

Research Article

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Tok stori as pedagogy: an approach to school leadership education in Solomon Islands

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Abstract

Tok stori is a Melanesian form of dialogical engagement. Although it has been generally associated with informal activities, this article points to the potential of tok stori as a pedagogical or teaching process. Set in a school leadership programme spread across the Solomon Islands, the discussion illustrates the value of approaching the education of school leaders through their own experiences and in a manner to which they are accustomed. Data are drawn from the stories of programme mentors. Of particular relevance are the relational implications of tok stori as these frame learning, the kinds of learning facilitated by tok stori, gender and the restricted nature of some knowledge, and the openness of tok stori to encourage and promote learning beyond the initial scope of a programme. Although tok stori can be informal, the data suggest that effective professional learning can take place through tok stori as pedagogy. As one amongst a number of traditional oral forms across the region and beyond, the claims made for tok stori in this context provide further support for the inclusion of Indigenous approaches to development work in and beyond Solomon Islands. This is important if development aid is to move to a new level of efficacy.

Introduction

Conversational modes that embed the storied negotiation of information in relational activity are a ubiquitous feature of life for many Indigenous groups. In Melanesia, tok stori is a term used for this aspect of sociality. Tok stori, sometimes associated with informal activities such as storytelling (e.g. Smith, 2016) and less frequently described in kastom contexts in village interactions (e.g. Van Heekeren, 2014; Sanga and Reynolds, 2020), has unexplored potential in formalised institutional contexts. This article discusses the value of tok stori as pedagogy in a school leadership development programme in Solomon Islands.

Solomon Islands is an archipelago of six major and approximately 900 smaller islands with a land area of around 28,400 km². Local matrilineal and patrilineal social structures (Maezama, 2015) and over 80 spoken languages add to the country's diversity. Education in Solomon Islands is managed by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD), Church Education Authorities and Provincial Government Education Authorities.

School leadership in Solomon Islands, where teachers are frequently appointed to leadership posts directly from the classroom (Sisiolo, 2010), is an area in need of attention (Lingam, 2011). Programmes of professional development and learning (PLD) for school leaders in Solomon Islands have generally been small scale, available residually in the capital, Honiara (Lingam, 2011; Lingam and Lingam, 2014), and taught by lecture and self-reflection. Solomon Islands school leadership development has been supported by aid (Rouikera, 2013). Donor-funded aid in Solomon Islands education has a long history and its own conventions (Willetts *et al.*, 2014) that frame what programmes develop and their profiles. Until the Graduate Certificate of School Leadership (GCSL), tok stori has not been the preferred mode of delivery for donor-funded PLD for school leadership, nor education generally.

This article draws on tok stori as experienced by mentors during the GCSL programme. The experiences of participants are discussed elsewhere, as are those of programme administrators (Sanga *et al.*, 2020). The GCSL grew from the Solomon Islands School Leadership Programme, a pilot in the use of tok stori as pedagogy. However, here the two initiatives are treated as a single 4-year national school leadership PLD programme, rolled out between 2014 and 2018.

Five modules contribute to the GCSL: Professional Development; School Leadership; School Management; Teaching and Learning; and Community Partnerships. The programme was initiated by MEHRD, funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, developed by the Institute of Education of the University of the South Pacific, and undertaken by the Fellowship of Faithful Mentors (FFM)—a group of Solomon Islanders concerned for leadership in Solomon Islands who, during the course of the programme, became an NGO. The tok stori experiences of some of these mentors are the focus of this paper.

Because tok stori scholarship is less developed than that for some other Indigenous conversational modes, the literatures of yarning and talanoa are first reviewed to tentatively point to areas of potential that may exist when exploring tok stori as pedagogy. Following this, the literature of tok stori is presented. Data are then offered from mentors involved in the GCSL, a donor-funded, locally developed Solomon Islands-wide initiative. Much of that data remain storied in order to honour the orality of the form as it transfers to written academic discussion. Analysis follows before conclusions and recommendations are presented.

The aims of the article are to add to the scholarship of Melanesian tok stori; to advocate for the value of tok stori to Melanesian people in institutional life, the academy and in relationships with aid donors; and to consolidate the literature of Indigenous conversational forms and orality more generally.

