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**Early Childhood Centres of Innovation (COI)  
Action Research at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa**

**“O le tama ma lana a’oga,  
O le tama ma lona fa’asinomaga”  
“Nurturing positive identity in children”**

Final Research Report  
from the A’oga Fa’a Samoa  
an Early Childhood Centre of Innovation

Valerie N. Podmore with Tanya Wendt Samu and  
the A’oga Fa’a Samoa

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## Executive Summary

### Background

In 1984 a group with vision, made up of grandparents and interested parents, set up an incorporated society “A’oga Fa’a Samoa”, found premises, and started a Samoan early childhood education centre in Auckland. When the A’oga Fa’a Samoa opened, it was the first Pasifika language and cultural immersion early childhood centre in New Zealand. In 1990, the A’oga Fa’a Samoa became New Zealand’s first licensed and chartered Pasifika early childhood centre. Then in 2003, the A’oga Fa’a Samoa was selected as one of the 6 initial early childhood education centres of innovation in New Zealand. The early childhood Centres of Innovation (COI) programme is part of the New Zealand Government’s 10-year plan for early childhood education policy: *Pathways to the Future/Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002).

Special characteristics of the A’oga Fa’a Samoa are its Samoan language-immersion programme, and its “community of learners” collaborative approach. Our key innovations as a COI are:

- Small groups of children stay with the same teacher (their “primary caregiver”) from the point of entry through different groups and spaces in the centre and into school.
- This innovation, with the educator able to move through each developmental stage from babies to 5-year-olds, was introduced to benefit children, families and educators.

Like all COIs, the A’oga Fa’a Samoa was engaged in a 3-year action research project to show how the centre’s innovative practices influence learning and teaching. Our research was designed to collaboratively with the A’oga Fa’a Samoa and its community, and for the benefit of its community. The action research focused on two major research questions:

1. What helps learning and language continuity as children make transitions within and from the A’oga Fa’a Samoa?

2. How can the key approaches that help learning and language continuity be implemented in practice?

### **Key Findings**

*“Key principles of the research included those which inform our actions within our different aiga (extended families): service and responsibility (tautua), love and commitment (alofa) and respect (faaalalo). The “connections” that we made (in terms of new knowledge, understandings and perspectives, and relationships with others) were a consequence of the principles that informed our research practice.” (Tanya Wendt Samu, focus group facilitator)*

### **Benefits and Outcomes for Children**

- **Children’s Language and Cultural Continuity** Children’s heritage language (Samoan) was shown to be important for cognitive learning. The vision of the Samoan grandparents who had the idea of establishing the A’oga Fa’a Samoa centre, the language and cultural immersion policy at the centre, and international research findings on bilingualism, all support the importance of young children learning to communicate competently in their mother tongue or heritage language.
- As part of being a COI, the staff/teacher-researchers at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa carried out observations and reflected on them. This led to teachers and management at the centre and in the primary school making further changes that enhanced young children’s language continuity. Learning increasingly took place in Samoan, as the improved structural layout to the centre and our changed practices ensured that Samoan immersion really happened. For example, much more of the centre became designated as Samoan-speaking-only areas.
- Teachers took on more study in immersion and bilingual education, and there is evidence in the translated interview data that teachers were using techniques that support language-immersion education and bilingualism (Baker, 2000). These techniques included: indirect error correction and

using repetition, restatement to ensure that children understand, role modeling, and frequent use of praise.

- The teacher-researchers, reflecting on children's conversations with their teachers, found that children spoke confidently and competently in Samoan, they had meaningful conversations among themselves and with their teachers, and they were proud of their achievements.

*“Findings from each cycle of the research helped us plan to meet children's needs, and this helped transition and language learning run more smoothly.”* (Ene Tapusoa, teacher-researcher)

- **Innovative transitions** The COI research, tracking the children's transition to school, shows that physical location (the A'oga Fa'a Samoa is situated in the grounds of Richmond Road primary school which has a bilingual unit) and transition practices, together with the language immersion policy at the centre, supported and strengthened the confidence and Samoan language competence of the children making transitions.
- Innovative transition practices (e.g., spending time in the new entrants' bilingual class in the primary school), and language immersion practices, supported children's competence and their confidence to express themselves in Samoan, and their identity.
- We found that that young children's sense of belonging is a very important aspect of learning during and after transitions. For children moving from the infants' and toddlers' area to the over-2s area of the centre, knowing where their shoes and bags belong, clothes are hung, and about sleeping places and patterns is important for their security and sense of belonging. Teachers introduced a new initiative, of using the child's own photograph to label the place where a child's bag and shoes belong. They found that this worked well for the children in transition and their teachers.
- Making transitions as members of a small peer group fostered a sense of belonging and contributing to the group. This is consistent with the *aiga*

principle, and was evident in observations of small groups of children, and parents' written comments on their young children's transition within the centre.

- **Aspirations for Children** The innovative transition practice of having a “primary caregiver” making transitions within the centre with “her” group of children clearly helped the children's sense of belonging, their security, and their competent communication in Samoan. In this way, our key findings for children are consistent with the aspirations for children as stated in the early childhood curriculum document *Te Whāriki*:

*“To grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society”.*  
(Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9).

**A Community of Learners** As part of the research, teachers reflected on their interactions with children, and introduced more teaching practices that support children as active learners and communicators. These practices included asking children meaningful questions and jointly constructing knowledge alongside them.

*“... We are all part of the community of learners, we all know that... working together at A’oga is like being in an aiga (family), it is not a family until the work is done together. This is all part of being Samoan; it’s part of our culture and traditions...It was interesting to find out...things that we had never seen or heard before about children who were being observed, which helped with understanding the children’s needs and interests and how would could extend their learning with the knowledge that we had learnt, to me its all about enhancing the children’s learning, what ways can we as teachers make learning for children interesting and exciting?”* (Au Luatua—Teacher-researcher)

- A focus group—that represented teachers, parents, researchers, centre management, and the primary school—served as an advisory group for the project. The focus group became a “community of learners”, and the research shows how a wide group became part of the research process and reflection.

*“The view from the COI focus group has been both enlightening and insightful for me as a parent, a management committee member, and as a learner. It has increased my understanding and appreciation of the complexities surrounding language continuity, good transitional practice, and the importance of working together as aiga in a supportive and collaborative way to ensure that our children develop and learn in an early childhood educational environment enriched by language and cultural values.”* (Riki Apa—focus group member)

### **Benefits and Outcomes for Teachers and Parents in a Pasifika Community**

- Parents and centre staff/teacher-researchers participated actively within the centre and the focus group. During the process of the research, the focus group became a “community of inquiry”. Focus group members reflected on data, findings, translations, and all of the A’oga Fa’a Samoa research reports.

*“Being part of this research has been a great learning curve... Reflecting on the data collected gave me a better understanding of the principles and strands of Te Whāriki, and also indicated the areas we need to improve. It showed theorists we learnt through studies being implemented through teachers interacting with children.”* (Ene Tapusoa—Teacher-researcher)

In summary, the findings of this research about language and cultural continuity are important for Pasifika children’s education. The innovative practices at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa, together with changes made during the research process, smooth infants’ and young children’s transitions as they move in small groups with their “primary caregiver” within the centre and on to school.

*“As the co-ordinator for of this 3-year research project it has been a wonderful learning experience and a reassurance that the philosophies, theories and practices at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa are sound.”* (Jan Taouma)

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The teachers/staff of the A’oga Fa’a Samoa:

Eneleata Tapusoa took on a leading role as a “teacher-researcher” throughout the project. Reflective data collectors and observers included: Ene Tapusoa, Malo Moananu, Ta’a Tuai, Au Luatua, and Lucy Tulia. Mane Kiliva and all of the centre staff contributed to documentation, portfolios, and Learning Stories.

Members of the focus group made invaluable contributions throughout the project: Tanya Wendt Samu facilitated the group and contributed advice and theoretical insights on Pasifika research, clearly evident in Chapter 4 of this report.

Riki Apa developed and maintained the website [www.aogafaasamoa.school.nz](http://www.aogafaasamoa.school.nz) and provided technological advice and major support on preparation of powerpoint shows.

Albert Refiti served as a respected resource person on fa’asamoa—his knowledge and influence is evident in this report. Teachers, community advisors (notably Chris Bayes), and centre parents contributed to the focus group.

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Dr Airini contributed insightful research on “critical incidents”, reported in a progress research report on this project (Podmore, Airini & the A’oga Fa’a Samoa, 2004, November), and inserted in this report as Appendix E.

John McCaffery provided a helpful update on relevant immersion and bilingual education research publications.

The Ministry of Education funded this 3-year project on contract and we appreciate their support.

Val Podmore and the A’oga Fa’a Samoa focus group, May 2006.  
Victoria University of Wellington and the A’oga Fa’a Samoa

This further acknowledgment, inserted on request, comes from Ene Tapusoa:

*"Great relationships have been formed, especially with Dr Val Podmore who has been a beacon of light to us all. She in her quiet and unassuming way guided us along when faced with turbulent and stormy weather of our own uncertainty and doubts as teacher researchers, to never lose sight. Her navigation expertise and experience in the sea of knowledge in ECE and research, her respect and support to who we are, embracing our values, our language and our culture, her love and understanding in our efforts and achievement, and most of all her patience and gentle encouragement to do our best, has helped in guiding us safely ashore on this journey. Fa'afetai lava Val, malo le galue."* Ene Tapusoa.

## Chapter 1 Introduction

### *E poto le Tautai ae se lana atu i ama*

The navigator is wise but can also be wrong.  
Knowledge is never complete; there is always  
something more to learn.<sup>1</sup>

### Overview

This chapter introduces the A’oga Fa’a Samoa, an early childhood Centre of Innovation (2003-2006). It outlines the aims and rationale of our research. Special characteristics of the A’oga Fa’a Samoa include its Samoan language and cultural immersion philosophy and programme, its transition processes, and its functioning as a “community of learners”. The research addresses two key research questions concerned with children’s learning and language continuity as they make transitions within and from the A’oga Fa’a Samoa.

### The A’oga Fa’a Samoa



Photo 1: The A’oga Fa’a Samoa (2003) located on the site of the Richmond Road Primary school grounds.

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<sup>1</sup> The proverbs at the beginning of the chapters were translated by Albert Refiti specifically for this report. Their original published source in Samoan was: Leaupepe Pita Leaupepe (1995). *Samoa i lona soifuaga i ana Aganuu*. Onehunga: Pacific Books Producers.

In 1984 in Auckland a group of grandparents and interested parents set up an incorporated society “A’oga Fa’a Samoa”, found premises, and started the first Samoan early childhood education centre in Aotearoa. The centre focused on Samoan-language immersion (Taouma, 1992). From the beginning the management committee, made up of the parents and grandparents of the children attending, had a vision of where they wanted the A’oga Fa’a Samoa to go. During its early years of operation, the centre was located at the Pacific Island Resource Centre in Herne Bay, Auckland. In 1989 the A’oga Fa’a Samoa was relocated on to a site in the grounds of Richmond Road School, where a bilingual Samoan unit operates at primary-school level. In 1990, this same centre became New Zealand’s first licensed and chartered Pacific early childhood centre.



Photo 2: The A’oga Fa’a Samoa, showing the covered way linking the under-2½ building to the over-2 building, with the sandpit as the focal play and meeting area.

## **Development and Growth of the A’oga Fa’a Samoa Site**

*Jan Taouma*

The A’oga Fa’a Samoa was originally established in the Pacific Island Resource centre in Herne Bay Auckland. About the same time a Samoan bilingual class was established at Richmond Road Primary School in Ponsonby and approaches were made to the school for the A’oga Fa’a Samoa move onto the school site. Visits by the children in the Samoan unit of the Primary school to the A’oga had already been happening and children from the A’oga were transitioning to this class room when they turned 5 years of age

In 1987 the A’oga Fa’a Samoa moved onto the school site and was given the use of a school prefab and in 1988 a move was made to another prefab which had been renovated to meet the needs of early childhood children. This classroom included a small kitchenette with a deck the shape of a *fale* and a bathroom, laundry area. The *fale*-shaped deck was important as it gave children the added Samoan cultural value of being in a *fale*. This has been a focal point for children and parents over the years for dancing, mat times for morning *lotu* (prayers) and is where food is served to children who sit cross legged on Samoan *fala* (mats).

As the centre evolved and hours of operation extended the need to increase the size of the building was crucial. A grant was obtained and the main room of the building was built out over the bank making a much larger open space for children to operate in. A room was added for under-2 children to use and sleep in. An office and storeroom was added to the back of the room and a new kitchen toilet area was built. The centre was licensed for 34 children at this time.

One of the many advantages of being on the school site was the use of the school grounds during the time the Primary school was not using them. Children from the A’oga Fa’a Samoa can go with their teachers out side and run on the large field area, play games, explore the tree area and play on the fixed apparatus.

In 1998 consideration was given to the need to expand the centre once again. This was due to the huge demand for infants and toddlers to come to the centre. For Samoan language to develop strongly children need to be immersed in it as soon as possible. Staff at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa were studying theories of working with infants and toddlers and also the importance of bilingual education. Through their studies they knew it was important for young children to be exposed to Samoan language from an early age.

*“Research has shown that newborns differentiate between speech sounds and other sounds, and up to the age of about nine months are able to respond with equal sensitivity to any set of phonetic distinctions they are exposed to (de Boyosson–Bardies 1999). After that time, they become increasingly locked into the sound system if the languages they are exposed to.” (Meade, Puhipuhi, & Foster-Cohen, 2003).*

The current building was not adequate for many under-2 children and after much research on working with children of this age a discretionary grant was obtained

to build another building for these children. This was exciting to be able to design something for the purposes of care and education for children of this age so that they could come to an environment that was created specifically for their needs. Staff needs to have a space away from the children and for a proper office was also part of the plan. This staff area was created upstairs from the children and has a wonderful view over the primary school grounds.

The under-2 building was created to take into account the large liquid amber tree which covered the outside sandpit area which is the central play area between the two buildings where children meet and play together. However, two years after the opening of the new building it had to be removed due to dying branches. A large cover-way has since been erected which links the two buildings and enables children to be outside all year round.

More recent developments to the site have been the wonderful meeting and work room built when the A'oga Fa'a Samoa became a centre of innovation. The entrance way and new foyer in the over-2 area has been changed, with plans to renovate the toilet laundry area now underway.



Photo 3: The A'oga Fa'a Samoa 2006, showing the meeting room (upstairs at right) and the new foyer area.

A statement of philosophy was developed by and for the centre. The philosophy states that the A'oga Fa'a Samoa will:

- Promote Samoan language and culture, so nurturing the positive identity of the children.



- Employ trained educators and encourage further training so that quality care and education is provided.
- Encourage a family atmosphere for parents and children so children feel secure and loved.
- Emphasise enjoyment of learning through the medium of Samoan language.

In 2003, the A’oga Fa’a Samoa was selected as one of the 6 initial early childhood education centres of innovation (Taouma, Tapusoa, & Wendt Samu, 2005; Taouma, Wendt Samu, Podmore, Tapusoa, & Moananu, 2003).

