wide generation gap between the students and their parents (Morton 1996, Morton Lee 2003, 2007), which is another dimension of tā-vā kāinga, time-space relationship to be critically considered. In terms of child-rearing practices, they are different in New Zealand from Tonga. New Zealand laws give children rights to leave home at a certain age. This acted as a constraint on parents pushing their children too hard to be successful in their studies for fear that they would leave home as soon as the law allowed. One of the parent participants' comments illustrate this point by saying that:

> Our parents here are totally lost. They cannot discipline their children; sometimes because of language barriers and sometimes because of children's rights. They just do not know what to do anymore because they cannot do what they used to do in the islands in terms of discipline. They are helpless.

This stated that the way that Tongans live in New Zealand makes it difficult for some of the parents to discipline their children. Therefore, it is very important for Tongan parents to have a sense of balance and be sensitive on what to do to discipline their children so that they can commit to their studies.

Mo'ui Fetokoni'aki is supportive livelihood. It is through mo'ui fetokoni'aki that Tongan students are taking their kāinga (pule'anga, fāmili, siasi, and fonua) with them during their academic journey. Mo'ui fetokoni'aki is the strength and core of the Tongan culture; it should be the basic asset to enhance Tongan students' academic achievement. Fetokoni'aki among the students' fāmili can help them to achieve if the fāmili work as a team (toungāue), even to the extent of sharing students' academic work such as typing up assignments to allow them time to complete their work (Koloto 2003a). One twenty-eight-year-old male student participant commented on how he completed his degree with this type of support from his family. Here is his reflection on what happened:

> My final semester was very tough and I could not have made it without the help of my family. Something had gone very wrong during the semester and I realised that I had less than two months to complete eight assignments [45 days to be exact], for the four courses that I took. I told my family that I had a major problem so all of them decided to help. As soon as I had permission from my lecturers to hand in my assignments late, tasks were quickly allocated amongst

all the members of my family: My brother who was also a university student helped looking for information both in the library and the internet: My dad did all the household chores while my mother helped in discussing my assignments, giving me ideas of what I should write about: My wife typed my assignments and she helped my mother in proofreading: What I did was reading, thinking, and putting my thinking down on paper. I realised that this part of my study was like a race against time. I knew what I should put down on paper but I did not have the time to do it so the help of my family got me to beat the time. Time was everything in this situation. I needed time to look for information, time to read and write my thoughts, time for personal tasks, time to rest when I was mentally tired, and all that. However, this team work not only saved a lot of time but enabled me to hand in all my assignments, passed my courses and graduated. I owe this to them and I cannot thank them enough for what they did. I will never forget this, ever!

The students' fetokoniʻaki with their fāmili, siasi, puleʻanga, and fonua, especially in tertiary education institutions, are essential in developing a more nurturing, reflective and people-oriented learning environment. This is where everyone understands the Tongan students' tasks in negotiating their relationships within the tertiary education culture and their Tongan culture. This is because, for the Tongan students, their achievement is something for their family, church, village, and the country as one of the participants said:

I think that this is the kind of value (attributing success to families and others) that we should look at as foundations to support us in our education. . . . It is rightfully our responsibility to speak on behalf of our people and we should not look at our Tongan culture as an excuse for our shortcomings but as strengths to help us. We grew up in a place ʻoku feʻamokaki mo faingataʻa ʻa e moʻui [where life is hard]. These should mould and encourage us to do even better for our families, church and the community.

It is recommended that the non-Tongan supporters such as lecturers in tertiary education institutions need to be versatile and flexible in the way that they connect with Tongan students. For example, lecturers should be more understanding about Tongan students' cultural obligations to their families, church, and communities; hence, lecturers should be flexible to grant extensions for assignments when asked for genuinely.

Moʻui fakapotopto is sustainable livelihood:

[It] is a life that is worthwhile and is able to use existing and limited resources wisely. [It] encompasses spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual capabilities [where] people are multi-talented with a range of skills, wide understanding of their environment and strong belief in maintaining relationships and fulfilling cultural obligations (Johansson-Fua, Manu, and Tapakautolo 2007, 12).