Literature review

This literature review provides a platform for the appreciation of tok stori as pedagogy in school leadership PLD. Tok stori is a dialogical form of engagement through which learning occurs for those who share their stories and those who listen (Sanga and Reynolds, 2019). Discussion is framed first by a general consideration of Indigenous conversational modes. Then follows a review of the literature of two specific conversational forms; yarning practised amongst Indigenous peoples in Australia; and talanoa, at home amongst peoples of the eastern Pacific including those of Fiji, Samoan and Tonga. Observations from the literature of these conversational forms support a review of the literature of tok stori, as yet thin. Finally, a synthesis is offered.

Conversational modes

Kovach (2010) provides a helpful general account of Indigenous conversational modes in which storytelling assists the development and collection of knowledge. Dealing with conversation as method and associating this with specific forms such as ‘storytelling, yarning, [Hawaiian] talk story, re-storying [and] re-membering’ (p. 124), Kovach claims that conversation:

is of significance to Indigenous methodologies because it is a method of gathering knowledge based on oral storytelling tradition congruent with an Indigenous paradigm. It involves dialogic participation that holds a deep purpose of sharing story as a means to assist others. (p. 124)

Present and vital relationships exist between method—what we do, methodology—how we understand what we do, epistemology—what counts as knowledge, and ontology—the worldview that knowledge informs. Because of this, method directs attention to ontology. Following Stewart (2009), Kovach (2010) points out that terms such as ontology, epistemology and methodology ‘shapeshift’ (p. 126) to meet the rigour of specific world views. Thus, in contexts such as Solomon Islands, a dialogic relational ontology prevails (Sanga and Reynolds, 2019), and actions generally show the self to be social rather than individual (Fazey *et al.*, 2011).

At the core of all Indigenous conversational forms are relationships in which relationality, the state of being related, is operationalised through the reciprocation in a dynamic storied world. Among the characteristics proposed by Kovach (2010) for conversational methods within Indigenous frameworks are: collaborative and dialogic qualities; informality and flexibility; purposefulness; locatedness, perhaps seen through protocol and invested in

epistemological and ontological contexts; and reflexivity. These characteristics imply the centrality of a ‘relational dynamic between self, others, and nature’ (p. 126) in ways that narrative inquiry, for example, with its origins in literature and its location within western knowledge traditions (Wells, 2011), does not. As Kovach says, one is a ‘researcher-in-relation’ (p. 123) when engaged in a research through a conversational mode. The same is true for an ‘educator-in-relation’ when engaged in dialogic relational pedagogy.

In order to examine tok stori as pedagogy in Solomon Islands leadership PLD, it is helpful to first consider the conceptual ground mapped out for other, more documented conversational forms; yarning and talanoa. Attention to these provides pointers to potential gaps in the literature of tok stori.

Yarning

Bessarab and Ng’andu (2010) describe yarning, a conversational form practised by many Indigenous peoples living in Australia, as a journey to visit relevant places and topics. The journey is framed through reciprocal, mutual dialogical engagement in which the researcher is required relationally to enhance their accountability to participants. Although a yarn can appear messy, rigour comes from listening to the flow of the story while looking for connective topic-orientated threads. The outcome of a yarn in research ‘is dependant on the quality of the relationship between the researcher and participant, the language being used and the conceptual baggage brought to the...process’ (p. 47).

Key aspects of yarning include the creation of a safe space for storytelling and truth telling (Gainsford and Robertson, 2019), its location within cultural protocols (Walker *et al.*, 2014), its familiarity to participants (Fredericks *et al.*, 2011) and the honouring of stories as important (Shay, 2019). Often associated with yarning, Dadirri (Mills *et al.*, 2013; Coombes and Ryder, 2019; Terare and Rawsthorne, 2019) is a process of ‘deep listening through which stories emerge that create new knowledge and understanding’ (Terare and Rawsthorne, 2019, p. 1). Dadirri ‘facilitates deep reflection and contemplation’ (p. 6). As with other conversation forms, relationality in yarning is enhanced through the giving and receiving of stories.