### **New Zealand Centres of Innovation Programme**

In 2002, the early childhood Centres of Innovation (COI) programme was announced as part of the New Zealand Government’s 10-year plan for early childhood education policy: *Pathways to the Future/Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002). Centres of Innovation are expected to:

- Build the use of innovative approaches that result in improved early childhood learning and teaching based on Te Whāriki: Early Childhood Curriculum;
- Facilitate action research, with the help of researchers, to show the results the innovative approaches have on learning and teaching;
- Share the knowledge, understanding and models of practice with others in the early childhood education sector and parents/whanau.

In 2003 the first 6 COIs were selected. After a similar selection process, the number increased to 10 from 2005. Selection of a third round of 6 more new COIs centres was finalized early in 2006. To date, the A’oga Fa’a Samoa is the only COI that is a Samoan-language immersion centre. Special characteristics of the A’oga Fa’a Samoa are its Samoan language-immersion programme, and its “community of learners” collaborative approach.

Our key innovations as a COI are:

- Small groups of children stay with the same teacher from the point of entry through different groups and spaces in the centre and into school.

- This innovation, with the educator able to move through each developmental stage from babies to 5-year-olds, was introduced to benefit children, families and educators.

(These innovations are described further in Meade, 2005).

Like all COIs, the A’oga Fa’a Samoa has been engaged in a 3-year action research project to show how the centre’s innovative practices influence learning and teaching.

### **Research Aims**

Our action research was designed to investigate the relationship between learning and language continuity as children and educators make transitions within the centre and on to school. A related intention of the research is to document aspects of the identity, strength, and confidence of the children.

### **Research Questions**

The two key research questions in this study are:

1. What helps learning and language continuity as children make transitions within and from the A’oga Fa’a Samoa?
2. How can the key approaches that help learning and language continuity be implemented in practice?

Our research was designed to address the above research questions, within the context of the A’oga Fa’a Samoa and its community, and for the benefit of its community. Collaborative, active involvement of key staff members is a key feature of the action research. The sampling design includes children at two transition points and the staff at the centre. The transition points are:

- (1) the move at around 2 years 6 months from the infants’ and toddlers’ area to the over-2s area, and
- (2) the transition from the A’oga Fa’a Samoa to the primary school on the adjacent site.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### *Sua le ava ae toto le ata*

To follow in line in an orderly and respectful way.

To acknowledge those who have come before.

#### **Overview**

The literature outlined in this chapter focuses mainly on four specific topics central to the aims and questions of the research. The topic areas are: quality and innovation; Pacific early childhood centres; transitions within and from centres, with a particular focus on transition from Pacific immersion centres to primary school; and immersion and bilingual education, and collaborative action research.

#### **Pasifika Early Childhood Centres**

There have been several waves of migration from the Pacific Islands to New Zealand, dating from the 1950s (Atiga-Anderson, 2004). By the 1980s, developments were initiated within New Zealand Pacific communities towards the maintenance of young children's Pacific languages and cultural heritages.

Many of the Pacific early childhood education centres were supported initially by churches and housed in church halls and church buildings (Ete, 1993). Several writers have outlined aspects of the emergence, within New Zealand, of Samoan early childhood centres with language-immersion programmes (the *A'oga 'Amata*) (Ete, 1993; Taouma, 1992). Pasifika early childhood centres were established initially to offer early educational benefits to children. The church has had a major role in the establishment of many of the *A'oga 'Amata* (Ete, 1993). During the late 1990s, becoming licensed and chartered was identified as a major challenge for Pasifika early childhood centres (Mara, 1998).

#### **Quality and Innovation**

Quality innovations and effective learning and teaching practices are central concerns of early childhood research and practice (Meade, 2003; Pascal, 1993,

2002; Whalley & Whitaker, 2003). The success of both the British “centres of excellence” and the New Zealand early childhood education “centres of innovation” programmes appears dependent, to some extent, on centres’ support, leadership, collaborative research, and related continuing professional development.

## **Immersion and Bilingual Education**

A large collection of research literature is available on the effectiveness of bilingual and immersion education (e.g., Baker, 2001; Cummins, 1993, 1996; May, Hill & Tiakiwai, 2004; McCaffery & Tuafuti, 1998, 2003; Tuafuti & McCaffery, 2005). Cummins (1993) reports that early childhood education experience in the mother tongue lays a foundation for later academic and linguistic success. Recent research on bilingual and immersion learning shows that:

Language maintenance and bilingual enrichment programmes are most effective in fostering children’s long-term bilingual fluency and literacy in both their first and second languages.  
(May, Hill & Tiakiwai, 2004).

In Pasifika early years contexts, McCaffery and Tuafuti (2001) support the importance of 100% immersion education so that before they start school, children have a strong foundation of understanding, speaking, and literacy knowledge. School-based research by Tuafuti and McCaffery (2005) affirms the importance of immersion and bilingual Pasifika languages programmes for children’s self-esteem and identity, and for effective learning in their first language (L1) and then in their second language (L2).

Summary principles about immersion and bilingual education are listed below. Ene Tapusoa prepared this summary as part of an information pack on bilingualism for our staff members in a Samoan full immersion centre.

**Summary prepared by Ene Tapusoa, at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa, 2006**

**What is bilingualism?**

*“Bilingualism is the ability to listen, speak, read and write in two languages. The first language (L1) is the language that you learn from your mother in infancy, and the second language (L2) is the language that a learner seeks to add or has added to his/her L1”.* (Baker, 2001 p.5)

**What is bilingual education?**

*Bilingual education is not about the teaching of languages in schools in separate language time slots. It is about the use of our home/community languages L1 and English as significant languages through which to teach other subjects of the curriculum.* (McCaffery & Tuafuti, 1998)

**What does bilingual have to do with A’oga, when we only use one language?**

Bilingual programmes at early childhood (language nests) aim to promote full bilingualism either by using a minority group language (immersion) or by using two languages (dual medium) as the means of instruction. In other words all methods that aim to assist learners to become bilingual, including full immersion, are part of the professional field known as Bilingual Education.

Random code switching by the teacher between languages in the ECE setting is not recommended, as the child simply waits for the adult to translate for them, instead of having to learn the new language (McCaffery, 2003). (Baker & Prys-Jones, 1998, pp. 586-595).

**How do we deliver this programme?**

At the A’oga, most of the children come with English as their first language with varying degrees of understanding of Samoan. What we need to do is to speak Samoan 100% of the time so that the children will learn and understand the language and begin to use it for learning. This immersion approach in ECE is strongly supported by research showing that high levels of heritage language use in early immersion settings produces better academic achievement and more native-speaker-like proficiency. Hence children at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa are growing up with two first languages (Baker, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002) (Baker & Prys-Jones, 1998, pp. 47-50).

**Transitions from Pacific Early Childhood Centres**

Recent research and writing on transition to school from Pasifika centres has influenced the development of this research (McNaughton, 1998; Podmore & Sauvao, 2003; Podmore, Sauvao, & Mapa, 2001a, 2001b; Sauvao, Mapa, &

Podmore, 2000). Findings on transition tend to show that, when young children move from one educational setting to another, it is important to understand the cultural context of their prior experiences, “given that children’s culture-specific experiences, and their development of language and literacy skills, are interconnected” (Podmore & Sauvao, 2003, p. 35).

One study of transition to school from Pacific Islands early childhood centres focused on children’s experiences, including language and culture-specific experiences that support the development of language and literacy skills, as they moved from Pacific Islands early childhood centres into English-language primary schools (Sauvao, Mapa, & Podmore, 2000). Five research questions on children’s transition from Pacific early childhood centres to schools were investigated: “(1) What are the similarities and differences between the contexts of home, school, and early childhood settings? (2) What are the aspirations, expectations, and views of parents, teachers, and children of these contexts? (3) How well do children make the transition between the contexts? (4) How can the information collected in (the) study assist teachers and parents to facilitate transition across the three contexts? How do schools continue to assist and support the home languages and cultures of Pacific Islands children starting primary school? (5) What is the language policy of the school (as stated in the charter)?” (Podmore, Sauvao, & Mapa, 2001a, p. 75).

The study described in detail the views and the experiences of children, parents, and teachers, drawing on interviews with families from each of 5 Pacific groups—Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa, Tokelau, and Tonga (Sauvao et al., 2000). Participants were 27 children, their parents, and their early childhood and primary school teachers. The children, aged between 5 years 0 months and 5 years 8 months, had recently moved from a Pacific early childhood centre to a primary school. Culturally sensitive interview processes were developed for each of the 5 ethnic groups and documented in detail as possible models for future research (Podmore, Sauvao, & Mapa 2001b). The main findings of the research were that parents, children, and teachers had some major concerns and made useful suggestions about transition to school. Key issues that arose included:

Continuity of Pacific Islands languages and culture between home, early childhood centre, and school; partnership between home and school; expectations of teachers and parents regarding children's skills at school entry; implications of the "hidden curriculum" (bullying and swearing); curriculum continuity; literacy; teacher education; and Pacific Islands representation in schools and education. (Podmore & Sauvao, 2003, p. 40).

Following on from that work, the research at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa looks in depth at the issue of continuity of Samoan language and cultural experiences as children move from a Samoan-language immersion centre to a bilingual unit in a primary school.

### **Collaborative, Participatory Action Research**

Findings of literature reviews show important interconnections between quality early childhood education and reflective teacher practice (Podmore & Meade, with Kerslake Hendricks, 2000), and between effective professional development, "enhanced pedagogy", and children's learning (Mitchell & Cubey, 2003). Further, there is clear evidence of support for the appropriateness of action research to evaluate and document innovations and practices in early childhood education (Smith, Grima, Gaffney, Powell, Masse, & Barnett, 2000, p. 124).

It is appropriate in view of the above findings that educators and research associates at all of the centres of innovation are using action research approaches to evaluate their practice. As Cardno (2003, p. 7) points out, *classroom action research* is typically qualitative, interpretive, and practical, and "involves teachers holding discussions (often with academics acting as facilitators and advocates of "teacher knowledge" rather than theory). *Participatory action research* tends to be strongly associated with liberation and emancipation (Atweh, Kemmis, & Weeks, 1998; McTaggart, 1991).

As McTaggart (1989, 1991) writes, in a paper on "16 tenets of participatory action research", action research is collaborative, participatory, self-critical, and it goes in cycles. There are some other key points in Borgia and Schuler's (1996), "five

Cs” of action research that can apply in early childhood contexts. Their five points are:

- commitment;
- collaboration;
- concern;
- consideration;
- change.

A number of McTaggart’s tenets, and the “five C’s”, have been evident during our action research at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa. The next chapter describes how the action research at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa was developed collaboratively and carried out at the centre, and how the data were analysed and reflected upon in the light of socio-cultural theories.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methods**

#### *Uluulu a matafolau*

You must thatch the house in order from the bottom to the top otherwise it will let in water. Do not hurry things, they must be done properly.

### **Overview**

This chapter is about collaborative, participatory action research processes. There is a description of the action research processes enacted in this study. Ethical considerations and Pacific research methodologies are described. An outline of the action research cycles is provided, followed by an explanation of each of the action research tools adapted or developed and used in this research study. The action research tools include: focus group interviews; a “critical incidents” study; observations of children and adults; teacher diary records; children’s interviews/children’s voices; and parent surveys. Finally, data analysis procedures are outlined, and a framework for analysis is presented.

### **Action Research Processes**

At the A’oga Fa’a Samoa, we implemented an action research spiral approach. The action research approach was similar to those used recently in New Zealand studies (Cardno, 2003; Carr, May, & Podmore, 2002). This involved using a spiral approach that included observing, planning, acting and reflecting (following a model derived from Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, and with reference to Cardno, 2003, and Wadsworth, 1991).

We found the participatory action research was collaborative, and potentially emancipating (in line with the views of other participatory action researchers and writers, for example—Atweh, Kemmis, & Weeks, 1998). The action research was also demanding of teachers’ time and of the centre’s organisation of staffing, and it offered the research team particular, exciting challenges associated with record keeping in both English and Samoan.

## **Ethics, Participatory Approaches, and Pacific Methodologies**

We carried out the research in accordance with the Ethical Guidelines of the New Zealand Association for Research in Education (1999). General principles, cultural appropriateness, consent, confidentiality, and responsive feedback were all important. We also developed and appraised the research procedures for cultural appropriateness, with regard for Pacific methodologies.

Sensitivity to the centre philosophy was needed to maintain the children's experience of Samoan language. Given that there were extra visitors to the centre, it was necessary for adults to meet to discuss the project in an area that is separated from the children, and an additional room was built for this purpose. Sensitivity to the child participants, and to the needs of infants/young children being observed is important throughout all phases of the research (Cullen, Hedges, & Bone, 2005; Hedges, 2002).

Before the research commenced, the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee approved the proposal. Informed consent for the research was then sought from the staff and centre parents; and from the primary school principal, primary school teacher in the bilingual Samoan unit, and parents of the school children in that class.

Processes included ongoing analysis of the research approaches with reference to Pacific research methodologies, as a safeguard for cultural appropriateness (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt Samu & Finau, 2001; Podmore, Wendt Samu, & Taouma, 2003). Collaboration and participation, and the establishment of (self-critical) communities were important characteristics of the A'oga Fa'a Samoa's research, a priority which is consistent with generally agreed "tenets" of participatory action research (Borgia & Schuler, 1996; McTaggart, 1989). An advisory group, convened initially to consult and finalise the research proposal, has provided advice and served as a focus group.

## Action Research Tools

### Focus Group Interviews

An initial advisory group (convened 20 February 2003 to consult and finalise the research proposal) continued to provide advice for the research project. Several key interviews/discussions of the focus group yielded useful data for the study. In-depth discussions around the focus group topics/questions provided background information pertaining to the first research question: “What helps learning and language continuity as children make transitions within and from the Samoan language immersion centre?”



Photo 4: The A’oga Fa’a Samoa COI focus group: Some key members 2003-2006

Participants in the focus group interviews included a facilitator, 3-4 teachers (including 1 from the primary school on site), 2 researchers, 1 representative from centre management, 2 parents, the centre manager, and a centre support person. The voices of more of the parents of participating children (that is, the groups of

children making transitions) were included after the team had reflected on the processes and findings of the first two spirals of the action research.

Topics discussed in the focus groups included:

- (1) aspects of language learning and
- (2) successful experiences of children's transition.

A copy of the key questions for the focus groups is presented as Appendix A. The focus group facilitator, together with the researcher/s, "moderated" the focus group, drawing on the experiences and views of the informants. The duration of the focus group discussions was from two to three hours. Recording methods included: recording the interview on a laptop computer; note-taking, and audio-taping sections for further analysis. The recorded information was always checked by participants to record collective views accurately and to ensure prompt feedback on the accuracy of the records (as in Podmore & May, with Mara, 1998).

### Critical Incidents Study

A critical incidents study with the focus group participants, carried out by Dr Airini, is summarised under the heading: "*Critical incidents research summary: What helps effective transition in Early Childhood Education: Perceptions of good practice in Samoan ECE*" in an earlier report (Podmore, Airini & the A'oga Fa'a Samoa, 2004, November). The findings are also included in this report (see Appendix E).

### Observations

Centre educators observed the group of children for whom they were the "primary caregiver" (that is, the group of children with whom they made the transition) and Learning Stories to assess children's experiences (Carr, 2001). In addition, as a central part of the action research, key educators tracked small groups of children as they make these transitions:

- the move at around 2 years 6 months from the infants' and toddlers' area to the over-2s area;

- transition from the Samoan-language early childhood centre to the primary school on the adjacent site.

