

Setting sail and returning home. Research voyaging in Aotearoa.

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ABSTRACT

We are drawn to this Talanoa in response to the call from Pacific Health Dialogue for frank and open discussion. Our contribution to the conversation is some reflections about our experience of academic health research as a collective of Māori and Pacific researchers trying to navigate within a large national research programme. Alongside this we will share the voyaging framework we developed to help locate ourselves as a collective, and articulate our needs and aspirations as early to mid-career researchers.

Our collective met in the context of working with *A Better Start – E tipu e rea*, a National Science Challenge created by the New Zealand government.¹ *Better Start* focuses on the health of children and young people across five key areas; healthy weight, resilient teens, successful literacy and learning, big data and Vision Mātauranga. Our team came together as collaborators within the Big Data theme, to explore the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) as an area of possibility and challenge for both Māori and Pacific communities.

Keywords: Pacific, Pasifika, Māori, indigenous research, migrant research, Research methodology

BEGINNINGS

Multidisciplinary and multicultural research is highly valued in an academic context, recognising the innovation that can come from combining a diversity of perspectives. Health equity is a priority within *Better Start*, meaning innovation is essential to drive the accelerated progress needed to close these health gaps. Success in working across disciplines and cultures requires teams to be both curious and respectful of different worldviews and, over time, cultivate the ability to uphold multiple truths in their work. In our context, this requires experts in their area of western science to be curious and respectful of the requirements of knowledge gathering and interpretation that aligns with Māori and Pacific worldviews, values and research methodologies.

Even within our own collective, we have diverse affiliations to different Iwi, Hapū, Pacific nations, genders and generations. As our team drew together, we felt we needed a metaphor that could support us to succeed as a team, whilst holding respect for these diverse perspectives. In doing so, we were also cognisant of the need for a framework that could act as a translation tool to explain to our non-Māori and non-Pacific colleagues' aspects of our approach that might otherwise be misunderstood or invisible. Our

hope was that this translation effort could facilitate inclusion of these in timeframes, funding and expectations and reduce the need to repeatedly advocate for and defend these.

We followed the path made by many colleagues who have used metaphor and storytelling to explain how they have conceptualised and navigated different knowledge environments.²⁻⁵

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Rec: 26.06.2020 **Acc:** 25.10.2020 **Pub:** 30.11.2020

Citation: Richards R, et al. Setting sail and returning home. Research voyaging in Aotearoa. *Pacific Health Dialog* 2020; 21(6):341-346. DOI: 10.26635/phd.2019.637

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In the academic sphere, these stories are often referred to as a 'model' or 'framework' so we have used the latter for clarity here. While the creation of new models is open to critique,² we believe that in our relatively youthful research arenas there is still space for new story-telling that allows value to be ascribed to multiple perspectives, and brings affirmation, contrast or extension to existing ones.

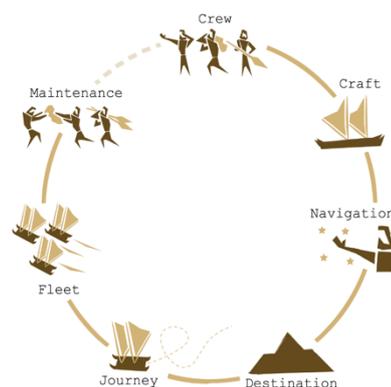
It is important for us to acknowledge here that in seeking to encompass multiple perspectives, our final story is a hybrid or compromise and is not a substitute for Kaupapa Māori or ethnic specific Pacific approaches, which may be more specifically attuned to the needs of individual researchers, teams or communities. We share our journey with humility as it will not be applicable to all, but after struggling with a sense of invisibility, we feel we then have a responsibility to make our response visible in the hope that it will help others find their way more quickly.

IN THE MI(D)ST

In 2018 we found ourselves in a context of time pressure and misunderstandings, perhaps not an unusual environment in a research programme the size of *A Better Start*, but not one conducive to effective research and Māori/Pacific workforce capacity development. In formulating a response, we decided to draw inspiration from a place of strength, our shared history of voyaging. The lead for the Māori team (JC) had been interviewing Master navigators from across the Pacific as part of her PhD and she brought knowledge of these practices to shape the framework. The Pacific team (RR, JK, AL, ML) are members of Va'a o Tautai (boat of expert fishermen/women), an academic unit named in acknowledgement that one person cannot sail the waka alone and all bring different expertise and abilities that aid us in reaching our destination.