A number of types of yarning have been identified in the literature. These include social yarning, therapeutic yarning, research topic yarning, collaborative yarning (Bessarab and Ng’andu, 2010), family yarning and cross-cultural yarning (Walker *et al.*, 2014). Each type has its own conventions that stem from the purpose of the yarn, the relationships between those involved and context. The flexibility of yarning is clear in the way that it has been beneficial not only in various kinds of research, but also in many fields including legal education (Gainsford and Robertson, 2019), literacy development (Mills *et al.*, 2013), social work (Terare and Rawsthorne, 2019), policy creation (Fredericks *et al.*, 2011) social media activism (Carlson and Frazer, 2018) and clinical consultation (Lin *et al.*, 2016). Yarning has been valuable in increasing mutual understanding both within and across cultural groups despite the challenges of negotiating the expectations and cultural norms of Indigenous participants, communities and the academy (Bessarab and Ng’andu, 2010).

Talanoa

Talanoa is a conversational form present in several Pacific cultures including those of Tonga, Fiji and Samoa. Like yarning, talanoa in

research developed from existing cultural practices (Fa'avae *et al.*, 2016) as 'a derivative of oral traditions' (Vaiotei, 2006, p. 23).

Key aspects of talanoa include that people speak from the heart without preconceptions (Halapua, 2008), openness as 'a product of the underlying trust relationship and sense of cultural connectedness between those involved' (Prescott, 2011, p. 130), and the significance of relationships in a safe space of noa, the result of protocols in place between people (Tecun *et al.*, 2018).

Vaiotei (2013) describes several forms of talanoa from a Tongan standpoint. These range from talanoa vave, quick superficial exchanges between two or more, to talanoa'i, talk that involves synthesis, evaluation and analysis (Fa'avae *et al.*, 2016). Like the multiple forms of yarning, various forms of talanoa can be evoked at different times during research or other kinds of encounter. Johannson-Fua (2014) suggests four Tongan principals needed for a productive talanoa: faka'apa'apa (respect), loto fakatōkilalo (humility), feveitoka'i'aki (generosity/caring) and fe'ofa'aki (love). Close to emotions (Fa'avae *et al.*, 2016), these principles portray the close relationality involved.

Talanoa is flexible and has been applied in peace negotiations (Halapua, 2008), conference presentations (Wolfgramm-Foliaki *et al.*, 2018), pedagogical analysis (Oldehaver, 2018) as well as in research in the fields of education (Otunuku, 2011), business (Prescott, 2011), leadership (Paea, 2015) and beyond.

Tok stori

Tok stori as a conversational form has been described as a 'traditional orally transmitted Melanesian processes of discussion' (Brigg *et al.*, 2015, p. 10), 'an oral tradition where reflections on issues or problems are undertaken dialogically' (Evans *et al.*, 2010, p. 83), and as 'a cultural and accepted method of sharing information' (Vella and Maebuta, 2018, p. 66). Tok stori involves speakers and listeners becoming part of each other's stories as they open their worlds through narrative. The result is relational activity in which meaning is primarily narratively embedded rather than understood strategically (Sanga, 2017). This resists abstraction as information remains contextualised. In addition, relational closeness is enhanced (Sanga *et al.*, 2018). Holistic data can be drawn from tok stori because each narrative is personally positioned to include emotion (Andersen, 2017; Sanga and Reynolds, 2019) as an aspect of truth telling. Listeners, therefore, are expected to respond accordingly.

The literature of tok stori suggests its contextual flexibility. In village contexts, Van Heekeren (2014) and Sanga and Reynolds (2020) describe forms of tok stori differentiated by nature, form and function. These include the transmission of secret knowledge, the recollection of clan stories and so on. There are also accounts of tok stori in leadership (Sanga, 2017; Sanga and Reynolds, 2019), as scholarship (Sanga *et al.*, 2018), in health (Andersen, 2017) and social research (Davidson, 2012). Brigg *et al.* (2015) discuss tok stori as a means of power broking in conflict resolution, contextualised by kastom 'bridging' (p. 10) protocols. Fluid power dynamics are an aspect of tok stori as a safe space (Davidson, 2012; Sanga *et al.*, 2018; Fasavalu and Reynolds, 2019) where speakers do not compete but seek to learn through stories.