The children’s transitions guided the timing of the cycles and spirals of the action research. As small groups of toddlers moved to the over-2s area, and as small groups of children made the transition to school, centre educators observed the transitioning children.

All teachers observed individual children, and small groups of children, as they made transitions. As part of the research process, three teachers tracked groups of children who were making transitions (together with their “A’oga Fa’a Samoa primary caregiver”) within or from the early childhood centre. These teachers maintained observations and diary records and they coded their observations of both the children’s and the teachers’ interactions across the strands of *Te Whāriki*:

Belonging	So’otaga
Well-being	Soifua laulelei
Exploration	Ola Su’esu’e
Communication	Feso’otaiga
Contribution	Sao.

During the research cycles, other staff members also continued their regular practice of writing Learning Stories about children, and these were a further rich source of data.

### Diary Records

Alongside their observations, teachers who had a key role in the COI research made diary records across the five strands of *Te Whāriki*. They reflected, both on children’s experiences of transition, and on teaching practices, holistically across the strands of *Te Whāriki*. Details of the diary headings are presented as Appendix B.

The teachers sorted and categorised the observations, and their diary reflections, by using felt-tipped pens and colour coding: Belonging = blue; Well-being = green; Exploration = yellow; Communication = pink; and Contribution = orange.

We decided that this was a manageable and meaningful process. Teachers recorded and reflected on examples of practices which helped transition, and/or encouraged children's Samoan language learning and development.

The information recorded includes useful examples of teachers fostering children's sense of belonging, together with their well-being and exploration in the new space, and of teachers encouraging communication in Samoan. There are also examples, during transition, of contribution (children looking after others as they arrive).

### Interviews with Children

Teachers who had a key role in the COI research team also made audio records of children talking about their transitions. A set of suggested questions was compiled for educators to ask the children (in the Samoan language). The questions at transition points, for example, are "*What are you looking forward to (doing) at school?*", "*What do you like about school?*" or (before and after the child moves across to the over 2s area within the centre "*What do you like best at.... (the centre)?*" (see Appendix C).

These interviews were prepared prior to the first cycle of the action research, and trialled with some of the children during that cycle. However, we found that the range of data collection tasks was too diverse and demanding of staff time. This led to the collective decision that teachers would concentrate on observations and their reflective diary records for the second spiral of the action research (i.e., the spiral which tracked the group of toddlers and of young children who made transitions during the first term of 2004). The next cycle concentrated on interviewing the children making transitions at that time. It also included their parents' voices by inviting parental participation at focus group meetings.

### Parent Surveys about Language Acquisition

In addition to the action research tools developed for the project and summarised above, two staff members separately initiated surveys of families. The focus of the surveys (together with the observations and teachers' diary reflections on

children’s communication) was consistent with the proposition in a recent review of Pasifika early childhood education research, that a key priority is to “describe (and evaluate) the languages experiences of Pasifika young children” (Meade, Puhipuhi, & Foster-Cohen, 2003, p. 40).

The aim of the surveys was to learn more about parents’ vision for the centre and for their children’s language experiences. A questionnaire used by the two staff members (Ene Tapusoa and Ta’a Tuai) was adapted from a questionnaire first developed by Jan Taouma (1992). The 10 questions are about Samoan language experiences at home and at the centre, parents’ views on the child’s experiences at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa, and their related satisfaction and suggestions (see Appendix D). A short explanatory letter, together with the brief questionnaire, was given out to 41 families, of whom 36 returned written replies (a response rate of 87.80%).

### **Robustness and Validation**

It was important to ensure that, in this action research, the research design was sound and the findings were robust and meaningful. Support from very experienced research associates was essential both for developing the project design and for supporting research capability among the staff and key “teacher researchers”. We used multiple methods to generate the data—observations, interviews, surveys, focus group discussions—and our research involved a good range of participant groups (children aged from 2 to up to 6 years, teachers, parents, management, school teachers, and the focus/advisory group).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> These design strategies meant, in qualitative research terms, that there was within-study triangulation. Triangulation is widely accepted by researchers as a useful process for enhancing robustness (Aubrey et al., 2000; McMurray, Pace, & Scott, 2004). “Triangulation” can mean: using multiple ways to collect data, or using several theories to interpret data, or drawing on multiple participant perspectives (across several researchers, observers, or participant groups).

We also checked the validity of both:

- the research processes (for comprehensibility and appropriateness) and
- the data analyses and interpretation of the findings (for “accuracy” and authenticity)

(Kemmis & McTaggart. 2005).

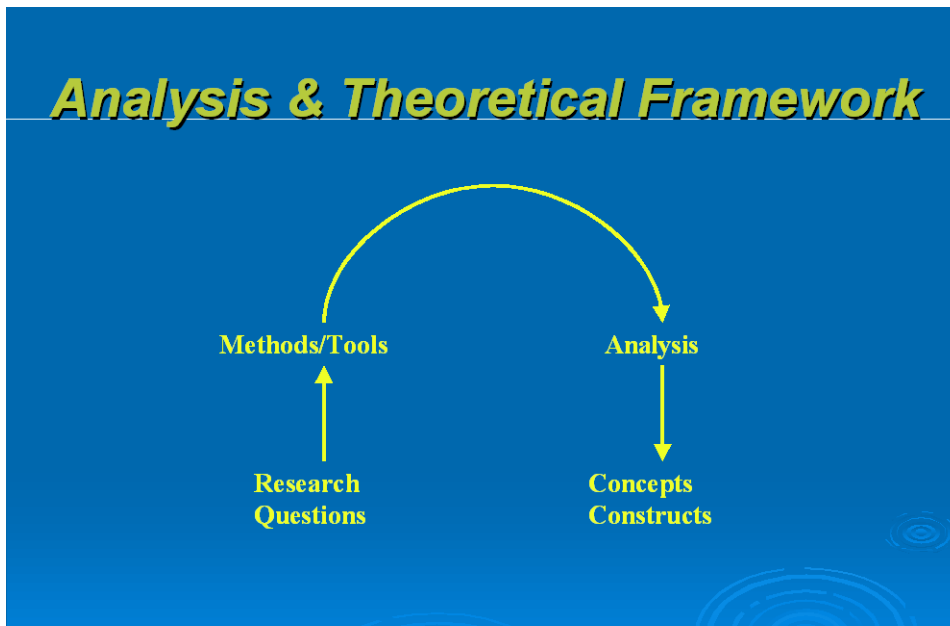
Throughout the study, the focus/advisory group had a key role in “respondent validation” (Foster, 1996). Focus group members commented on and contributed to the action research processes, the observations and translations of observational transcripts from Samoan to English, and the findings of the COI research (Podmore, Wendt Samu, Taouma, & Tapusoa, 2005). This contributed to ensuring the findings were not only robust but also meaningful within our Samoan early childhood context.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The research design, the analyses, and the findings are all closely intertwined with the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*, the New Zealand early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996). *Te Whāriki* is strongly underpinned by socio-cultural theory. The principles of *Te Whāriki*—empowerment, respectful and responsive relationships, family and community participation, and holistic development—reflect socio-cultural approaches.

The research analyses and theoretical framework are outlined in Figure 3.1. The design of Figure 3.1 reflects the shape of a Samoan *fale* or house.





Nurturing Positive Identity in Children



**Figure 3.1 Research Analyses and Theoretical Framework:  
A “fale shaped” design.**

Further details of the design and analyses are set out in Table 1, linking:

- the research questions;
- the research methods and action research tools;
- data sorting, categorising, and analysis processes; and
- key theoretical concepts.

Table 1 lays out the concepts and theoretical constructs that were used in the analytical interpretation of the data.

Table 1.

**Analysis Framework:  
COI Action Research at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa**

<u>RESEARCH QUESTION</u>	<u>METHODS/ TOOLS</u>	<u>DATA ANALYSIS</u>	<u>THEORETICAL ANALYSES &amp; CONSTRUCTS</u>
<p><b>1. What helps learning and language continuity as children make transitions within and from the A’oga Fa’a Samoa?</b></p> <p><i>(2 action research cycles)</i></p>	<p>Focus group interviews</p> <p>Critical incidents interviews</p> <p>Observations</p> <p>Diary records</p> <p>Language survey</p>	<p>Coding, sorting and categorising</p> <p>Coding across the strands of Te Whāriki</p> <p>“ “ “ “ &amp; reflections</p> <p>numerical data: frequencies &amp; percentages</p>	<p><b>Language continuity</b></p> <p><b>Innovative transition Ethics BWECC</b></p> <p><b>Continuity of group</b></p> <p><b>Continuity of teacher</b></p> <p><b>Samoan language continuity</b></p>
<p><b>2. How can the key elements that help language continuity be implemented in practice?</b></p> <p><i>(3rd action research cycle)</i></p>	<p>Focus group</p> <p>Interviews with children</p> <p>Full staff discussion/ Meetings</p>	<p>as above</p> <p>Translation, categorising under research questions (&amp; Te Whāriki strands)</p> <p>Reflections across the strands of Te Whāriki on teacher’s role</p>	<p><b>aiga; &amp; as above</b></p> <p><b>identity, communication tools and artifacts</b></p> <p><b>scaffolding/ co-construction;</b></p> <p><b>community of inquiry; transformation</b></p>

Note: BWECC = the 5 strands of *Te Whāriki*: Belonging, Well-being, Exploration, Communication, and Contribution.

The next chapters focus on the main findings of the research. The findings were analysed and interpreted in the light of key constructs in Table 1 (as in the right-hand column, where the concepts and theoretical constructs are set out in bold and highlighted). There are chapters about findings on: the *aiga* principle; Samoan language and cultural continuity; innovative transition; and community of learners/community of inquiry.

## Chapter 4

### FINDINGS: Ethics and the *Aiga* Principle

#### *Seu le manu ae taga'i i le galu*

Always be aware of who you are and be prepared before you speak as you might insult those who are important. To acknowledge that one has responsibilities to one's family/community.

#### Overview

This chapter discusses the findings of the research, focusing on the key philosophical concepts of ethics and the *aiga* principle. It explains how these concepts are embedded, and central to the robustness of the research findings and the validity of interpretations of outcomes.

#### Ethics and the *Aiga* Concept

Throughout all phases of this research, “ethics” was defined with reference to the Pasifika guidelines. We referred, in particular, to the Pasifika Education Research Guidelines prepared by Melani Anae, Eve Coxon, Diane Mara, Tanya Wendt Samu, and Christine Finau (2001). In this project, the focus/advisory group, which includes teachers, parents, management, and the research associates who work alongside the teachers, had a key role. Focus group members commented on and contributed to the action research processes and the findings from the centre. Relationships within the *Aiga* community (families, teachers, children) became an integral part of the research process, as a consequence of application of Pasifika informed ethical principles. This is essentially culturally embedded ethical research practice.

The community that we have via the A'oga Fa'a Samoa has many parallels to the fundamental traditional Samoan institution of the *aiga*—or the extended family. The A'oga Fa'a Samoa, like the *aiga*, is a cultural and social institution that has key positions, each with important roles and responsibilities in relation to the others. The positions or groups that are a part of the A'oga Fa'a Samoa are: the teachers, the management committee; families and their children.

The findings of the research show how the centre practices and relationships reflect Samoan cultural values. The A’oga Fa’a Samoa places a strong emphasis on the *aiga* (extended family) in regard to relationships. As Tanya Wendt Samu has explained, the *aiga* concept is a reality in action at the centre, and is related to values:

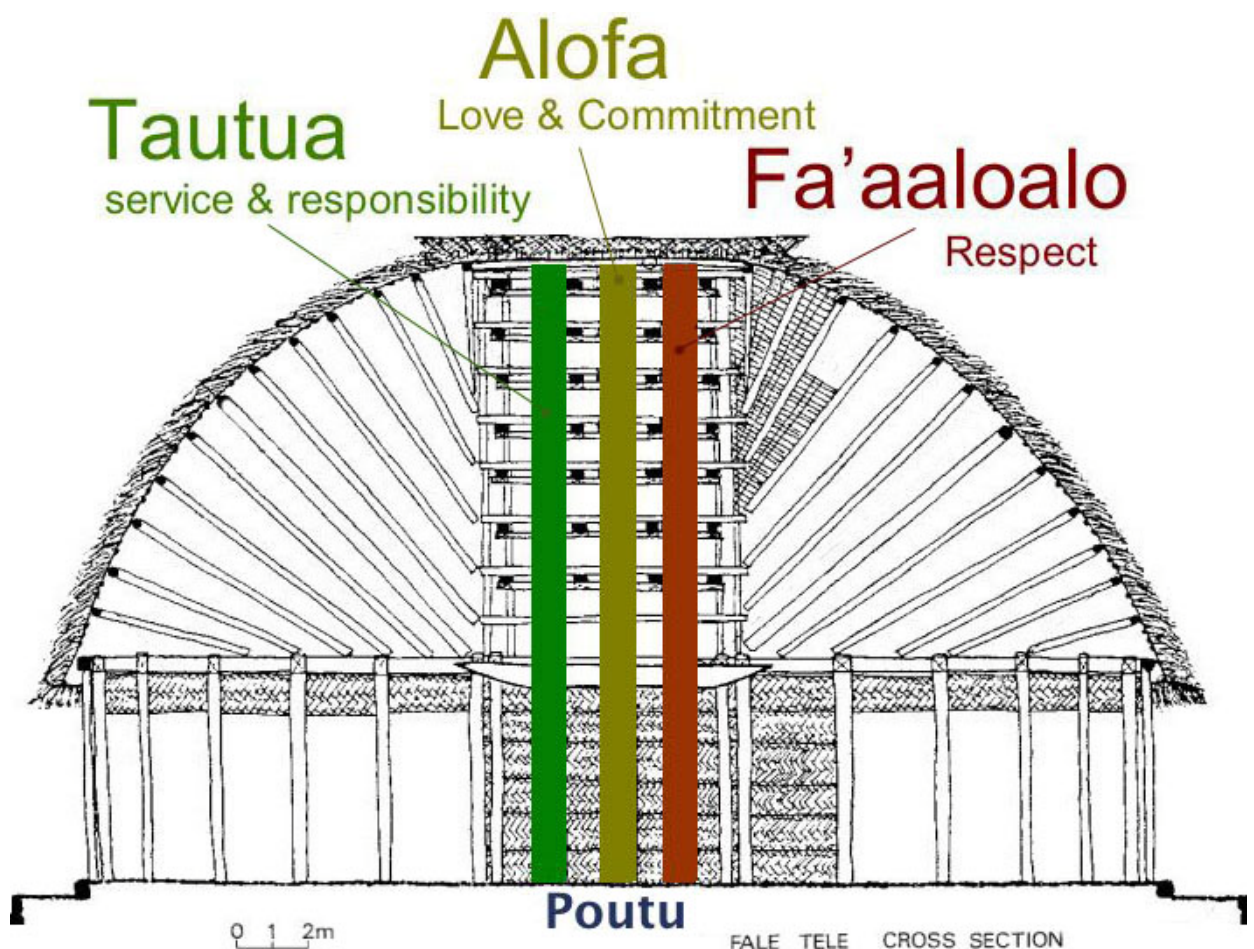
The values that underlie our interactions (as families, teachers, and children) are not unlike those which inform our actions within our different *aiga*. Values include, for example, service and responsibility (*tautua*), love and commitment (*alofa*) and respect (*faaaloalo*). (Taouma, Wendt Samu, Podmore, Tapusoa, & Moananu, 2003, p. 5)

The *aiga* principle has been central to the philosophy that underpins the relationship agreement between the A’oga Fa’a Samoa COI team, including the research associate. As discussed later in Chapter 7 (on “community of learners” and “community of inquiry”), the focus/advisory group, convened for the purpose of developing the COI research proposal and processes, has guided the research reporting. The focus group represents the *aiga* philosophy of the centre, and has staff, parents, community, management, and the research associates all involved. The *faia’oga* (teachers) and parents have complementary roles that are closely interwoven (Taouma, Tapusoa, & Wendt Samu, 2005).