Within this framework, each research project is considered as a voyage of discovery, with many aspects to consider when preparing and journeying. We will describe some features of this process that we noted were important at the beginning, during and after our research voyage together. Specifically, we will give our reflections on the crew, craft, navigation, fleet, journey, destination and maintenance present on our journey (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1: Steps considered in planning and returning from our research voyage



Crew

The crew you plan to complete your research journey with are one of the first considerations. Across your collective, do you have the skills you need for the tasks that are being undertaken? In Māori and Pacific contexts these are often broader skill sets than those traditionally taught in academia, and include language, cultural knowledge, whakapapa connections, and community regard and connections. The value of these skillsets needs to be appropriately acknowledged in appointment levels and remuneration. This is a challenge when these are not recognised as valid or valuable by academic institutions that attribute greater value to formal qualifications. In addition to technical skills this also means a balance of strengths, including the visionaries who launch a voyage, the managers who ensure the project follows the right path and delivers on its promises, and story tellers, who bring the information together in various forms and make sure that it is told to those who need it and can action it.

As well as having the necessary skillsets, there is a need to invest time to understand the personal and professional journeys that brought the team together and where team members see themselves in the future. This acknowledges the teaching role that the team has in supporting each other towards their aspirations and emphasis on capacity-building in Māori and Pacific contexts.

As noted above, one of the roles often held by Māori and Pacific research team members is articulation and lobbying for these worldviews to be acknowledged and reflected in research. Sometimes this advocacy happens from a position of lower power, in the established hierarchy of academia or overlooked as a small part of a large research programme, where staff members may not be in leadership roles and

therefore not in the room when decisions are made or arguments put forward. Systems are set up to reward established norms, for example, budget constraints based on an underlying assumption that only small direct salary costs are needed as most staff will hold tenured roles. This does not acknowledge the current workforce status of Māori and Pacific academic staff. Recent reports from MBIE's Diversity in Science statement highlight that Māori and Pacific staff reflect only 2% of the science workforce.⁶ This workforce also tends to be weighted towards emerging researchers, who do not hold tenured roles that can be leveraged to support project involvement. Because of this reality, budgets require careful planning to pay direct salaries where necessary and attention paid to longer term planning for secure, permanent appointments for these staff.

Craft

We decided to build our virtual craft/waka/va'a from the values that we hold. This was important as we were in relatively unfamiliar and turbulent waters (Big data and IDI) and the journey was not clearly charted out before us. We could, however, take some comfort from knowing we would use our values as a pivot point for responding to ideas that came up during this process and provide language to reflect on our work and challenge ourselves. As a diverse Māori and pan-Pacific team we felt that the degree of alignment between values will determine if we travelled together on a single va'a/waka or supported each other as members of a fleet of separate vessels.

Our team started very simply by brainstorming our values on two sides of a large sheet of paper. The variety of values expressed were included manaaki (hospitality and maintaining the mana of those we work with and ourselves), kokiritanga (being champions for the kaupapa), tino rangatiratanga (self determination), whanaukataka (family, nurturing and fostering relationships), unity/oneness/support, excellence, responsiveness, respect for other's abilities and for other values of colleagues and community. After discussion, we decided we were all closely aligned and would continue as one team, though with the ability to work in parallel where necessary. This latter option remained because sometimes it is not until values are put into practice and tested that it becomes clear how team members express their values. For example, there are multiple ways to express respect and very occasionally, these will conflict for different team members. It is

important that there are options that allow diverse approaches to be enacted.