Tok stori has been used for activities that have pedagogic elements. These include as a tool of critical reflection (Evans *et al.*, 2010; Honan *et al.*, 2012); as a way to explore customary land rights, a process where tok stori is valuable as a 'means through which ... [people] locate themselves in the world and within

genealogies' as well as engage in 'transmission of the self ... [in a] spirit of reciprocity' (Stead, 2013, p. 72); advocacy (Roche *et al.*, 2019); in examining the relationships between learning and evaluation (Paulsen and Spratt, 2020); and, through toktok, the Papua New Guinea Tok Pisin term for the oral activity framed by tok stori, in educational programme evaluation (Joskin, 2013).

Sanga (2016) depicts several aspects of the *modus operandi* of aid in the region. Among these is a tendency to speak rather than listen, a trait that suggests local people have little to contribute. Tok stori offers a platform for dialogue in which listening and speaking are expected to be balanced, and through which the expertise of all is valued. Sanga also says 'our *modus operandi* ... emphasises clutter over people relationships' (p. 10). This is operationalised through an emphasis on activities designed to support the language of outputs, outcomes and results, and hierarchies based on access to material wealth and associated technologies rather than on the possession of local knowledge, understandings and initiatives. Tok stori emphasises mutual understanding developed over time, and involves a relational space that flattens hierarchies. In these and other ways, tok stori can make a contribution to rethinking the way development aid is experienced by donors and recipients, particularly in training programmes.

Currently, the scholarship of tok stori is thin. However, the literature of yarning and talanoa as companion Indigenous conversational forms point to areas of development in the literature of tok stori. These include deeper questioning of the significance of storying and the centrality of relationality; fuller accounts of safety as a factor in the tok stori space; the role of emotion; tok stori and protocol; flexibility of relationships between forms of tok stori; and the kinds of learning tok stori can support.

The GCSL context

Solomon Islands is a widespread archipelago in which diversity is a significant feature. For example, there are matrilineal and patrilineal social structures (Maezama, 2015) and over 80 spoken languages. In addition, education in Solomon Islands is managed by the MEHRD, Church Education Authorities and Provincial Government Education Authorities. The lingua franca in Solomon Islands is Solomons Pijin. In urban areas, this provides a means for people from various cultural groups to tok stori. However, where people all speak a local language, this, of course, can also be a medium for tok stori.

This article draws on tok stori as experienced by mentors during a leadership training programme for school leaders, the GCSL programme. The five module programme was delivered to school leaders by mentors through a tok stori pedagogical approach. Mentors visited school sites or sites central to clusters of schools over a 4-year roll out. The programme was initiated by the local Ministry responsible for education, funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, developed by the Institute of Education of the University of the South Pacific, and undertaken by the FFM—a group of Solomon Islanders concerned for leadership in Solomon Islands.

The data presented here come from three sources. First, four mentors provided written accounts of their GCSL tok stori experiences. The accounts were emailed to the research team for thematic analysis. One each of these forms the spine of each section of data as it is presented. Second, eight tok stori sessions about the GCSL were conducted with 10 mentors in Honiara at the end of the programme. These sessions lasted between 20

and 50 min. Although the majority were one-to-one, two were group tok stori. Each tok stori was recorded and transcribed with permission and the stories gifted by mentors to the research effort. Transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2014). Finally, written material from location-centred GCSL reports adds contextual information. A level of triangulation is provided as a result of the data being drawn from different times, developed for a range of audiences, and produced by varied means. The four themes drawn from the data by means of thematic analysis are: fluid power-sharing; kinds of learning; relationality and safety; and protocol.

Stories about tok stori as pedagogy

In this section, data are presented in four sections. Each section features a written recollection of a GCSL tok stori gifted by an FFM mentor supported by data from other sources. Where Solomons Pijin was in use, this is indicated by the start of a conversation. Then a translation is provided.