In this research project, the observations of young children making transitions show how both the children and teachers demonstrate the *aiga* principle in action. Among the children, this is apparent through their supporting others in the group and actively contributing to their well-being. We discuss these findings in Chapter 6.

Tanya Wendt Samu has analysed how the three key principles have informed the research approach. The *Pou Tu* model (adapted from Samu, 2005) demonstrates the central role of these principles. A traditional Samoan *fale tele* is constructed around three or more centre posts (*pou tu*). The centre posts are constructed and placed first – they are like the cornerstone, of a large European style building. The

vaulted roof is built on top of and around the centre posts. Posts are constructed around the rim of the fale. However, the most unique feature of the structure of a fale tele is the posts around the rim are not a structural necessity for holding the vaulted roof up. It is the centre posts—or the *pou tu*. Samu (2005) has argued that the potential success of Pasifika research and education projects lies in the extent to which Pasifika values have informed both the design, structure, and implementation of the project. The values for this project are illustrated in the following *Pou Tu* model:



**Figure 4.1** The *Pou Tu* model (adapted from Samu, 2005), showing the three values that informed our research at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa.

Three values or principles have informed our research project. Tanya Wendt Samu explains them in this way:

- *Alofa*: love and commitment. The relationships the members of our COI (i.e., the A’oga Fa’a Samoa) are familial relationships. Being involved with the COI research project is a specific, shared commitment – it is a make or break commitment for us all.

Children – it has been a journey of discovery for us as parents, teachers, and researchers. We have discovered or learned new knowledge of our children, the ways that they learn or have been learning. The research has provided us with different set of lenses in which to see our children.

- *Faaaloalo*: respect. Hierarchies are non-existent within the relationships that have been formed between those involved with this COI project. For example it is incidental that our lead research associate (Dr Val Podmore) happens to have a title, a professional title (Dr), from a world we collectively respect i.e., academia and education. But the primary source of our respect for her is the form and the manner in which she has contributed to our community, our A’oga Fa’a Samoa. She has shared her knowledge and expertise with us, provided guidance and leadership in terms of research.

*Faaaloalo* also applies to the respectful and ethical involvement of our children in this research project. Such a relationship is not alien of our day-to-day practice, or very much a part of our centre’s philosophy.

- *Tautua*: service. Service for us is about the contribution of time, resources and knowledge and expertise. Reciprocity is an essential feature of our notion of service. For example, the focus group, for many of the participants, particularly the parent members, has been an opportunity to serve the A’oga community (teachers and children) via advice, provision of feedback for milestone reports, assisting with the preparation of presentations , and so on. There is also the perspective that this research project is a way that our Centre the A’oga Fa’a Samoa, can serve other

groups—other cultural groups e.g. Pasifika immersion centres, and professional groups.

These principles have informed the research process that we, A’oga Fa’a Samoa, were immersed within for the duration of the project. The “connections” that we have made (in terms of new knowledge, understandings and perspectives, and relationships with others) are as a consequence of principles that have informed our research practice. This has made this research ours. The western methodological framework (including, for example, the action research and the action research tools) has become ours—we have clear, unwavering sense of ownership of this project as a consequence of these principles. This research is ethical because our values flavour it in deep, meaningful ways. The research is still valid, and legitimate and robust research—it is still action research, and still informed as well by socio-cultural theory.



## Chapter 5

### FINDINGS: Language and Cultural Continuity

*E au i le tau ola, e au i le fagota*

If you follow and learn from the navigator, then one day you will also become the navigator.

#### Overview

The focus of this chapter is on Samoan language communication and immersion. The findings are interpreted with reference to related research and theory on learning and teaching in the “mother tongue” and on bilingualism. A key related concept evident in the data analysed from this study is children’s identity. Drawing on socio-cultural theoretical approaches, additional concepts discussed are: tools, artefacts, and mediation.

#### Observations of Communication in Samoan

Observations recorded throughout the project illustrate how the children’s use of the Samoan language was extended within the centre. For example these observations, recorded as a group of children moved across to the over-2s area, were coded as examples of communication:

*“Fa’afetai mo le supo”. (Thank you for the soup).*

*Lilly looks at the potato and says, “Talo”*

*“Leai, e le o se talo, o le pateta”. (No, it’s not taro, it’s a potato).*

*Lilly: “O le pateta”. (It’s a potato)*

*Faia’oga: “O le a lau mea’ai na e ai?” (What are you eating?)*

*Lilly: “O le supo ma le kaloti, ma le moa, ma le kapisi, ma le pateta”. (It’s soup and carrots and chicken and cabbage and potato)*

*Faia’oga: “Teine lelei, Lilly.”. (Good girl, Lilly).*

The example shows the teacher using praise and questioning the child, Lilly, to extend her thinking and her communication in Samoan.

The staff member then reflected on these observations and recorded in her diary that Lilly (as observed in the above excerpt) “knew what she was eating in Samoan, except the potato which she mistook for taro.” The staff member also made these reflections on the role of the teacher in children’s Samoan language development:

*The teacher was encouraging her (the child in transition) in the use of Samoan language, by questioning and helping her know the difference between some of the vegetables—talo ma le pateta (taro and potato).*

Throughout the action research project, observations were consistently recorded that show teachers praising children, as in the above example. Further examples of communication that show a teacher both praising children, and also using strategies to extend children’s thinking in Samoan, are included in Appendix F of this report.

## **Communication and Language Continuity: Interviews with Children**

Teacher/researchers carried out interviews with the children to document and discuss their use of the Samoan language before, during, and after their transition to school. Interviews with 5 children who made the transition to school between late 2004 and March 2005 showed that the children looked forward to going to school, and that they enjoyed communicating in Samoan with the A’oga teacher-researcher when she interviewed them. Another small group of children who moved to school later during 2005 (action research cycle 3) spoke with the teacher-researcher about their cultural identity and language use.

Some children showed strong identity with fa’asamoa. A teacher-researcher (faia’oga) and a child (Jared) who had turned 5 years old was moving to school held a long conversation together, in Samoan, about animals (crocodiles, fish, and snakes):

Faia’oga - *O le a le igoa ole manu na e ai le gata?* (Which animal eats snakes?)

Jared – *Serafi* (Giraffe)

Faia’oga – *Ole a?* (Pardon?)

Jared – *Serafi*

Faia’oga – *Serafi. E tago le serafi ai le gata pe ai e le gata le serafi?* (Giraffe. So the giraffe eats the snake or does the snake eat the giraffe?)

Jared – *Ai le gata le serafi.* (The snake eats the giraffe).

Faia’oga – *E ai ele gata le serafi, a?* (The snake eats the giraffe, does it?)

Jared – *Ioe* (Yes).

Faia’oga – *Manaia. A’o a igoa o isi manu ia?* (Nice/Right. So what are the names of these other animals?)

Jared – *E ai e le Leona le elefane.* (The lion eats the elephant).

Faia’oga – *E ai e le Leona le elefane?* (The lion eats the elephant?)

Jared – Yes.

As Jared showed considerable fluency and understanding, the teacher-researcher commented favourably, and the child explained that the Samoan language was used in the home environment too:

Faia’oga – *Sole, ese lou poto* (Wow you’re very clever).

Jared – *E fa’asamoa a’u i le fale. E fa’asamoa a’u i le fale.* (I speak Samoan at home. I speak Samoan at home).

Faia’oga – *E fa’asamoa oe i le fale.* (You speak Samoan at home?)

Jared – *Ioe.* (Yes).

Faia’oga – *To’aga e fa’asamoa.* (Keep your Samoan up).

The teacher-researcher interviewed Peniamina, another child who was turning 5 years and was about to move across to the primary school (action research cycle 3). He was happy to come to the A’oga and about starting school:

Faia’oga – *Ia, o lea ua fai le ma talanoaga ma le tama o Peniamina. Ua sauni foi Peniamina e alu i le A’oga a tamaiti matutua. Ia, o lea o le a fai a’u fesili i le tama o Peniamina ae tali mai Peniamina.*

(I’m going to talk with Peniamina who is getting ready to go to “big school”. I will ask questions and Peniamina will respond.)

Faia’oga – *Talofa Peniamina* (Hello Peniamina)

Peniamina – *Talofa* (Hello [Faia’oga])

Faia’oga – *O a mai oe?* (How are you?)

Peniamina – *Manuia fa’afetai lava M* (teacher) (Very well thank you). (They continue talking - about the sun and a smiley face)

Faia’oga – *E fiafia oe e sau i le a’oga?* (Are you happy to come to the a’oga?)

Peniamina – *Ioe* (Yes)

Faia’oga – *O ai na lua o mai i le taeao?* (Who did you come to school with this morning?)

Peniamina – *O lo’u tama. E nofo lo’u tina i le fale.* (My father - my mother, stays at home).

Faia’oga - *E nofo lou tina i le fale ae sau oe i le a’oga?* (Does your mother stay home while you come to school?)

Peniamina – *Ioe* (Yes).

Faia’oga - *Ia, lelei tele oe e fiafia e sau i le a’oga?* (Good – you’re happy to come to a’oga?).

Peniamina (the child) sang a song, and then, as the conversation with the teacher-researcher continued, he expressed some ambivalence about Samoan identity and speaking Samoan at home. It is important to note, though, that throughout several interviews and taped conversations, Peniamina showed evidence of considerable fluency and enjoyment of speaking in Samoan.

There is evidence, in the examples of translated interview data above, in the observations of children in transition, and in extensive transcripts of conversations (see Appendix F), that teachers were using the techniques Baker (2000, p. 140) specifies as supportive in language education. These include:

- indirect error correction and the use of repetition;
- restatement to ensure that children understand;
- role modeling;
- frequent use of praise.

## **Teachers’ Professional Development**

During the COI research project, teachers at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa were encouraged to take on further study and to extend their professional development. Two of the staff were studying papers in bilingual education for a Graduate

Diploma qualification. They introduced further innovative centre practices to help the children's language learning and to foster language continuity. These included building a new foyer where parents and staff could communicate in English without interrupting the children's Samoan language immersion.

## **Teachers' Reflections**

Teacher reflection was an important part of the COI action research. The teacher-researchers note that, upon reflection, the children's conversations with their teachers showed that the children were confident about speaking in Samoan, and that they were proud of their achievements.

The teacher-researchers applied their knowledge of bilingual education research and theory to the findings on language continuity at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa, for example, the techniques advocated by Baker (2000). They also affirm that our findings are consistent with Genesee's (1987) points, that language learning aims not for grammatical perfection, but rather for meaningful communication, and that meaningful conversations among students and teachers enhance students' confidence and motivation to use their (second) language.

## **Tools and Artefacts**

The curriculum at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa is supported by a physical environment that reflects the country and cultural practices of Samoa (Podmore & Meade, 2005). A circular space is a central meeting and eating area, like a Samoan *fale*, and adjacent to it is a very large sandpit. The development of, and rationale for, the *fale* are explained in this way:

The school prefab that we started in has had a deck built onto it shaped in a circular shape with poles supporting to resemble that of a Samoan *fale*. This provides a uniquely physical space within which to create a strong sense of fa'aSamoa (Samoan culture) to our centre. It was important that the children and families attending the centre could have that special feeling of Samoa even though the centre was a renovated prefabricated classroom. (Taouma, Tapusoa, & Wendt Samu, 2005, p. 6)



Photo 5: Tools and artefacts: A “Samoan corner” in the over-2s building at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa.



Photo 6: Tools and artefacts: The ramp into the over-2s building, showing shell patterns that reflect a traditional Samoan design.

There is a wide range of natural materials and cultural artefacts from Samoa at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa, and these are evident in a number of the observations recorded during the process of the action research.<sup>3</sup>

These structural characteristics and artefacts, together with the Samoan language-immersion environment, influence children's sense of belonging, and their identity. This is evident in both the observations and interviews with the children.

### **Parents' Voices on Language and Cultural Continuity**

Parents clearly value having their children experience Samoan language and culture at the centre. This was shown in their responses to a survey carried out in February 2004 (see parent questionnaire, Appendix D). Parents' replies to the parental survey indicate that Samoan was spoken regularly in about half of the homes (17 of 36 replies), and that the Samoan language was very important to most parents. Thirty-two of the 36 families replied that Samoan language was really important to them, or a high priority.

Parents' vision for their children also showed a strong focus on language. When asked "What is your vision for your child in A'oga?" 26 of the 35 parents responding to this question replied that "to speak Samoan" was their main vision, and another 5 families said "Samoan language as well as social skills". In response to the question, "Has the A'oga increased your child's Samoan language vocabulary and understanding?", 34 of the families replied "yes" and the remaining 2 families wrote that, as their babies were very young, it was too early to know.

It was also clear from the information provided in response to the survey that parents were very satisfied with the teaching staff at the A'oga. All 36 responding

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<sup>3</sup> Two closely related socio-cultural constructs emerging from, and embedded in, the data on language and cultural continuity are *tools* and *artefacts*. Vygotsky (1978) saw language as a psychological tool (i.e., a psychological tool as contrasted with material tools). Recent research also demonstrates the importance of mediation of material tools and artifacts to learning and teaching, in studies of young children and of older students, across a range of cultural contexts (McDonald, Le, Higgins, & Podmore, 2005).

families replied “yes” to the question “Are you satisfied with the teaching staff at the A’oga?”, and many added very favourable comments about the staff.

As the research cycles progressed, on several occasions an expanding group of parents became actively involved in the focus group meetings. During the second cycle of the action research, the facilitator of the focus group prepared a set of short questions for parents of children who made the transition to primary school (on the same block of land). The open-ended questions were designed to hear about parents’ perspectives about both transition to school and language and cultural continuity (see item 2, Appendix D). Parents’ voices were also recorded as part of the focus group meeting notes.

From the parents’ perspective, language continuity was certainly important. Several talked about the continuity of language across home, early childhood centre, and school. Their comments are presented below:

*We continue fa’asamoa at home, however we are concerned that some of the Samoan language may be lost in the bilingual unit (depending on future staffing there). It’s still too early at this stage to note the impact on our child [who has just started school].*

*How is the Samoan/English structured at the school?*

*[The transition is] just a continuation of [our child’s] Samoan language. The support from the teachers was great. [Our child] has made steady improvement, and we are generally happy with her development!*

*I felt the transition impacted negatively on [our child’s] language as the English component (60:40) is too high for children coming from an immersion environment. [Our child] speaks much less Samoan at home now, and it is quite hard to encourage him to speak more. Language continuity is helped by being in an environment where they can continually hear and practice speaking it, as well as expressing thoughts and ideas.*

Through the use of the questionnaire, and the recording of parents’ perceptions at the focus group meetings, the research yielded more in-depth information on



parents' views, experiences, and aspirations regarding transition to school and their children's Samoan language continuity.