Navigation

In voyaging, there are many signs to interpret in the environment to help voyagers reach their destination. Alongside our team values there are other constellations or orients that are important guides for our journey. As professional health researchers, we have a variety of documents and processes that are in place to support good practice, such as health research guidelines, ethics processes, and consultation processes. We were mindful in the IDI space there was important context and concerns about data sovereignty and potential for deficit framing because of the nature of information the IDI prioritises.⁷ This means that there was a heavy responsibility for thoughtful conduct of research done in this space. We have described elsewhere our eventual interpretation of the context of the IDI and the application of Pacific health research values of Akangateitei (respect), Inangaro (communal relationships), Uriuri kite (reciprocity) and Ora Katoatoa'anga (holism) and in the Māori context a framework of Pāpahi (Māori input), Kia whakamana (recognition of data as an extension of who we are as people, enhance outcomes), Kia pono (acknowledging systematic bias in data), Kia tika (using Māori research methods) and Kia wero (including Māori measures of wellness and success).⁷

This was a significant body of work that needed to happen to inform data analyses. Ideally, these principles would have been in place prior to any work being undertaken, however, our team was constructed two years into the challenge, limiting the extent to which these could be expressed. In our experience, it is not uncommon for Māori and Pacific researchers to be invited into a project at its later stages, either near the very end of writing grant applications, or after the project has been funded and commenced. It is frustrating, difficult and sometimes impossible to retrofit new perspectives into a vessel that has already set sail and introduce new orientation points into a course that is already charted and advanced.

Fleet

Very few researchers work in complete isolation and it is important to consider who is travelling with us and supporting from the shore. In large programmes of research such as National Science Challenges there is a fleet of vessels, pursuing different types of knowledge, but with some

overarching similarities in aspiration, destination, and purpose. When researchers have an applied or community responsiveness approach, their fleet includes a broader array of vessels than just those based in academia. The groups, agencies, and communities who are travelling with us or who have supported our launch need to be recognised and these relationships need to be built, maintained and respected as part of the research planning and funding. Researchers need the capacity in budgets to visit stakeholders, provide hospitality and *koha/me'a alofa* to acknowledge the value we derive from their expertise and support. Furthermore for this to be formally acknowledged and supported within University expenditure policies. It needs to be noted that sometimes these relationships are held because of family or community ties and therefore need to be valued beyond research outcomes. Research teams should be reflective and proactive about what they, as a whole, can do to support the aspirations of their community partners.

Destination

It is also important to have clear understandings across the team about the destinations are that we are seeking in our journeys, in the hope that there are strong commonalities in where we are hoping to go. Sitting above any one specific project or programme is a broader question of what is the longer-term impact or purpose of this work and where does it fit within the larger body of knowledge and alongside the needs of the communities we serve. Given the current capacity of Māori and Pacific researchers, workforce development is an important part of our destination, with opportunities for capacity building mindfully built into projects and programmes. In this context, many voyagers will be adding to their skillsets rather than already having them, therefore it would be reasonable to build additional mentorship and longer timeframes to allow for this.

Journey

The actual conduct of the research is probably the part of the story that is most familiar to project management in mainstream research. This includes project grant applications, timelines and key performance indicators and the established machinery for collecting or collating data, analysing this data, and collaboration around interpretation. Results are then preparation for various audiences, with a

particular value placed on publication in academic journals, and usually including some feedback to communities of interest. This latter step is particularly important for maintaining relationships with those in your fleet. Māori and Pacific communities have significant oral traditions, so it is important to be able to share research findings orally, with visual tools for impact and appropriate language/languages for each audience. To fully meet those obligations of that commitment to communities, this stage of the journey needs to be fully resourced for in terms of time, travel costs and design for visually compelling communication.

Maintenance

An often-overlooked part of a research journey is time in between journeys to maintain the *va'a/waka*, repair any damage and prepare for the next journey, screening and training crew and raising money for the next journey. In a relationship sense this would include time to check-in with colleagues, reflect on what happened and what could we have learned. Unfortunately, research timelines often mean there is no natural reflection space between journeys, as grant applications for the next project are planned 6-12 months before the completion of the current one.

Given the relatively small size of current Māori and Pacific research workforces, there is value in supporting each other to build and curate our skillsets in very deliberate ways. This would include proactively helping each other to find opportunities to work with different methodologies, to dig deeper into current models and to work under the guidance of different mentors (both within the academic world and outside of it). One way of considering each research journey is to reflect on whether the experiences on that journey bring you closer or further away from where you want to be as researchers.