Tok stori 1: fluid power-sharing

Tok stori as pedagogy in the GCSL generally took place in Solomons Pijin, the lingua franca of Solomon Islands. Because language both reflects and constructs reality, vernacular languages were used when feasible. In the tok stori pedagogy, alternation between shared and vernacular languages marks the way the GCSL tok stori focus shifts between professionally relevant concepts and sense-making stories. In a face-to-face tok stori, a mentor explained this process:

In the classroom situation, the facilitator would introduce a topic and then he [or she] organizes them into groups; then facilitates tok stori sessions; allowing participants to share their experiences. Even with a basic concept such as gender, after I have introduced the subject matter, I organize the group into their language groupings. Using their mother tongue, the participants are then able to talk about the core concept of gender and all related issues; as they understand in their contexts. We find that tok stori makes learning meaningful because it is contextual. Participants can own their own learning.

The following extract from a written recollection of the GCSL tok stori experience illustrates the way such practices harness the power-sharing potential of tok stori for pedagogical purposes. In the tok stori process, participants are positioned as experts in their own lives and their perspectives validated. As stories are woven together, those developed using Indigenous knowledge and encoded in Indigenous language are highly prized even though they may require subsequent translation.

I mapped out the group tasks for the morning and provided the parameters of and learning expectations for the session. In my instructions, I encouraged participants to self-select into smaller-sized linguistic groupings; and that Indigenous languages were to be used in their group tok stori sessions, to use their Indigenous minds, rather than thinking in English. I then assigned the groups with the key concepts such as 'profession' or 'standards' or 'professional development' for a particular profession to invoke their Indigenous understandings of these concepts within local tribal and village community contexts to later share with the wider group.

Following the small group tok stori about the key concepts, the school leaders reconvened. I then facilitated a wider tok stori session

in which linguistic groups shared their learnings of their assigned concepts. As an example, the group from U. Island, reported on their tok stori about the concept of a profession and its standards (of members' attributes and skills). They used their understandings of their tribal initiation process for boys who are transitioning from boyhood into manhood. In their tok stori, members shared about the different stages boys needed to go through, such as:

1. Boys as lads, staying at home and being trained mostly by their mothers and older siblings to perform domestic chores under supervision on a daily basis until they have mastered the roles. Once boys have shown mastery of certain roles and expectations, they are deemed ready and are mature enough to move on to the next stage.
2. Boys being set apart as a group of boys, often physically removed from the village to a temporary camp (which they construct themselves) where they live together for a period of time, say, four months. In this phase the boys are coached daily to master certain knowledge, skills and to apply certain competences to mastery. This phase is then followed by a period in which they return to the village and they are generally observed on how they play their roles and apply certain knowledge which they may have learnt while in seclusion.
3. Boys who are deemed ready by their parents and elders can now be prepared for the initiation rite/ceremony. At times, this rite involves a particular challenging task like going out to the sea and catching bonito fish or going out into the bush to hunt for and catching a boar or a wild pig and bringing this back as meal. Or at times, the challenging task involved preparing for and hosting a feast; a task which involves much planning, organization of tasks and mobilization of people and later hosting of the event.

For the group from U. who shared about boys' initiation rites, the tok stori identified the kastoms, expectations and conventions relating to membership of the boys' group as well as manhood. They also spoke about certain essential knowledge, certain key skills and group standards that boys undergoing initiation needed to know, demonstrate and keep.

This account indicates how, through tok stori as pedagogy, GCSL participants were able to discuss key concepts as their intellectual selves, using their Indigenous languages and applied conceptual understandings. They were able to talk about the standards of knowledge, skills and conduct required of those who are members of the particular profession and the nature of the professional development that members needed to go through, as and when needed, using their understandings of their Indigenous contexts.

The value given in the wider tok stori to this story of boyhood validated participants as experts in the activity. They were able to present and then convert their knowledge into learnings about how to map professional concepts from education onto traditional thinking. Delivered as story, this provided a potential pedagogical frame for others.

The power to stori is available to all participants in tok stori. As a consequence, mentors report that the significance ascribed to storying through the tok stori form to the story of boys' development eased the subsequent learning about professional development and professional standards for teachers and school leadership within school settings in modern Solomon Islands. That is, the power of mentors as apparent experts became diluted when their stories became joined to those of others.