During the process of the action research, changes were made in the primary school to enhance the practices that promote children's Samoan language continuity. This happened partly because representatives from the school heard the parents' views on language continuity expressed at the focus group meetings. After the data presented above were collected in October and November 2004, a new teacher/team leader was appointed to the primary school, to work with the older children. From that point, the teachers in the new entrant class all had (or had had) children attending the A'oga Fa'a Samoa. The centre manager made the following comments, that were verified by the school principal at a focus group meeting on 17 March 2005. These comments referred to the class that the children move on to from the A'oga: *"They are very keen to initiate 80%:20% Samoan: English, and so teachers are using Samoan every day with the children in the school classroom"*. During 2005, the bilingual class at the school did change to 80%: 20% Samoan: English.

Then in 2006, a "past pupil" of the A'oga Fa'a Samoa was appointed to the bilingual class at the school. This teacher is also the daughter of a senior faia'oga (educator) at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa. Her appointment provides an example of the changes made in the school to promote greater language continuity. Furthermore, it is an example of one Pasifika child's success in education and life, illustrating how one of the first children to attend the A'oga Fa'a Samoa subsequently succeeded in education (by successfully completing secondary school, then graduating with a teaching degree, and being appointed to a teaching position in the school). Her continued service to immersion/bilingual education in the community also shows the *aiga* principle and the values of the A'oga Fa'a Samoa in action: love, respect, and service.

## **Summary of Findings**

### **What has the COI done for children's and adults' learning in the areas of language and cultural continuity?**

- The vision of the Samoan grandparents who had the idea of establishing the A'oga Fa'a Samoa centre, the language and cultural immersion policy enacted at the centre, and international research findings on bilingualism (Meade, 2005), all support the importance of young children learning to communicate competently in their mother tongue or heritage language.
- The A'oga Fa'a Samoa, located on the same block of land as a primary school, has close links with the school communities on site, especially the bilingual Samoan class in the school. The COI research, tracking the children's transition to school, shows that physical location and transition practices, together with the language immersion policy at the centre, served to support and strengthen the confidence and Samoan language competence of the children making transitions. It also led to changes being made in the school to extend the continuity and quality of the children's Samoan-language experiences.
- As part of being a COI, the staff/teacher-researchers at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa carried out observations (working alongside the research associate) and reflected on the data. This led to teachers and management making further changes to enhance language continuity. For example, changes were initiated to ensure that learning increasingly took place in Samoan. These included improvements to the structural layout of the centre, and then our changed practices ensured that Samoan immersion really happened. Much more of the centre became designated as Samoan-speaking-only areas.
- The A'oga Fa'a Samoa teachers took on more study in immersion and bilingual education, and there is evidence in the translated interview data, and in taped conversations of small groups of children with a teacher, that

teachers were using techniques Baker (2000) specifies as supportive in language education.

- The teacher-researchers, reflecting on the children's conversations with their teachers (including those presented in this report), were convinced that: "*the children are confident about speaking in Samoan, they have meaningful conversations among themselves and with their teachers, and they are proud of their achievements*". Further evidence supporting these comments is presented in Appendix F, which provides additional examples of conversations among a teacher and groups of children.

## Chapter 6

### FINDINGS: Innovative Transitions

*O alofa na o alofa nei, o alofa lava ma te momoe nei.*

Your love for one person will be felt by everyone.  
(This proverb relates to the primary caregiver's long-term relationship with her group of children).

#### Overview

This chapter presents and discusses findings on innovative transitions, both within the centre and from the centre to school. Innovative practices at the centre include having small groups of infants assigned a “primary caregiver” who makes the transitions within the centre with “her” group of children. Findings are also presented on small groups of children’s transition to the primary school located on the same block of land as the centre. Two key themes are discussed: continuity of teachers; and continuity of the group.

#### Transition to the Over-2s Area

##### Applying Attachment Theory

Jan Taouma

In considering the addition of the building for children aged under 2 years, staff had been researching how best to incorporate these very young children into the centre. It was decided that the area would be designed from the level of an infant, dropped windows to see the road, low furniture, feeding chairs would be at ground level and the bench top low enough for children to access and interact with staff. A swinging basket from Kenya was installed above the safe crawl area for young babies to sleep in. Barriers around the safe crawl area were designed so that they can be removed to make one big room if so needed. From research on primary caregiving and the importance of attachment for very young children, we decided that children would start in groups and stay in that group with the same “primary

caregiver” for their whole time spent at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa. This would mean that the primary caregiver would move with the children when they reached the age of 2½ years to the other building, staying with them until they transitioned in to the Samoan class in the primary school.

Not only was this going to create strong bonds it would allow staff to plan for children knowing their interests and development and to be able to extend their thinking, learning and language development. Parents were also able to build up a long term relationship with the primary caregiver and other parents in the group.

Children would settle in to the centre during primary holidays when attendance was low and the centre was quieter so allowing children to have a calm time to acquaint themselves with the staff and the centre.

## Innovative Practices

The current transition processes for the children at enrolment, and when they are aged over 2 years 6 months, is summarised in the box below.

### *Transition processes for infants and toddlers: The Primary Caregiver*

Children are enrolled with a “primary caregiver” according to their age, birth-date, making sure that small ratios are kept at all times. This primary caregiver moves with the children through each area—*babies/infants - toddlers - young children*. In this way, children, families, and staff are able to build up strong relationships, develop strengths and interests, and extend learning and language.

When children move from the building of the under-2½-year-old children to the building for older children the staff member moves with them. At this stage of transition, the research was documented through observation, diary recordings, individual portfolios, and parent feed back.

## Belonging, Learning, and Teaching during Transition

Throughout the research, observations showed that understanding where to put their shoes when making a transition within the centre is important to children’s

sense of belonging in the new environment. This was evident across the action research cycles. The groups of young children in transition were also concerned about where to place their bags and belongings.

*Example: Belonging (22.9.2003)*

*The first day at the over 2s side, a staff member shows Lilly (a child in the transition group) and her mum where to put her bag, and the changing room, and where to put her nappies.*

*Mum leaves and Lilly plays with (her two friends) inside. They play in the family corner, sort colours, draw pictures and use scissors to cut papers. She decides to walk outside; her friends follow her and they all go and sit outside on the couch and take their shoes off. They line their shoes up at the back of the couch then she (the child) leads them to the sand pit. The teacher brings them back to show them where their shoes should go.*

Reflecting on her observations of the “transition children”, a teacher recorded in her diary:

*The children linked what they knew (in this instance, where their shoes belonged), i.e. they tried to find a similar place in the over-2s area. They were building up knowledge about where their things belonged—developing a sense of identity. They did this twice before they remembered. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, two children remembered—the third child needed reminding. Within a week they had all remembered (where to put their shoes in the new environment).*

Regarding the teacher’s interactions, she noted:

*When (the “primary caregiver”) realised that our three new children had put their shoes in a place like they used to use, she got them together and explained where their shoes belonged in the new setting (over 2s area). This was repeated during the week.*

Clearly, understanding where to put their shoes when making a transition within the centre was important to these children’s sense of belonging in the new environment. The importance of removing shoes inside, and placing them in appropriate places, is consistent with cultural practices in Pasifika contexts. Understanding where to sleep in the new environment was also important, as

evident in observations from both groups of young children who were tracked during their transition to the over-2s area.

In the second year of the project, the next group of children moving across to the over-2s building was helped by a new practice the teachers introduced after the first cycle of the research. Teachers implemented a labelling system, using the child's own photograph, to help identify the appropriate place for each child's shoes and belongings after their transition to the building for the children aged over 2½ years. Some examples of their subsequent observations of a child in the transition group follow:

*20/9/04 Belonging*

*Aotea took the teacher's hand and said, "Look". She (the child) pointed her hand at her photo on her container and said, "Aotea" (her own name). Then she moved onto another child in the transition group's container and said "Tarita" (that child's name). She kept walking down pointing at her group's photos saying their names.*

Teacher's reflection:

*Aotea was excited about her photo on her container. It helped her to know where her bag went when she came in the morning and when the teacher wanted to know where her bag was. It helped her also to know when the other children's bags were by their photos. Knowing she has a place to call her own.)*

On the basis of further extensive observations, the teachers observed that this new practice, of labeling using the child's photograph, is working well in terms of enhancing children's sense of belonging in the new space:

*Great idea by the teacher to put photos there. The children love seeing their photos and this helps them to recognise their names. It also stimulates communication between children and staff.*

### Transition with the Teacher: Learning in the New Space

Observations illustrate that the children needed to know not only where to put their belongings, but also where to sleep and which adult would be with them throughout the day. The innovative practice having the teacher (their A'oga Fa'a Samoa "primary caregiver") making the transition with each small group of young

children in transition, enhanced the children's sense of security in the new space, and also facilitated appropriate interpretation of their actions. The following observational excerpts and diary entries show the effectiveness of this practice in terms of the young children's sense of belonging and their well-being.

*Example: Belonging (19.1.2004)*

*Tiare, aged 2 years 2 months*

*Tiare: "I don't want to sleep down there". She points towards the sleep room. "I want to sleep up there", and points to the under-2s area. After changing I put her down and she walks straight over to the under-2s area.*

*I follow her and ask "Fea lou ofu?" (where's your dress?). She says "Where's my bag? It's over here", and walks towards the cubby holes. We go next door and she turns round teary-eyed. "What's wrong?" She says, "I don't want to go to that bed". (in the over-2s area).*

*"What bed do you want to go to?"*

*She points towards the door and says, "That one", pointing to the under-2s.*

*"You're a big girl now. That's your new bed now. All the babies sleep over in the cots now". Tiare nods her head. "Where's Tiare's bed?" She points to the door.*

*I bring the mattress down with a pillow and cuddle her.*

*After her bottle, she goes into the sleep room and cuddles for a few minutes then sleeps at 1.05p.m. When Tiare wakes up, she gets dressed and walks next door and "bonds with Teacher 03". She has afternoon tea there and stays with her until 4 o'clock.*

The teacher reflected that "*Tiare is unsettled with the new sleeping environment*", after she moved to the over-2s area. At the beginning of her time in the over-2s area, "Tiare" would settle to sleep only with the teacher who moved with her (from the under-2s area). This teacher was the one who had first settled Tiare into the centre.

The above example, from the second spiral of the research, illustrates the importance to a child of where she sleeps at the time of transition to the over-2s area, and the relevance to her security of having a familiar teacher (her A'oga Fa'a Samoa "primary caregiver") with her.



This child, “Tiare” was observed for 5 months after making the transition, and she continued to show a bond with the familiar teacher. For example, 2 months after the above observation:

*Example (10.3.2004 )*

*“Tiare” is unsettled this morning and cried when she was dropped off. She wouldn’t stay with one teacher but she stayed with Teacher 03. She stopped crying (this was during Lotu/prayers in the morning). I was singing and doing actions to a song when looking across opposite from where I was sitting, saw that Tiare looks at my hands and tries to imitate what I am doing. We say the rhyme again and she still follows, keeping her eyes on my hands. When it comes to the end, I put up my thumb (thumbs up), she tries to do it – she finally manages to. She looks up and sees me smiling, then smiles too.*

*Reflection on “Tiare’s” “Wellbeing” and “Belonging”:*

*The teacher, realising that Tiare was trying to copy her, went slower for her and realising that this took her mind off her mum made sure that she would know that someone else was looking at her and smiling, praising her for trying, giving her a sense of belonging and independence.*

The following observations were recorded when the primary caregiver of one group of transition children (Teacher S) was absent on sick leave for several days.

*20/9/04: On the first day of Teacher S and her group’s transition to the over-2s side, Tarita was the first to arrive. She was happy to see the teacher who was already there. The teacher said, “Talofa Tarita”. Tarita replied “Talofa (Teacher M) Teacher M then asked her how she was and Tarita said, “Manuia fa’afetai” (I’m well, thank you). She then went and sat down and ate her piece of bread. Another child came; the teacher greeted her and asked how she was. She replied, “Manuia fa’afetai” Then the child saw Tarita, she walked over and sat with her. When Vitolio came, they both stood up and said “Talofa” to him. Vitolio walked over to them. Aotea came, they clapped their hands and ran to her. They brought her back to where they sat before they all shared Tarita’s bread. Tarita saw another child come in; she stood up saying to them, “Va’ai Shiloh” (Look at Shiloh). They all went to meet that child, and then they came and sat down talking happily together.*

*Tarita asked the teacher, “Leai Teacher S?” (Is Teacher S not here yet?). The teacher replied “E lei sau Teacher S” (Teacher S is not*

*here). Tarita then told her group saying “Leai Teacher S”. Later on Tarita asked Teacher M again, saying “Teacher M, sau Teacher S?” (Is Teacher S here?). Teacher M replied, “Leai, ua ma’i Teacher S”. (No, Teacher S is sick). Then she went and repeated it to the other children in her group, “Leai Teacher S, Leai Teacher S” (No Teacher S).*

*That day one of the children and Aotea went to the under-2s for a little while. Most of the day these children (the small group in transition) were seen playing together.*

The teacher/researchers’ diary records included these reflections about the children’s sense of *belonging*, (and *well-being*, *exploration*, *communication*, and *contribution*) and what the teacher did to foster this:

*Belonging: The children were excited to see each other and being in the new environment. Teacher M encouraged a sense of belonging in the new space—she greeted the children, welcoming them and making them feel comfortable in the new environment knowing that Teacher S (their primary caregiver) wouldn’t be there.*

*Well-being: The children showed a growing capacity to identify their emotions and to be independent, knowing that familiar adults are around. The teacher responded to the children’s attempts to communicate their feelings in a respectful way.*

*Exploration: (Thinking/ideas) Even though the children were happy to see each other, Tarita still noticed that Teacher S (their primary caregiver) was not there, and asked the teacher about her. The teacher explained to Tarita why teacher S was not there.*

Given that these young children were concerned to know where their primary caregiver was during and after their transition with her, talking about her and her whereabouts became a topic of strong interest that seemed to stimulate conversations in the Samoan language. As well as being important to their belonging and sense of well-being, then, the quest to find out more about their primary caregiver also appeared to challenge these children to communicate in Samoan among themselves and with other teachers who were nearby. The teachers encouraged the children to use short sentences in Samoan.

