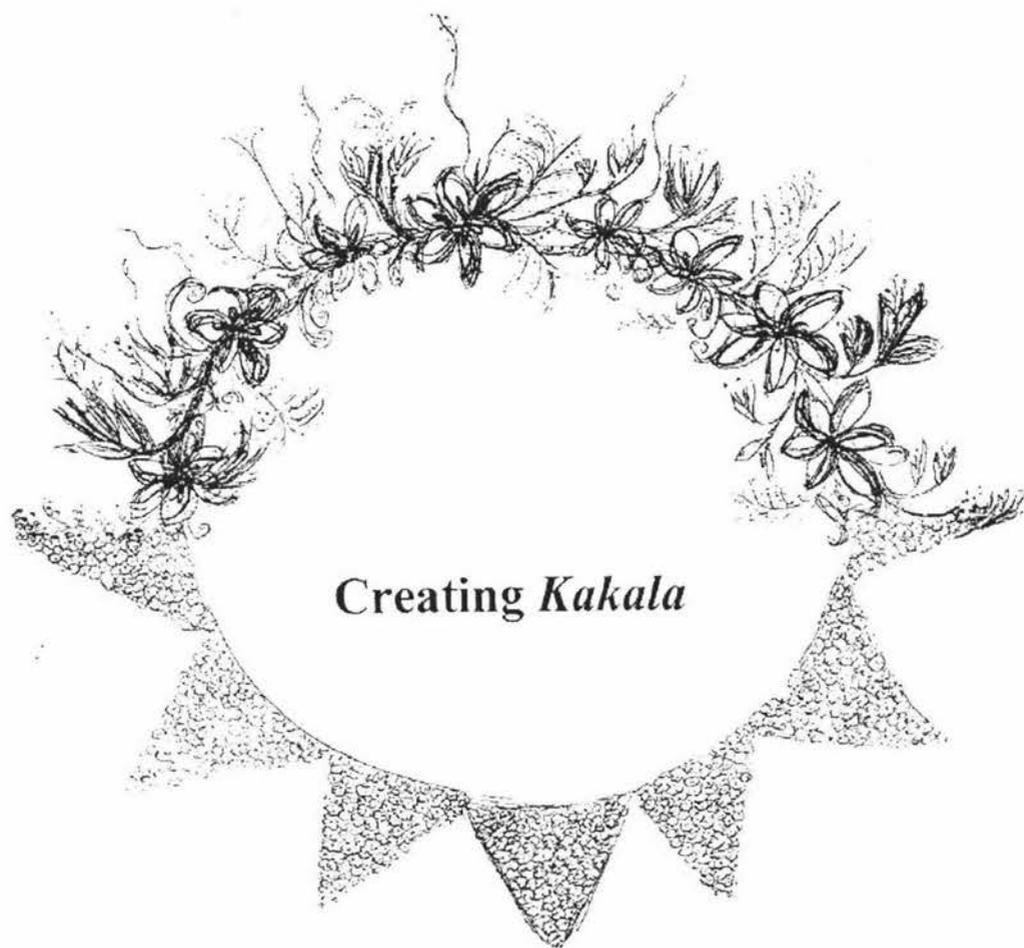


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Creating *Kakala*

**Gifted and talented Tongan students in
New Zealand secondary schools**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of

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Ingrid Frengley-Vaipuna, 2007

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Tākanga 'enau fohe

Their oars move in unison

'Oku 'uhinga ki ha kakai 'oku nau uouongataha.

When people work together, helping each other (Mahina 2004).

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Abstract:

This thesis is an ethnographic case study investigation of two gifted and talented young Tongan women in New Zealand secondary schools. A motivation for the study was the researcher's personal and professional involvement with Tongan communities and a deep fascination for this rich and complex culture. The other motivating factors came from a yearning to see all gifted and talented students in New Zealand better catered for, and especially those from cultural minorities who, for many complex reasons, can be overlooked in our present education system.

A literature review considered two broad areas. 'The Tongan Way' considered issues related specifically to the way Tongans live their lives in New Zealand and elsewhere, while 'Gifted and Talented' explored Francoys Gagne's differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent as well as the situation for gifted and talented minority students and gifted and talented education in New Zealand. The review found no evidence of studies of gifted and talented Tongan students in New Zealand.

The following research questions guided the research:

- * What gifts and talents are valued by Tongan communities?
- * What catalysts operate in the development of Tongan students' talents?
 - At school? At home? In the community? Are any of these culturally specific?
 - How are the intrapersonal characteristics of giftedness exhibited within Tongan culture?

A case study approach was used to explore these questions. Two young Tongan women in Year 13 at different schools were selected as the central participants, one born in Tonga and one New Zealand-born. These students were interviewed and, during the initial interview, they nominated other participants. Such 'snowball sampling' ensures the researcher and participants are partners in the research process.

In Pasifika research, as in all cross-cultural research, ethical considerations are particularly important. Culturally appropriate methodology was developed including the use of a metaphorical framework developed by Tongan academic and poet Dr. Konai Helu Thaman. This was particularly important as the researcher was *Pālangi* and credibility within the Tongan community was needed for the research to have any kind of validity or purpose. Advice from Tongans was sought in all stages of the research from the initial proposal to the dispersal of the finished manuscript.

Data was gathered from interviews, questionnaires, observations, and documents. This was coded and presented according to the emerging themes of opportunities, achievement and leadership, personal qualities, motivation and identity.

The 'Tongan Way' was explained in depth as this influenced all aspects of the research. A descriptive account was given of the schools and the biographical details of the central participants. Data was analysed and interpreted in various ways including poems constructed from the voices of participants, diagrams and recommendations for schools.

Recommendations for further research included longitudinal studies with a larger sample in order to move beyond the limitations of the research as well as revisiting the effects of culturally specific catalysts since they may change over time.

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