Tok stori 2: kinds of learning

Tok stori is a flexible and open conversational form. When used as pedagogy, these aspects support shifting information between

contexts to create new learning. Because participants are responsible for appreciating the intersections between stories in tok stori, these are inevitably located in relation to their lived experience. Melanesians are skilled in this because tok stori is a habitual activity. Speaking during a tok stori recorded in Honiara, one mentor described the ubiquity and flexibility of tok stori during his GCSL experience:

You can... apply tok stori for different purposes and in different settings. You can apply tok stori casually; when we are travelling together in a canoe; when we are having dinner or when we are just relaxing. We can use tok stori to reflect on the day's experiences and also move it to a more serious level of work.

What follows is an extract from a written recollection of the GCSL tok stori experience. This centres on a seemingly casual tok stori during dinner and demonstrates the way learning comes when various perspectives are brought into relationship through tok stori.

This story is from western part of the country. In November 2015 my team was sent to a village in South Choiseul. When the community elders were made aware of our coming, they organised the community in groups to get things prepared. The elders organised the community into five groups. Group One was responsible for feeding the facilitators and participants in breakfast. The other four groups were responsible for morning tea, lunch, afternoon and dinner respectively.

What was striking for us the mentors was that during these feeding slots each group would share a thought or story in the Bible relating it to the importance of leadership and they prayed before we have our meals. During the meals they would perform dances and keep us entertained. When we went back to classes, the groups would sit outside of our room to listen. One of the group members lamented:

Mi herem wat iufala tisim ota tisa blo mifa hem barava gud tumas... [I heard the teachings you delivered to the teachers and it was good. These teachings are not only for the teachers but for all of us. I'm just a father and these teachings helped me to take care of my family].

This story indicates two types of learning facilitated through intersection. Firstly, one group member tells of the way the professional teachings of the GCSL tok stori seem relevant to him in the context of his family. This may be because a theoretical model was not offered in abstract but embedded in narrative. This explanation is supported by another mentor's recount, derived from a face-to-face tok stori:

Particularly when discussions are based around cultural understandings of leadership, tok stori is very effective for deep understanding of context and relevance. Participants can then connect the learning of today with cultural heritage, cultural wisdom and Solomon Islands society. Tok stori reduces the normal barriers which we create for learners in our usual lecture format.

Secondly, reciprocity as an element in tok stori comes into play when, during the meal, mentors were offered bible stories. The Melanesian mind acknowledges three spheres of control: church, culture or kastom, and formalised institutions (Sanga, 2009). Here, the PLD institution-focussed tok stori has been linked to the church domain. Because this intersection crosses the space between institutional and church domains, correspondences between the two sets of stories can offer an enhanced frame to

ideas of school leadership and contemporary application to the biblical material. To people of faith this constitutes local relevance.

Tok stori 3: relationality and safety

Tok stori provides a safe space for the expression of people's ideas and lived experiences. Safety is indicated and constructed by the quality and configuration of the relationships between participants including, in the GCSL, mentors. In a group tok stori, a mentor explained the value of this aspect of tok stori by comparison to his experience of other PLD modes:

In a relational way, in the GCSL, tok stori was used a lot. Again, this was different from other programmes. When you use interviews with Solomon Islands school leaders, this disengages them. When you call them for an interview, they will read this as you're wanting something from them. But when you tok stori with them, this is perceived as a social interaction. They can then freely share with you. They can share about the positive as well as the negative. In tok stori, we give people the space they need to share. This is a good thing. This is a good approach to relating with Solomon Islands people.

What follows is an extract from a mentor's written account of a tok stori within the GCSL programme. This describes links between relationality, safety and tok stori as pedagogy.

This tok stori took place during the East Malaita cluster of GCSL training ... The East Malaita cluster consists of school leaders (SL) from schools in East Kwaio, East kwara'ae and East Fataleka. The tok stori took place during a small group discussion/tok stori of [one] group around two topics. First was School Based Assessment Policy and the second was on the Conducive Learning Environment (CLE) audit. The selected leader was facilitating the tok stori.