The teacher/researcher made these reflective comments:

*Communication: (Samoan language development) All the children were familiar with the greetings in the morning “talofa, manuia fa’afetai.” The teacher helped them to respond. What she said helped Tarita to make short sentences to communicate with the teacher.*

For months after their primary caregiver returned from sick leave, the children continued to show the same strong bond with her. Their primary caregiver recorded:

*9/11/04 – Two children from the transition group and Teacher S:*

*It was lotu time. I sat down on the mat. Emma came sat on my lap. Tarita saw us and came over calling my name. She tried to push Emma off. Emma said to her, “My (Teacher S)”. Tarita, nearly crying, said “No my (Teacher S)”, holding onto my hand. I told Emma to sit on one side while Tarita sat on the other.*

The teacher-researcher reflected in her diary, with reference to the strand of Belonging, that the two children both wanted to sit on their primary caregiver’s lap:

*One child said to the other “My S”. This shows how close she was to Teacher S, not wanting to share her. Teacher S helped them to understand that they can both sit with her. By doing this, she was letting them know that she loved both of them.*

This primary caregiver actually left the centre in January 2005, and departed overseas. The teacher-researcher noted that, before she left, the children had just spent 3 weeks without her (during the Christmas holiday period when the centre was closed). “It probably helped, their being away for 3 weeks.” Then, prior to leaving, she sat down with the children and explained that she was leaving, and the children seemed to accept this. Two weeks after she had left, no-one from “her” group of children had mentioned her. At this point, the teacher-researcher asked the children in Samoan “Where is (Teacher S)?” She noted that: “The children knew. One child (Tarita) said “Alu i Australia” (“In Australia”). The other two said “Va’alele” (“In an aeroplane”). Sensitive communication by their teacher had apparently helped them to adapt to her departure.

As illustrated above, observations during several action research cycles showed how small groups of young children making transitions within the centre were showed their concern on days when their primary caregiver was absent through illness, or when one primary caregiver left the centre. Talking about the primary caregiver and her whereabouts (on days when she was absent from the centre) became a topic of strong interest that seemed to stimulate conversations in the Samoan language. As well as being important to their belonging and sense of well-being, the quest to find out more about their primary caregiver also appeared to challenge these children to communicate in Samoan among themselves and with other teachers who were nearby. The teachers encouraged the children to use short sentences in Samoan.

These observations and reflections provide further evidence that the innovative transition process, of having the primary caregiver move with a small group of children from under-2½-year-old children's area to the building for older children, fosters children's well-being, communication, contribution (in terms of aiga philosophy), and sense of belonging in the new space.

### Learning Together as a Group

Learning together as a group was clearly important to the young children in transition. After the small groups of children moved to the over-2s area, the observations and teacher diaries showed numerous examples of co-operative and imaginative play in their same, small transition groups. The sense of bonding and security associated with being together in a transition group was found repeatedly throughout the research. Some examples of learning together as a group, recorded from observations and in teacher diaries during the first cycle of the research, are presented below.

A number of other observations show the same child interacting with two others who have recently made the transition to the over-2s area together:

*Example (3/2/04) (Children: Miara, Keenen, and Kalden)*

*All three children are playing together in the sandpit – they walk behind each other on the edge of the sandpit. Kalden picks up a spade and pretends it is a guitar; he sings. Keenen joins in the singing. Miara starts digging. After a while the other two join in until Keenen sees a box then he walks over and jumps in. The other two follow. After a while child Miara walks over to the babies' side and Keenen and Kalden walk over to the rocket. They climb up inside and put their heads through the hole, growling, pretending to be lions. The teacher “growls” at them through the other hole and they both scream and move to the other hole. The teacher “growls” from the other side and they laugh and move back. When the teacher looks in, they are both sitting back looking through both holes to see which one she will growl from.*

Reflecting on the observations of this small group of three of the transition children, the teacher wrote:

*It seems to me that Kalden, Keenen and Miara are very comfortable playing together. The change to the new environment (the over-2s area) they are in now has not affected their relationship as friends. They're still together. (I guess what I'm saying is that transition in a group with the teacher is less stressful for the children according to the observations so far).*

These observations and reflections provide preliminary evidence that the innovative transition processes at the centre are fostering the young children's well-being, and their sense of belonging in the new space.

The teacher-researcher also made these reflections on the role of the teacher:

*“(The teacher was) being part of their play valuing their play by interaction.”*

A few months later, this teacher-researcher reflected further that in some of the interactions, the teachers could also be placing more emphasis on encouraging children's exploration and thinking.

In the second action research cycle, as well as their attachment to the primary caregiver, one small group of transition children who moved up through the centre together also showed strong bonding as a group and looked after one another,

consistent with the *aiga* philosophy. One of the children, Tarita, communicated to the other children the information about their teacher's absence. The teacher-researcher reflected later that day:

*Contribution: (looking after others arriving/aiga philosophy) Even though Teacher S wasn't there, when the children found out they accepted that and looked after each other all day, playing together.*

The teacher-researcher also noted that, even by March 2005, one child (Tarita) was still taking a lead role in looking after the others in the group. In late March, Tarita herself had left the centre to go overseas with her parents. By then, the other children were well used to being in the new space, and they were closely bonded as a group.

### Parents' Perspectives

Parents contributed further information about their children's transitions. One parent provided a written commentary on her son's close friendship and attachment to Tarita, a child noted by the teacher-researchers as one who took a lead role in looking after other children in the group. The parent described her son's experience this way:

*Our twin son and daughter have both attended A'oga Fa'a Samoa, since 21 months of age. They played separately from each other within a few months of starting at a'oga. This early success is probably due to the fact that they had the added security of both being in the same peer group with the same caregiver, but also had the freedom to make their own friends with children from younger and older age groups.*

*Whenever we talked about friends and who they were looking forward to seeing at the start of the new school week, they would name some common and some separate friends. Our son became particularly close to a girl, Tarita, in the over-2 years group.*

*At 33 months of age, a year after starting a'oga, we noticed a new unexpected change in our son's behaviour. He became distressed (on arrival) at a'oga, and his sleep behaviour changed...*

*It took a few weeks before I realised that we hadn't seen Tarita for a while, despite Tarita still being named as a friend our son was hoping to see. I asked the faia'oga (A'oga teacher) if she (i.e., Tarita) was sick, and was informed that she had shifted out of the*

*country permanently. That afternoon, I told our son that I was sorry Tarita was no longer at school. Tears welled up in his eyes...*

*We talked about where Tarita was, why she was there, and why we couldn't go visit her. We talked about who we knew in that country... We also planned to write Tarita a letter. Our son's behaviour changed back to normal gradually.*

This young boy was in the small group of children who were slightly younger than Tarita. After Tarita moved to the over 2½-year-olds' building, observations showed that she looked after others within the group, and on several occasions also crossed over to the under-2½s area to check on the small group of younger children there. The observations and parents' comments show clearly that young children formed close friendships and attachments to other children, both within their own small group, and with children from the younger group.

## Summary

The observations of the children, the teachers' diary reflections, and also the parents' comments support the finding that the innovative transition process, of having the primary caregiver move with a small group of children from under-2½-year-old children's area to the building for older children, fosters children's well-being, communication, contribution (in terms of *aiga* philosophy), and their sense of belonging not only in the new space, but also to their small groups of peers. There were clear examples of children as young as around 2 years forming close bonds with other children, and taking responsibility for caring for other children and members of the group, thereby making a contribution within and across the groups. This is evidence of the principles and strands of Te Whāriki, and of the *aiga* principle, in action in the centre.

## Transition to School

### Innovative Approaches to Transition to School

There is a close connection between the A'oga and the school, located on the same block of land. Their primary caregiver from the centre accompanies the children to the school classroom to observe and be part of their transition experiences. This also builds up a relationship between the classroom teacher and

the children who will be moving to school. Details of the transition-to-school process are summarised below.

***Transition Process for Children into the Bilingual Samoan classroom of  
Richmond Road Primary School***

The A’oga Fa’a Samoa is situated on the site of the primary school and is regarded as a part of the “*school family*”—a part of the community of learners attached to the school.

The A’oga joins with the school in all the school assemblies each Friday, performing on a regular basis with the bilingual Samoan classroom. The A’oga also joins in *powhiri* and other whole school community events that regularly occur during the school year.

The oldest group of 4-year-old children begin a *transition process* with their primary caregiver, who takes them, for at least an hour once a week, to the bilingual classroom in the primary school. This enables the children to become confident in their knowledge of the school area, classroom, teachers and of course to meet up with their brothers, sisters and friends who have previously been apart of the A’oga Fa’a Samoa.

These 4-year-old children also have a time each week to go to the school library to read and take out books, which is part of the transition knowledge and also is encouraging literacy for them.

These innovative practices are enhancing understanding and interpretation of the actions of children who make the transition. Below is a conversation with a child (Izaiah) soon after he moved to the school classroom.

*Faia’oga (A’oga teacher) – “O a mai le a’oga?” (How’s school?)*

*Izaiah – “Manaia” (Nice).*

*Faia’oga – “O ai le igoa o lau faia’oga?” (What is your teacher’s name?)*

*Izaiah – “O Miss Catherine”.*

*Faia’oga – “Ete fiafia i le a’oga?” (Are you happy at/with school?)*

*Izaiah – “Ioe”. (yes).*

*Faia’oga – “Aisea?” (Why?)*

*Izaiah – “Because I do my homework”.*



*Faia'oga – “O a mea a'oga e fai?” (What homework do you do?)*

*Izaiah – “O le art and do some names”.*

*Faia'oga – “E te iloa fa'asamoa?” (Can you speak Samoan?)*

*Izaiah – “Ioe”. (yes)*

*Faia'oga – “O le a le fa'asamoa o lau tala? (How do you say what you said in Samoan?)*

*Izaiah – “E fiafia e fai le galuega, e fiafia au i la'u faia'oga o Miss Catherine. E fai le lotu, e tautala Palagi ai i le a'oga”. (I'm happy to work. I like my teacher, I say prayers and I speak English at school).*

The above conversation shows how talking with the A'oga teacher about moving to primary school contributed to the child's communication in Samoan. The faia'oga extended the child's speech in Samoan and his thinking. In this way, the COI research interviews helped children to keep talking in Samoan about their move from the Samoan-immersion environment of the A'oga to the bilingual classroom at the school.

This trend continued to be evident throughout the action research. Another teacher, observing a new group of children making the transition to school, recorded examples of communication and belonging, including the following brief excerpt:

*Example: Communication (3.2.2004)*

*The teacher (from the A'oga Fa'a Samoa) asks the child who has moved to school:*

*Ua maua sau uo? (Have you found a friend?)*

*Child: – “No”. Then she says “Yes, (Her cousin)”. She walks inside and goes straight to where she hangs her bag under her name. After hanging her bag she walks to her mother holding her hand.*

*When school starts she says her goodbyes to her mother, sits on the mat and waits for the teacher.*

*The School Teacher calls out the roll. When it comes to (the child's) turn, she says “Talofa lava lau susuga a le faia'oga”. (Greetings to you Teacher).*

*Teacher– Fa'afetai lava. Teine lelei tele. (Thank you – child's name – Good girl).*

This teacher reflected that the children she was observing “settled in very well because they saw a familiar face.” “I was there to be near them, to talk to them to make the transition work well. They need lots of cuddles and love”.

In the next example, recoded during mat time in the new entrant classroom 4 months after one small group of children made the transition to school, there is evidence both of communication in Samoan, and of belonging in terms of cultural identity:

*The whole class sits on the floor during mat time. They are saying their A E I O U..... Samoan alphabet. The class will follow the stick— whichever letter the teacher points her stick at. They then add two letters together e.g. fa, fe, fi, fo, fu. (to remind them of their letters). The school teacher asks in Samoan “What’s today’s date, day and year?”.*

*Karl puts his hand up and says “Aso Lulu, Iuni, 04’ (Wednesday, June 2004). He goes up to the board and writes the date, month and year...*

*He shares his news with (the A’oga Fa’a Samoa teacher who is observing) in Samoan, “Sa alu a’u i le lakapi; sa alu a’u ma lo’u tama Andrew i le Kalapu”. (“I went to the rugby with my father Andrew at the club”).*

*She replies: ‘Lelei tele le tautala fa’asamoa a oe.’ (Your Samoan is very good, (child’s name))’.*

*He (the child) replies “Because I’m a Samoan, I’m not a Palagi” (English-speaking European).*

In this way, some of the observations and diary records also illustrate children’s sense of identity after they make the transition to school.

### **Important factors for Transition: Parents’ Voices**

A wider group of parents became involved in the focus group meetings. At the focus groups, parents made some extensive comments in response to questions about transition practices (for the detailed questions, see Appendix A). As one parent said:

*Retention of staff here is amazing. All my children have come here and faia'oga are like their aunties. I feel relaxed leaving them here. It feels normal, it stems from cultural – the aiga or family base – the idea of teachers moving with them (the children making transitions) makes it feel even more natural. The inclusion of the wider community and individuals feels natural as they move on further to school (Parent, at the focus group 11 August 2004).*

## Important factors for Transition

Factors that the parents of parents of a group of 6 transitioning children identified as important to make transition smoother included some policies and practices already in place, like location and visits:

*“Having A’oga connected to a primary school bilingual unit”*

*“Having our children as 4-year-olds go up to bilingual unit once a week”*

*“Participating in school assembly with the primary school”.*

*“Weekly visits from the A’oga to the unit once he turned 4 made it a very familiar place. I also think the assembly performances are great for helping them feel part of the school at an early age.”*

*“Starting at the A’oga was a positive step, and helped her transition to school. Having her friends from the A’oga attend the same school was also a huge help.”*

Familiarity of the older children in the school was a related factor:

*“I think the transition was made smoother due to the fact that (the child) knew many of the older children as most of them have been through the A’oga, he already had an older brother in the unit...”*

The teacher was also important:

*“Having a warm, caring, friendly teacher like\_\_\_ who was previously with A’oga is a great help and relief for me as a parent.”*

*“I suppose the familiarity of the school and teachers”.*

Parent commitment was a further factor:

*“Having a group of parents who are committed and passionate about providing resources for bilingual unit (for e.g., trips)*

*“Knowing the parents already, made it comfortable for us to send\_\_\_ to the primary school. We felt the parents in general were very supportive and were enthusiastic in ensuring the primary school excelled.”*

Communication and relationships (across parents, children, teachers, and the community) were clearly key factors.

The importance of relationships is emphasised in *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum, where the overarching principles are:

- Empowerment (“The early childhood curriculum empowers children to learn and grow”);
- Relationships (“Children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places, and things”);
- Family and Community (“The wider world of family and community is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum”
- Holistic development (“The early childhood curriculum reflects the holistic way children learn and grow”).

(Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 14)

During the process of discussing language continuity and transition, parents in the focus groups spontaneously made positive comments about relationships with families and the community:

*Relationships are culturally embedded, with language as a means to support transitions, making them sound, easy, and fluid – from the under 2s to the over 2s to primary (year 1). Relationships of faia’oga are critical and important to kids – building a very real sense of community from the child’s perspective (i.e., the child’s community).*

*It’s not just the relationship with the child and the faia’oga (teacher) etc., but also with me, the parent. I am the connecting point bobbing along with the family...As a result I am more relaxed. There is a lower level of anxiety associated, especially with transition. (Parent, at the focus group 11 August 2004).*

*Transitions become...are therefore not defined strictly in a single point of time, rather graduated over an extended period of time (Another parent, at the focus group 11 August 2004).*

In this way, parents' perspectives endorse our view that the principles of *Te Whāriki* can be seen in action in the innovative transition practices at the centre. Parents' perspectives also support the importance of the *aiga* principle (see Chapter 4) to centre practices, including the transition practices.

The critical incidents analyses similarly show what helps successful transition. Responses from parents and educators participating in a focus group were sorted into categories of what helps in transition. The categories that emerged were: "time in new entrants' class in the primary school", "positive teacher characteristics", "establishment of a 'buddy system'", and "educators are involved in observations of children". (For a detailed report on the critical incidents analyses, see Appendix E).