Therefore, moʻui fakapotopoto signalled that Tongan students and their supporters should have boundaries or tā-vā, time-space limits on the relationships within their physical and social environments. This enables the Tongan students to have better resources in terms of physical, social, spiritual, and mental skills such that they can be healthy in body *sino,* spirit *laumālie,* and mind *ʻatamai* to study effectively.

Moʻui fakapotopoto is similar to the concept of *"topono"* which means to feel satisfied and contented with whatever one has and whatever one can give. The Tongan financial hardships impacted on Tongan students' education severely mainly because of *fua kavenga fakavalevale*, (unrealistic financial commitments). One of the parent participants said:

Some Tongan families do not prioritise their financial spending carefully and sometimes they spent their money unrealistically. Some families sent money to families in Tonga, to church donations and other family obligations which deprive them from giving priority to their children's education. I also questioned how families in Tonga disposed of the money that was sent them. They should have seen how we struggled here making sacrifices to help them.

Therefore, it is recommended that Tongan students and their families need to feel at peace with what they can give in terms of money and other material wealth to their kāinga *(puleʻanga, fāmili, siasi,* and *fonua).* They should neither be embarrassed with what they can give nor compete with each other because it can exhaust their resources and get them into financial trouble. It is also advisable for Tongan students and their supporters to recognize the trends of globalization and improved information communication technology such that they are able to decide the limits of their involvement with the wider *kavenga fakafāmili* (family obligations), *kavenga fakasiasi* (church obligations), and *kavenga fakafonua* (country obligations) to enable them to have time, space and resources for their education. There are big cultural differences for Tongan students living in New Zealand and often they find it difficult to adapt to the New Zealand lifestyle. Some of the students ran into trouble because they did not know the limit of their certain

worlds. As one of the academic educators, who was also a church minister stated:

> I believe that our children here in New Zealand cannot handle all their social, cultural, emotional and spiritual problems at once which impact on their studies. And I see it many times when kids are capable and they are on top of the world and then it changed entirely, and it was not good for them. I think they need to minimise the conflicts between these different worlds.

On a related note, if the students are to succeed, then education needs to be their top priority; other affairs such as their *fai fatongia* and fua kavenga have to take lower priority. It should also be made known that as education is top priority Tongan students should not feel guilty about not being able to fulfil their cultural obligations fatongia to their kāinga. This is not a matter of ignoring or avoiding fai fatongia or fua kavenga to focus on educational achievement but of managing them differently. Some parents in this study ensured that they gave their children time and they put considerable emphasis on time. One of them said: "Whenever my children said that they will not attend any church activity or Tongan cultural occasions because they have school work to do I let them stay home and do it." This means that Tongan students had to change the tā-vā, time-space aspects of their relationships with their kāinga to commit to their studies. They had to spend less time with their fatongia to puleʻanga, fāmili, siasi, and fonua and to dedicate more to their study. Their families must understand the demands of *ako*, which requires a different/expanded constructions of tā and vā and kāinga relationships within a particular contexts that of school semesters, exam periods, and so on. To achieve academic success, Tongan students had to temporarily put more distance between themselves and their relationships with their family, church, and wider community. One of the parent participants who is also an academic stated that some students "were wasting their times doing other things like going to church, going to celebrations that they should not attend, watched TV, talked to their friends, went to parties and so on other than studying." This means that the Tongan students have to prioritize their studies at that point in time to be able to complete their study requirements. They have to know that they need to achieve in Western education as well as keeping their own Tongan identity. Tongan students have to be both theoretically (analysis) and practically (praxis) projected beyond the "imagined" and the "real" to achieve in Western education. This supports Manuʻatu (2000a) and Manuʻatu and Kepa (2001), who noted that the Tongan culture does not need to be a barrier to students' study and can be used to their own

advantage. The effective relationship between Tongan students' and both their Tongan and non-Tongan supporters', and their understanding and willingness to help, is a way forward for academic success. This means that it is imperative for Tongan tertiary students, as well as their supporters, to be fakatoukatea and *fetokoni'aki fakapotopoto* in their tā-vā kāinga time-space relationships among themselves for academic achievement in New Zealand tertiary education.