Group Leader: Ok iumi start na. Anyone lo iufala garem assessment policy lo school blo hem? [Let us begin. Does any of you have an assessment policy for your school?]

SL1: Mifala ia olketa tisa ia gohed folom head nomoa ia. [We are teachers and we do what we know from experience].

SL2: Ma mi ting se policy lo ministry na ba. [I thought that policy only that which comes from the Ministry of Education].

Group leader: Mista nomoa. Hem minim olsem ia, every school blo iumi mas garem

school assessment policy lo school. Blo ministry ia national wan ia'. [Teacher. No. What this means is that at the school level, each must have its own assessment policy while the Ministry's policy is a national regulation].

[I was sitting next to them and listening.]

SL3: Sir iu save explain lelebet. [Sir, can you explain further?]

Group Leader: The objective of the task is to give an opportunity to create a sample school-based assessment policy. Some guidelines that will help guide how assessment is done at your schools. For example; every class teacher must have an assessment plan for a term. In the assessment plan you have a number of assessment instruments with a weighting percentage. Any other examples?

SL4: Policy must state a variety of assessment instruments teachers must use, like quiz, unit test, group investigation task etc.

Group Leader: Very good, Sir. See I know you have great ideas like that. So now you tok stori around what kind of things would go into an assessment policy at your schools.

The group started to tok stori and suggested ideas of things that should go into the assessment policy. Tok stori became serious business.

This recollection of tok stori in the GCSL is revealing. First, tok stori needs a comfortable and safe space for the tok stori tellers. Here are school leaders who have status and hold authority in their schools and perhaps even in their communities, coming together to tok stori about something that is of great value to their schools. The episode shows that the leaders start the tok stori by just asking questions, testing their thoughts and ideas, perhaps even making a few jokes here there, adding humour. They need to feel good and easy, to be in a safe comfortable space, before serious business starts. Tok stori as pedagogy is capable of accommodating this need and allowing the tone to shift.

Secondly, when used as pedagogy in the GCSL, tok stori has a rhythm. Even when a whole class explanation is provided, safety involves a follow-up explanation at the beginning of tok stori: a space made safer where the requirements are clear. One technique mentors described as aimed at clarity is to give an example, a sample or template.

The mentor's recollection continues:

So I give example, they give examples, I endorse, they tok stori and do the work—more examples, ideas emerge as the tok stori warms up and soars to a new height. Learning not only takes place, but a collective, quality assured product is created and the school leaders have something concrete to take back and introduce and implement at their schools.

A third contribution to safety in the pedagogical tok stori space involves the harnessing of the Melanesian social self. This also involves rhythm:

I DO (teacher explain, give examples), WE DO (the group collectively contribute more examples and endorsed by teacher), YOU DO (the group is given time and space to tok stori and compile a sample school assessment policy).

Both rhythms express the value given to the development of relationships through tok stori. In the first, a relationship of care is operationalised by safety through clarity. In the second, learning is collective.

Safety in the GCSL tok stori can also involve gender. Because Melanesian societies are gendered, under certain conditions some subjects may not enter the pedagogical tok stori space. This was discussed by a number of mentors. For example:

Relationally, women's tok stori may touch on some very sensitive issues so they need women mentors to be able to tok stori freely. In the programme, we had to deal with school leaders as human beings, hence, allowing them to tok stori about things which affect all of their lives. So within Solomon Island context, some personal problems faced by women can only be talked about to other women; not to men.

Male mentors are not able to support female school leaders effectively. Male mentors cannot obtain details from female school leaders.

Awareness of the relationships between gender and safety is essential for effective tok stori as pedagogy.

Tok stori 4: protocol

The flexibility of tok stori means that it involves no set cultural protocol. However, as part of the GCSL tok stori experience, participating communities used protocol to express their feelings about the GCSL programme in general. In turn, the protocol speaks of tok stori. A story of a closing event drawn from a GCSL location report serves as first example:

At the closing, a pig was traditionally baked as a traditional token of appreciation and to bid 'Farewell...'....We were given meat from pork shoulders; named as for our families thereby extending the host's appreciation to the guests' family. We were also presented with traditional bags as gifts.