## **Summary of Findings**

### **What has the COI done, on innovative transition, to help children's and adults' learning?**

The innovative transition practice of having a primary caregiver making transitions within the centre with "her" group of children clearly contributed to the children's sense of belonging, their security, and their communication in Samoan. This conclusion is supported by the observations and reflections analysed (across the strands of *Te Whāriki*) in this research, by information shared by parents in the focus group meetings, the critical incidents analyses (Appendix E) and by repeated surveys of parents. Specific findings on smoothing transitions for children were:

- Promoting a strong sense of belonging in the new space eases transition for children. For children moving from the infants' and toddlers' area to the over-2s area of the centre, knowing where shoes and bags belong, clothes

are hung, and about sleeping places and patterns is important.<sup>4</sup> Teachers reported that a new initiative, of using the child's own photograph to label the place where a child's bag and shoes belong, worked well for the children in transition and for their teacher.

- Having the A'oga Fa'a Samoa "primary caregiver" move with "her" group of children during their transitions contributed to the children's sense of belonging and their security.<sup>5</sup>
- Continuity of the group is a key factor in smoothing transitions. Making transitions as members of a small peer group fosters a sense of belonging to, and contributing to, the group. This is consistent with the *aiga* principle, and was evidence in the observations of small groups/s of children, and parents' written comments on their young children's transition within the centre. Establishment of a "buddy system" is also important during transition to school. This emerged as a key category in the critical incidents analyses.
- Transition practices at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa (e.g., spending time in the new entrants' bilingual class in the primary school), and language immersion practices, are innovative approaches. The effectiveness of spending time in the new entrants' classroom was supported by the critical incidents analyses. These innovations supported children's competence and their confidence to express themselves in Samoan, and their identity.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> There was evidence of this in the teachers' observations of three separate groups of young children during transition, and related teacher diary records.

<sup>5</sup> This was evident in the observations over time of three different groups of children during transition, and related teacher diary records. Observations of the third group of children's conversations when their primary caregiver was absent through sickness, showed that they were concerned about her. Both the presence, and the absence, of the primary caregiver had an impact on children aged 2 to 3 years.

<sup>6</sup> The evidence included: observations of groups of children during transition, related teacher diary records, child interviews findings from critical incidents analyses (Podmore & Airini, with the A'oga Fa'a Samoa, 2004), and interviews with children before and after their transition to school.

## Chapter 7

### **FINDINGS: Community of Learners, Community of Inquiry**

*E afua mai mauga le manuia o le nuu*  
*The goodness and blessings of a village flow from the mountains*  
(We suggest that the mountains might symbolise the teachers  
and the community of the centre).

#### **Overview**

This chapter draws on additional socio-cultural constructs to address further the issues of innovative teaching and learning and the “community of learners” approach of the centre. There is a discussion of findings, focusing on concepts including: scaffolding and co-construction; centre, home, and school linkages; and transformative participation.

#### **Teachers’ Learning and Reflections in the Centre Community**

The four principles of *Te Whāriki* (empowerment, families and community, relationships, holistic development) and its five strands (belonging, well-being, exploration, communication, and contribution) set expectations that there will be communities of learners. Our COI research has had close connections to *Te Whāriki*, and we certainly see the A’oga Fa’a Samoa as a “community of learners”.

The process of being involved in the action research led to staff development, and to increased reflection and action to enhance children’s thinking (Fleer, 1995). Teachers at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa were used to observing and documenting children’s learning. Teachers at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa had prior experience of the Exemplars project (learning stories):

*Where there was lots of reflection from the child’s side. But in this new (COI) research we’ve got to do more reflection on ourselves, on the teacher.*

This COI research, where they were reflecting more on what the teachers were doing, further challenged their own thinking and interactions with the children.

During the first month of the second spiral of the action research, after the “reflection and action” stage of the cycle, the research associate asked a staff member about her reflections on the process and on the data. The staff member, who has had a key role in the research, explained it this way:

*Teacher-researcher: “We think about children’s background and the reasons why they are behaving like that and what we are doing to foster the children’s well-being, and what we can do as the next step. With this (research – i.e., the process of reflecting on observations both of the children and of the teachers) I have been able to tell whoever is observing that the part of the teacher is important too, because we will see what the teacher did and the method she is using to extend the children’s learning”.*

*Research Associate: “Extending the children’s learning of the Samoan language?”*

*Teacher-researcher: “Yes, Language and communication. And learning to do things for themselves, and be confident learners.”*

When the research associate asked the staff member about her reflections on the second spiral, one additional suggestion arose:

*Teacher-researcher: “Sometimes we (the teachers) could have said something more, to extend children’s thinking and learning.” “We need to say more than ‘That’s nice’. We need to extend them”.*

The staff member reflected further on Marilyn Fleer’s (1995) writing, which draws on Vygotsky’s work, and she concluded that:

*Teacher-researcher: “We need to do more mentoring so that there are more responsive and reciprocal interactions”.*

The research associate also reflected on this suggestion, that there needed to be “more mentoring” and more discussion among the staff. It became clear that this “mentoring” would involve more experienced staff working alongside less experienced staff and guiding them in practices that extend children’s thinking



and conversations. It seemed likely that this type of “mentoring” and discussion would lead to more teacher talk about children’s learning, learning talk which would be both “analytic” and “challenging” (Annan, Lai, & Robinson, 2002).

Consequently, the project team agreed that another action research cycle (or a mini cycle) would concentrate on using the extensive observations and diary data already generated to include a wider group of all staff in reflection and action, in order to extend children’s understanding (one example was of scientific concepts), their thinking, and their exploration. This collaborative decision was an example of how Borgia and Schuler’s (1996) “five Cs” of action research—commitment, collaboration, concern, consideration, and change—proved applicable to the research and reflection at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa.

After that we held a meeting of the whole staff with the research associate. Teachers’ observations and reflections before and after this meeting showed how they were reflecting on their practices, and scaffolding and co-constructing learning with children. A teacher-researcher also prepared transcripts of taped conversations in Samoan that demonstrate how to extend children’s thinking in Samoan and to use strategies that are helpful for learning in an immersion or bilingual setting (Baker, 2000). (See Appendix F).

Later, staff took on an active leadership role with Pasifika centres, and/or started working on their own further professional development, through participation in the Ministry of Education’s Exemplar project (March-December 2005).

### **Community of Learners; Community of Practice**

The findings from our research are consistent with New Zealand’s 10-year plan for early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2002) which, through its goal of promoting collaborative relationships, endorses the expectation that there will be communities of learners (Podmore & Meade, 2005). The focus group discussions, and parental feedback throughout the research, show that participants experienced being part of a “community of learners”. The focus group served as

an advisory group, but members have also contributed many insights, as parents, about why they value the education provided for their children.

Parents and the extended *aiga* are an important part of the A’oga Fa’a Samoa. Through their involvement in the management committee, parents have a governance role at the centre. Some parents at the A’oga also have older children at the Samoan class in the school and this binds the two groups more closely. During the COI research process, the focus group “community of learners” extended to include representatives of the school and the school principal.

The action research that we have undertaken at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa has continued to have an impact on the primary school. For example, when the school staff, as well as the A’oga project team, were asked to present at the Ulimasao Conference in Samoa in September 2005, the Samoan teachers from the bilingual unit at the school worked closely with the A’oga team to prepare their presentation. A further development has been the primary school’s engagement in research on bilingual education—a Teaching and Learning Research Initiative project (TRLI)—with staff from the A’oga Fa’a Samoa on their advisory committee.

The theoretical concept of “community of learners” is connected to international socio-cultural research and theoretical writing (Rogoff, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978). Wenger’s (1998) writing on “communities of practice”, shows how individuals, communities, and organisations can all learn together through shared participation.

We experienced this at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa. Further innovations came through parent participation in the COI research and dissemination work. For example Riki Apa, a parent who was a member of the focus group, developed the centre website [www.aogafaasamoaschool.nz](http://www.aogafaasamoaschool.nz). Two other parents from the focus group, Tanya Wendt Samu and Albert Refiti, took part in COI presentations and workshops. Parent evenings were held to share information about being a COI. Teachers have talked about their observations and documentation to parents, using Powerpoint shows at parent evenings. The inclusion of parents’ voices is also

evident in the children's portfolios. Parent surveys included a high rate of participation (80-90% return rates). By responding to the brief sets of questions in the surveys, most of the parents participated on issues of Samoan language continuity and understanding of bilingual education.

## **Community of Inquiry**

The focus of this COI's action research process, on teachers'/educators' ongoing reflection and collaborative analyses of their observational data on teaching and learning, is linked to Wells' notion of "communities of inquirers" (Wells, 2001; Wells & Claxton, 2002).

The widely representative focus/advisory group of this COI team increasingly became a "community of inquiry" (Wells, 2001; Wells & Claxton, 2002). The participants reflected on, questioned, and reviewed the action research processes and findings. Over time, the involvement of the parents as key informants in the focus group, and of educators/faia'oga as "teacher-researchers", led to their experiencing "transformation of participation". The final chapter includes their accounts of this process.

## **Summary**

### **What has the COI as a "community of learners" done for adults and children's learning?**

- Teachers reflected on their interactions with children, and introduced more scaffolding and co-construction to support children as active learners and communicators.
- The focus group, as a "community of learners", extended to include representatives of the primary school. Our research at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa shows how a wide group became part of the research process and reflection, including parents, teachers, researchers, a parent who was a teacher at the primary school, and later more representatives of the school including the principal.

- Parents and centre staff/teacher-researchers participated actively within the centre and the focus group. During the process of the research, the focus group became a “community of inquiry”. Focus group members reflected on data, findings, research reports, and translations.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Summary and Concluding Comment**

#### *Tulituli mata gau le ufi a Sina*

All good effort should reach a proper end. (Good deeds will be rewarded)

### **Overview**

This chapter summarises the major findings and conclusions of the research. To conclude, teachers, parents, and focus group members report their reflections on being a COI.

### **Major Findings**

In summary, this 3-year COI action research project addressed two major research questions:

1. What helps learning and language continuity as children make transitions within and from the A’oga Fa’a Samoa?
2. How can the key approaches that help learning and language continuity be implemented in practice?

Examples of key findings of the research, interpreted in the light of socio-cultural theory are synthesised and presented below.

### **Values, Principles, and Aspirations**

- Key principles of the research included those which inform our actions within our different *aiga*: service and responsibility (*tautua*), love and commitment (*alofa*) and respect (*faaaloalo*). The “connections” that we made (in terms of new knowledge, understandings and perspectives, and relationships with others) were a consequence of the principles that informed our research practice.

- The innovative transition practice of having a primary caregiver making transitions within the centre with “her” group of children clearly contributed to the children’s sense of belonging, their security, and their communication in Samoan. Therefore, our key findings for children are consistent with the aspirations of *Te Whāriki*, as stated in the curriculum document:

“This curriculum is founded on the following aspirations for children:

*To grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society”.*

(Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9).

### Innovative Transition and Language and Cultural Continuity

- The COI research, tracking the children’s transition to school, shows that physical location (on the same block of land as the primary school which has a bilingual unit) and transition practices, together with the language immersion policy at the centre, served to support and strengthen the confidence and Samoan language competence of the children making transitions.
- As part of being a COI, the staff/teacher-researchers at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa carried out observations and reflected on the data. This led to teachers and management making further changes that enhanced language continuity. Learning increasingly took place in Samoan, as the improved structural layout to the centre and our changed practices ensured that Samoan immersion really happened. For example, much more of the centre space became designated as Samoan-speaking-only areas.
- Teachers took on more study in immersion and bilingual education, and there is evidence in the translated interview data that teachers were using techniques Baker (2000) specifies as supportive in language education. (Further data to support this finding are presented in Appendix F).

- The teacher-researchers, reflecting on children’s conversations with their teacher, are convinced that children were confident about speaking in Samoan, they had meaningful conversations among themselves and with their teachers, and they were proud of their achievements.
- For children moving from the infants’ and toddlers’ area to the over-2s area of the centre, knowing where shoes and bags belong, clothes are hung, and about sleeping places and patterns is important. Teachers reported that a new initiative they introduced, of using the child’s own photograph to label the place where a child’s bag and shoes belong, worked well for the children in transition and their teacher.
- Making transitions as members of a small peer group fostered a sense of belonging to, and contributing to, the group. This is consistent with the *aiga* principle, and was evidence in the observations of small groups/s of children, and parents’ written comments on their young children’s transition within the centre.
- Innovative transition practices (e.g., spending time in the new entrants’ bilingual class in the primary school), and language immersion practices, supported children’s competence and their confidence to express themselves in Samoan, and their identity.

### Community of Learners; Community of Inquiry

- Teachers reflected on their interactions with children, and introduced more scaffolding and co-construction to support children as active learners and communicators.
- The focus group, as a “community of learners”, extended to include representatives of the primary school. Our research at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa shows how a wide group became part of the research process and reflection.

- Parents and centre staff/teacher-researchers participated actively within the centre and the focus group. During the process of the research, the focus group became a “community of inquiry”. Focus group members reflected on data, findings, translations, and all of the A’oga Fa’a Samoa research reports.

## **Final Reflections**

The teachers and staff who participated in the COI research work reflected on this report, on the research processes, and on what being a COI meant for their own learning. They expressed their reflections in English and in Samoan, and described the challenges and learning that took place during the 3-year action research project.

### Teachers’ Voices

#### **Teacher’s Reflections - Lucy Tulia**

##### **What I learnt of being part of COI research**

For me personally, it was tough because I didn’t know what to expect. In the beginning I was excited to be part of the research. Having been to a focus group meeting and meeting parents whose children are part of the research has made me realise how important it is for children to keep up with their language and their cultural identity. Also to watch what these children have achieved in the time of the research, whether their transition to primary has made them more confident in who they are.

Lucy Tulia

The next reflections show how the research project extended teachers’ knowledge of working with children, and emphasise the importance of listening to children’s voices to extend their conversations. Being a COI offered new challenges like going out and learning with other centres. The research also confirms the importance of their heritage language to children’s learning and identity.



**Teacher's Voice: COI Research Project March 2003-March 2006**  
**Final word from Mrs Mane Kiliva, Senior Educator**

O le matou A'oga e ese ma le pisi. Ua toe faaopoopo mai foi ma nei suesuega ua atili ai le pisi. Ae aoga le pisi e ola ai le mafaufau.

O lenei suesuega e ese ma le tele o lona taua ia te au. E aoga e faalautele ai lou malamalama i galuega a tamaiti. Ae maise o le faatauaina leo o tamaiti ma o latou matua.

Ae maise ai lava lou fiafia e talatalanoa i ai. Ou te fiafia e faaoga le laau pue leo e pue ai a latou faamatalaga. Ae maise a matou fetufaiga.

O le taua foi o nei suesuega ua maua ai foi le avanoa e feiloai ai ma isi aoga ma tufa mai foi lo latou tomai ae maise foi o le faaogaina o nei suesuega e faasoa atu i fonu a le NZCA.

O le alualu i luma o nei suesuega e taua lava le faaoga o lata lava gagana na foai mai e le Atua e tautala ai.