For our collective, preparing this Talanoa article has formed part of that reflection as we decide where we will journey from here, whom we would like to travel with and the right time to next set sail. There are several things we are happy to have achieved within *A Better Start*, in terms of collaboration^{8 9-12} and leadership of academic papers,^{7 13 14} successes of early career researchers^{15 16} and the opportunity to work closely with an iwi partner.^{15 17} In terms of where we journey next, for one author this has meant continued involvement within the IDI, unpacking education and health pathways for Pasifika families. For some it has meant moving within

Better Start to the Healthy Weight theme to focus on sleep intervention development for Māori and Pasifika families, and for others the next step has been making further contribution to health and wellbeing via government roles and postgraduate studies.

ENDINGS

Among our communities, we need accelerated progress to close health gaps, meaning our research workforce and practices need to evolve rapidly to meet these challenges. Research has a role to play in invoking change. In particular, well-designed, clinically and socially relevant research, grounded in aroha/aloha for Māori and Pacific communities, can provide insight and visibility into successes and challenges.

This talanoa about our voyaging framework and our experiences as a team has a strong focus on relational spaces between and within research teams. In particular, we used our experience of the National Science Challenge space, which has multiple large-scale programmes of research, as a point of reflection. The first set of relationships we considered was within our primary team. As noted earlier, we came with diverse affiliations to Iwi, Hapu, Pacific nations, genders and generations. Using this framework allowed us to discuss gracefully how this diversity might influence our values and processes and therefore if we would sail in a single waka or in a fleet alongside each other. For the Pacific members of our team, whose work is primarily based in New Zealand, this was also an important space to reflect on our responsibilities under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and to work towards upholding the health and research aspirations of Tangata Whenua. As our New Zealand based Pacific population and research workforce continues to grow, this is a space where further theorisation and methodological development is important.

The second point considers relational spaces within the broader context, when we are working as early-mid career Māori and Pacific researchers within larger teams, across academic disciplines and within the dominant narrative of western research approaches. Within this context, the purpose of the framework was to provide translation through metaphor or storytelling to share insights for colleagues about how Māori and Pacific research contexts impact on study design, timeframes, budgets and staffing. While we strove to do this with generosity and grace, it remains a deliberate act of disruption, created to extend current practice with the value that our perspectives bring.

Frameworks and language to discuss relational spaces is vital to the well-being of our research workforce. Academic research is a punishing career, and the responsibility for the creation, maintenance, and rebuild of relationships as they go array is an important skillset and burden. We have tried to reflect on points of tension we have observed in our journeys here and elsewhere and acknowledge our own steep learning curves about how to work effectively in this environment. We also share because, within the constraints of publication word counts and academic pride, it can be difficult to share deeper issues and hard lessons. We may be hesitant to admit when things did not go to plan, and to acknowledge that, even within teams of good people with good intentions, tension and misunderstandings occur. A healthy research workforce and ecosystem requires that we take time to acknowledge and learn from difficult situations and build the resiliency and relational skillset necessary to withstand and thrive in research environment. We are grateful to the Pacific Health Dialogue for creating a forum for this type of discussion and are excited to engage, discuss and learn from other colleagues as they share their stories.

Funding: Aspects of this work were created while authors were employed by the Better Start National Science Challenge – Big Data theme. Ms Rapata's Masters in Health Sciences (Nutrition and Dietetics) research is currently funded by the Better Start National Science Challenge.

Competing interests: The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Author contribution: RR, JC, JK, TR and AL, developed the overall framework concept, with DK, HR and ML also contributing to the final design. RR led the first draft of the manuscript and all authors reviewed the final draft of the manuscript.

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to acknowledge and thank the Kahui Tuturu Reference Group and Pacific Advisory Group for their leadership within the Better Start National Science Challenge. We would also like to acknowledge colleagues from the Better Start National Science Challenge; Challenge Director Professor Wayne Cutfield, Co-Director and Big Data Theme co-leader Professor Barry Taylor, Big Data Theme leader Dr Rick Audas, Vision Matauranga theme leader, Professor Angus Hikairo Macfarlane and Dr Barry Milne. Particular thanks to Associate Professor Rachael Taylor, leader of the healthy weight theme, for her vision and grace which will allow us to journey with this Challenge again. We would also

like to acknowledge Ngāti Whatua Kei Orakei for the collaborative project that allowed us to test this framework, nei ra o mātou nei mihi ki a koutou.

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