The value placed on tok stori facilitators as people as well as professionals is recognised in protocol through the way their families, left behind, were recognised. If the outcome of tok stori depends on the quality of relationships between facilitator and participants, the efficacy of the GCSL tok stori as pedagogy is suggested as the mentor-in-relation is honoured through kastom.

In this mentor's story of another closing, similar value is placed on the tok stori as learning:

The community chief gave a closing remarks, paying respect to the traditional appreciation of choosing to be in their community for their training. He explained:

Ufala no onli kam fo trenim ota tisa blo mifala bat trenim mifala lidas lo vilaj tu...(You not only train the school teachers but also our village leaders. Before you came I bound the fishing grounds but I told my people that I will open the fishing grounds to feed you. This decision of mine is good because you have fed us with good teachings.)

The traditional act of closing fishing grounds in order to assure plenty at an important time is used in the community chief's tok stori as a metaphor to indicate the value of tok stori as pedagogy when, through the openness of the form, the learning has been accessed by the wider community despite a professional focus.

In both examples, the elevating relationship between protocol and tok stori is at the behest of the community rather than inherent in tok stori. However, the value of tok stori as pedagogy is reinforced as the mentors as storytellers and the processual product of the storying, learning constructed by the community, become the focus of protocol.

Discussion

The data presented develop the literature of tok stori as an Indigenous conversational form. It illustrates how, when used as pedagogy, fluid power sharing services a shared space made safe by relational means. This facilitates learning through the intersection of stories and experiences located in the lives and expertise of participants, professional and otherwise. Tok stori as pedagogy may use discursive protocols such as specific conversational rhythms. However, tok stori itself does not require cultural protocol. However, communities may attach appreciative cultural protocols to tok stori programmes such as the GCSL. Corresponding with the nature of tok stori itself, the examples given revolve around recognising the value of mentors as teachers-in-relation to the community and their own respective families, and the consequent learning as belonging to all.

Aspects of the GCSL tok stori pedagogy correspond with some characteristics of Indigenous conversational forms proposed by Kovach (2010): ontological and epistemological locatedness; informality; flexibility; collaborative and dialogic qualities; and the centrality of a 'relational dynamic' (p.126). Like yarning and talanoa, characteristics of tok stori include a safe storying space, reciprocity, attention to relational quality and mutual dialogic engagement. The flexibility of tok stori to facilitate pedagogical activity is echoed in the multiple contexts depicted for yarning and talanoa in the literature.

A number of areas in the literature of tok stori that require further elaboration were identified above. Some have been partially addressed through the presentation of experiences of the GCSL tok stori. Attention has been paid to the significance of storying in tok stori as pedagogy through the way stories constructed in Indigenous language from Indigenous experience can act as a model for mapping one set of knowledge on another when storied in wider pedagogical contexts. This suggests that, given appropriate structure, tok stori can support this kind of learning. Secondly, the GCSL tok stori experience points to the roles of humour and dialogic rhythm in creating safety in the pedagogic tok stori space. Gender also features here. Thirdly, illustrations have been given of how one form of tok stori relates to another. In one example, a shift in the level of seriousness links two forms: informal tok stori warms the space for professional tok stori. In another, professional tok stori is responded to by intersection with tok stori of a biblical base. In the GCSL tok stori, protocol endorsed the programme through appreciation of mentors-in-relation and of valued learning as community response. These areas of the literature of tok stori deserve further development along with more attention to emotion as an aspect of the form.

This article has provided a discussion of tok stori as an Indigenous Melanesian conversational form of orality through the context of tok stori as pedagogy within the GCSL, a Solomon Islands-wide PLD programme for school leaders. Although tok stori can be informal, the data suggest that effective professional learning can take place through tok stori as pedagogy, and that the openness of the form can facilitate the extension of that leaning to communities. As a form of engagement familiar to Melanesians, tok stori has great potential in fields such as development aid because it has much potential, for example, fluid power sharing, deep and located learning and relational development, qualities valuable in such contexts.

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