Conclusion

All of what has happened to the world through physical evolution and social interactions are related *(*kāinga*)*, and their relationships are fundamental to the existence of the world today. In particular, for the Tongans, their existence as Tongans rests in their relationships within their kāinga, which are influenced by the changing New Zealand context. Therefore, a key conclusion of my research is that the problems of underachievement among Tongan tertiary students were perceived to be situated in their capability, or incapability, to function within the interface (space) of the Tongan and the New Zealand culture in this contemporary age. This is an implication for a high level tā-vā, time-space to include kāinga relationships in its different discourses where fetokoni'aki, fakapotopoto and fakatoukatea in both Tongan and New Zealand cultures are vital for academic achievement. That is, when Tongan students and their supporters are at the same tā-vā kāinga, time-space relationships, then there is a mutual understanding among the group that could support students' education. Therefore, it is significant to extend this theory from the *Tā-Vā* Time-Space into what I have called *Tā-Vā Kāinga* Time-Space Relationship Theory of Reality as discussed in this article.

NOTES

1. Postmodernism is a broad term encompassing a number of theoretical positions and interrelated concepts that refer to a form of contemporary culture (Eagleton 1996). According to Mikula, (2008, 159) "postmodernism is characterised by its investment in culturally situated knowledge, libidinal economy, fragmentation, dispersion, co-presence and empty simulation." Everything is contested in the postmodern world, and there is uncertainty, fragmentation, diversity, and plurality that are characterized by an abundance of micro narratives (Lyotard, 1984, 7). There are many truths, and all generalizations, hierarchies, typologies, and binaries are contested, troubled, or challenged (Merriam 2002; Atkinson 2003). In a postmodern stance "there are no absolutes, no single theoretical framework for examining social and political issues" (Merriam 2002, 374). Postmodernists "celebrate diversity among people, ideas, and institutions, [and by] accepting the diversity and plurality of the world, no one element is privileged or more powerful than another" (Merriam 2002, 275). Postmodernism is a collection of loosely linked ideas that combine

and recombine in numerous ways and contexts (Atkinson 2003). It is a time of tremendous conflict and confusion because there is no absolute truth (Pivonka 2004). Lyotard (1984) posited that it is more helpful to think of postmodernism as an intellectual trend or condition during the postmodern era after the Second World War. This is "a period of multiple changes in society, involving information advances, consumerism, the omnipresence of simulations, and the rise of a postindustrial order . . . globalization, rapid scientific and technological change . . . and terrorism" (Bloland 2005, 123).

2. Relating to, consisting of, or participating in two cultures of two different countries or ethnic groups. Advocating or encouraging the integration of people of two different cultural groups into all areas of society.

3. Relating to, consisting of, or participating in more than two cultures of different countries or ethnic groups. Advocating or encouraging the integration of people of more than two different cultural groups into all areas of society.

4. Globalization is defined as the movement of values, ideologies, goods, services, and practices across national boundaries (Taufeʻulungaki 2003).

5. Tribe or village; large social unit based on kinship and headed by a chief, or relating to one another.

6. Contact, or contacting one another, or communicating.

7. Point of communicating, or connecting point.

8. Relationship, connection, connecting, or link.

9. Together, or to work together, fellow workmen or working relationship.

10. Attitude, feeling, relationship toward each other.

11. Intervening space or time; relationship, mutual feeling or attitude, especially of a bad kind.

12. To be connected or interrelated, interrelationship, connection with one another.

13. To be connected or related.

14. To be related to each other as in blood relation.

15. Blood relation.

16. To love or be kind to one another.

17. To appear to, or be in sight of, each other.

18. To divide out to other people.

19. To help carry each other's obligations.

20. To help each other.

21. To respect or honour one another.

22. To rely on each other.

23. To help each other.

24. To respect each other.

25. To work together.

26. To take or carry hither and thither or to trudge backward and forward, in or over between people or places.

27. To have peace between each other.

28. To visit one another.

29. Sweet-smelling flowers, or trees or plants bearing sweet-smelling flowers, of any kind (Churchward 1959); a garland of sweet-smelling flowers.

30. Keeping good relationships.

31 Aesthetically pleasing state and the emotional feeling of warmth.

32. To talk (in both formal and informal ways), to tell stories or relate experiences etc. (Churchward 1959)

33. A Tongan proverb: *ʻOku ʻuhinga ki ha taha ʻoku ʻikai hama ha meʻa,* meaning when someone is proficient in many ways.

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