O le isi mea taua ua maua ai le lototetele o isi tamaiti e faaoga masini pei o Laptop, komepiuta ma maua ai foi le lototetele e o atu ai i aoga tulagalua ma faasolosolo atu ai lava i isi nofoaga lautele. O lenei galuega e le se galuega faigofie ae faafetai i le Atua i lona fesoasoani mai. A maea se galuega ona tatou faapea ifo lea. O tatou lava o auuuna leaoga.

E momoli atu ai le agaga faafetai i le filifilia o lenei aoga e fai ai nei suesuega, ua tele ai le tamaoiaiga ua matou mauaina e ala i fetufaiga ma fefaasoiaiga mai i aoga eseese ae maise o le faasoa mai o manatu o e ua i ai le poto ma le tomai faapitoa i suesuega tau i fanau iti.

A uma se galuega ona tatou fa'apea ifo lea. O tatou lava o auuuna le aoga.

Fa'afetai lava  
Mane Faleifi Kiliva

Several teachers talked about Information and Communications Technology (ICT)—using the digital camera and Powerpoint—and the professional development that happened in this area.

### **Faiaoga Reflections – March 2006**

Taua ma le aoga o le COI ia te au ua faalautele ai le malamalama i tala tusitusia e uiga i aoaoga a tamaiti ma manatunatuga i mea ua tuana'i.

O le isi vaega taua o le taua ma le aoga o le transition mai le taimi o laiti tamati seia oo ina lima tausaga. Le mafanafana o le mafutaga a le faiaoga ma ana tamaiti.

Ua malamalama ai foi i le faaogaina o le camera ma tuu i le powerpoint mo le molimauina o galuega a tamati.

Milo Fili  
Educator

Teachers commented on the networking and learning that had happened as being part of a COI, and look forward to further learning and innovation.

### **Teacher's Reflections: Mrs Ta'a Tuai**

#### **To manatunatuga e uiga i le suesuega**

1. Ua maua mai isi metotia taua i le fetufa'aiga ma isi aoga e iai.
  - Exemplar workshops
  - Mt Roskill South Kindergarten
  - ma isi aoga sa au ai
2. O le faatauaina o leo o tamaiti ma o latou aiga
3. Ua mafai ona ou mafaufau totoa ma iloilo totoa i tala tusitusi a tamaiti.
  - i aoaoga o lo'o tupu mai ai
  - faatauaina o manatunatuga a faiaoga ma le fesili.

What next and where to?

As shown in the following teacher-researcher reflections, important learning, leadership, and professional development took place during the action research and dissemination processes. These experiences, and the commitment of the teacher-researchers to reflection and to using practices that enhance children's learning, are inspirational for other COIs and for Pasifika immersion/bilingual services.

### **Teacher's Reflection—COI      Au Luatua**

Being able to do research on this particular topic was hard at first. Why?—not understanding it, the word “research” made me think “oh no, more work for us to do.” It was quite frightening for some of us. Our professional development

workshops that we did with Chris Bayes, helped me to understand and set us up for the BIG one (research for COI). Understanding the different steps of the action cycle that we had to go through took a while for me to get to grips with. It was confusing because I did not know what I was doing and not knowing what was to be expected. It was a lot of hard work, long tired nights of discussions about reflecting on children's language and work, and how they might be thinking, what language they were using...

Overall it has been an interesting experience, being part of the COI research has really opened up my eyes at how well we can achieve something when we all work together. Working together with parents, staff, focus group, and management and Val Podmore has made it possible for us to be successful. We are all part of the community of learners, we all know that we can never do anything on our own, working together at A'oga is like being in a aiga (family), it is not a family until the work is done together. This is all part of being Samoan; it's part of our culture and traditions.

It was important to get the work done in order to get the answers to the questions of our research. Information gathering was a vital part to our research, observations, interviews, and recording of children's language is what we had to put together in our journals. Working alongside Val Podmore has been a great opportunity to learn from someone like her who is very knowledgeable and very helpful to me and I am sure to the rest of the staff. It was interesting to find out the information that we got from our information gathering, things that we had never seen or heard before about children who were being observed, which helped with understanding the children's needs and interests and how we could extend their learning with the knowledge that we had learnt, to me its all about enhancing the children's learning, what ways can we as teachers make learning for children interesting and exciting? This is probably another research question...hmm

#### **Ene Tapusoa, Teacher-Researcher**

Being part of this research has been a great learning curve. Sure it was hard work at times, but looking back now it was all worthwhile. Reflecting on the data collected gave me a better understanding of the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*, and also indicated the areas we need to improve. It showed theorists we learnt through studies being implemented through teachers interacting with children.

Findings from each cycle helped us plan to meet children's needs, and this helped transition and language learning run more smoothly.

Disseminating this research has been a great professional development for me as we document children's learning and share findings at different workshops and conferences attended.

I have seen great minds come together in the focus group, sharing knowledge and experience and working collaboratively in nurturing and guiding this research from the beginning till the end.

The COI Hui have been helpful to see where everyone was, to learn from the sharing and to know that we were on the right track.

Ou te faafetai i lenei suesuega ona ua faalateleina ai lou malamalama i le aoaina o tamaiti laiti, ae maise le a'oa'oina o le gagana Samoa. O nisi nei o ni auala na faaogaina.

- Fai oe ma faataitaiga lelei,
- Faaoga na'o le gagana Samoa, tusa pe tali mai le tamaititi i le fa'aperetania, faasamoa pea iai.
- Faalateleina le gagana a le tamaititi i le tu'u fesili iai i ni fesili e tautala mai ai, ae le na'o le ioe po'o le leai.
- Vivii le tamaititi i ana taumafaiga uma.
- Faailoga se pito o le A'oga e talanoa ai i matua po'o tagata e leiloa faasamoa.
- Galulue felagolagoma'i o faiaoga ma matua ma aiga

Fa'atuauaina lau gagana, o lau meaalofa lea mai le Atua.  
Soifua.

The next quotes show that, for focus group members and the centre manager too, the experience of being a COI and part of a community of learners was an insightful, collaborative learning and teaching experience.

### Parent and Focus Group Perspective

#### **Riki Apa, parent and focus group member**

In "*O Le Taeafo Afua*"\* a study of Samoan perspectives on mental health, Tupua Tamasese writes that, when *Tautai* (Samoan fishermen) are out fishing, there are three perspectives that guide them to plentiful fishing stocks:

- the view from the top of the mountain to signal the distance and travel of schools of fish;
- the view from the tree-tops on the shore to monitor the distance of the fishing boats; and
- the view of the fisherman on the boat catching the fish.

All three perspectives are important to ensure that the village receives all that it needs from the sea.

I believe that this analogy captures the essence of the “community of learners” — who gravitate about, and are part of, the A’oga Fa’a Samoa—particularly during the COI research. One’s view or perspective is certainly influenced by where one stands relative to the core activity, and yet everyone has a valid contribution to make towards a common goal.

The view from the COI focus group has been both enlightening and insightful for me as a parent, a management committee member, and as a learner. It has increased my understanding and appreciation of the complexities surrounding language continuance, good transitional practice, and the importance of working together as aiga in a supportive and collaborative way to ensure that our children develop and learn in an early childhood educational environment enriched by language and cultural values. To this day, my two daughters provide me with ongoing evidence that the A’oga Fa’a Samoa way works.

\* K. Tamasese, C. Peteru, & C. Waldegrave (1996). *O Le Taea Afua/The new morning: A qualitative investigation into Samoan perspectives on mental health and culturally appropriate services*. Wellington: The Family Centre.

## Co-ordinator/Manager Perspective

To conclude, the final words of this report come from the centre manager and COI project co-ordinator:

### **Jan Taouma, Project co-ordinator**

#### **Centre of Innovation**

As the co-ordinator for of this 3-year research project it has been a wonderful learning experience and a reassurance that the philosophies, theories and practices at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa are sound.

Hosting all the overseas groups at the centre also verified this as they were so impressed with the transition processes especially the ability to work so closely with the Samoan bilingual classroom in Richmond Road Primary School.

The contributions to the research by the focus group and the teaching staff made this such a wonderful collaborative process. The leadership and guidance by Dr. Val Podmore added to the security that the research was thorough and inclusive of all. Highlights were presenting of keynote addresses both here and in Samoa and witnessing the growth of staff as they gained confidence in preparing and presenting when called upon.

It has been a wonderful experience and we hope will be helpful to other Pasifika early childhood centres.

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## Appendix A Focus Group Interview Questions

<b>Early Childhood Centres of Innovation (COI) Action Research at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa</b>
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### QUESTIONS/TOPICS FOR FOCUS GROUPS

1. How do we assist Samoan language communication in the centre?  
*Probe: Links to Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996)*

2. What strategies or practices do we use to facilitate children’s transition:  
a. From the infants’ and toddlers’ area to the over-2s area?  
b. From the over 2s area to the primary school?

*Probes: focus on “critical incidents” (Airini & Brooker, 1999)*

3. What are our main expectations/aspirations for children at the centre?  
*(centre participants)*

4. What are our main expectations/aspirations for children moving from this centre to the school? *(school participants).*

## Appendix B

### Teachers' Diary Headings

<p><b>Early Childhood Centres of Innovation (COI) Action Research at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa</b></p>
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#### TEACHER'S DIARY HEADINGS

**What Children Did** to show

*Belonging*

a sense of belonging in the new space  
(settling)

**What Teachers Did** to foster

*Belonging*

a sense of belonging in the new space

---

*Wellbeing*

Independence  
(mealtimes)

---

*Wellbeing*

independence

---

*Exploration*

(physical – e.g. playground)

---

*Exploration*

(thinking/ideas)

---

*Communication*

Samoan language development

---

*Communication*

Samoan language development

---

*Contribution*

(looking after others arriving/aiga philosophy)

---

*Contribution*

## Appendix C

### Child Interview Questions

Early Childhood Centres of Innovation  
Action Research at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa

#### Video/Audio Records of Children talking about Transitions

##### Steps in the process:

- Ask each child a question
- Videotape/audio tape the question and the child's responses
- Audio discussions 10-15 minutes in length
- Write down the child's name and the date, and then
- Pass each tape (with date of recording) to (lead research associate) to arrange transcription in Samoan (and translate from Samoan to English so we have records in both languages)

##### Questions to ask (in the Samoan language)

#### Transition to school

Interview points and questions

For 4-year-old children (before they go to school)

*What are you looking forward to (doing) at school?*

For children in the first weeks at school:

*What do you like best about school?*

For children after 3 months at school:

*What do you like best about school?*

#### Transition to the over-2 area

Before moving across:

*What do you like best at A'oga?*

Two weeks after moving across:

*What do you like best at A'oga?*

About 3 months after moving across:

*What do you like best at A'oga?*



## **Appendix D Parent Questionnaires**

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### **Parent Questionnaire (Taouma, 1992)**

#### **Language Acquisition Survey: - March 2004**

#### **Questions.**

1. Is Samoan spoken at home?
2. How important is the Samoan language to you.
3. What is your vision for your child in A'oga?
4. Is your child happy here?
5. Has the A'oga given your child any advantages?
6. Are there any aspects of the A'oga that you would like improved?
7. Will you send your child to a bilingual Samoan class when he/ she leaves?
8. Has the A'oga increased your child's Samoan vocabulary and understanding?
9. Are you satisfied with the teaching staff at the A'oga?
10. Other comments to share?

**From a Parent’s Perspective: The Transition to School**

**Questionnaire for parents July 2004-March 2005**

1. What factors do you think will/did help make the transition to school smoother for your child?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What impact, if any, did/will the transition have on your child’s language?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Is there anything else that you would like to say in relation to at least Research Question 1?

## **Appendix E**

### **Critical Incidents: Findings on Transition**

*Dr Airini*

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**Note:** Discussions at the second meeting of the COI focus group centred on the question, “*What strategies or practices do we use to facilitate children’s transition?*” There was an emphasis on successful aspects and experiences of children’s transition and their language learning, from the perspectives of teachers, and parents. We drew on the “critical incidents technique” (Flanagan, 1954), used previously by Airini and Brooker (1999) in teacher education research.

This yielded some rich narrative examples of successful experiences. The critical incidents analyses identify categories and related competencies for professional development associated with language learning (and connected to the principles and strands of Te Whāriki), during transitions (from the infants’ and toddlers’ area to the over-2s area; and from the centre to the primary school) (Airini, 2004, April). A summary of the “critical incidents” analyses and findings is set out below.

#### **Critical incidents research summary:**

#### **What helps effective transition in Early Childhood Education: Perceptions of good practice in Samoan ECE<sup>7</sup>.**

This research is about adult perceptions of what helps children through transition phases within a Samoa immersion ECE setting, and from that setting into primary school. In short, this is about times of change in ECE and what helps make them happen in ways beneficial to a child’s holistic development.

#### **Data collection method**

The critical incident technique (CIT) (Flanagan, 1954) was selected as the basis for data collection because it provided conditions in which participants might feel safe to freely report critical incidents, and to describe situations relating to what helps children through transition phases within a Samoa immersion ECE setting. This method has been used widely, including in studies of care and medicine, indigenous health programmes (McCormick, 1995; Williams, 1999) and teacher education (Airini & Brooker, 1999).

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<sup>7</sup> This research was developed by Airini with the assistance of the wise advice and guidance of the Centre of Innovation Project Focus Group members of the A’oga Fa’a Samoa.

The CIT is a form of interview research in which participants provide descriptive accounts of events that facilitated a particular aim. The technique includes collation of direct observations made by participants, in such a way as to derive solutions to practical problems. Upon completion of the interviews, critical incidents are extracted from the accounts and then grouped by similarity to form a set of categories that encompass the events. These categories can be tested for reliability and validity.

### **Research participants**

Through the A'oga Fa'a Samoa management and *Centre of Innovation project* team parents and educators associated with the A'oga Fa'a Samoa were made aware of the study. Sometimes this was by informal conversation; sometimes it was through no-commitment, general written information.

Interested participants met as a focus group and were informed of the purpose of the research interviews, that it came within the ethics approval for the wider *Centre of Innovation project*, each person's voluntary decision to participate, their rights as a participant, including the right to withdraw at any point without consequences. Participants provided verbal consent to take part in the study.

Participation was subject to the following criteria:

- the participant was currently or recently (within the last 12 months) involved in transition associated with the A'oga Fa'a Samoa;
- the participant had to be able to recall an experience in which a child was helped through transition during or out of the A'oga Fa'a Samoa.

Seven parents or educators at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa with recent or current experience in the implementation of transition volunteered to take part. Participants included two teachers, the A'oga Fa'a Samoa coordinator, and five parents. Five were female, two were male. All participants were members of the centre's advisory group. During a 35-minute group interview, participants met as a focus group with the researcher. The interview was conducted in English.

## Results of the Critical Incidents Analyses

From the transcript 8 incidents were recorded about what helps children's transition in and from ECE as reported by the parents and educators of the A'oga Fa'a Samoa. Analysis of the incidents produced 4 categories. Each incident was classified in one category only. Table 1 lists the categories. A report is provided on each of the 4 categories. A description of the category, associated outcomes, and examples of the incidents in the category showing the variation within each category is provided.

*Table 1: Categories of what helps in transition in and from ECE as reported by parents and educators associated with the A'oga Fa'a Samoa.*

	Category
1.0	Time in new entrants' class in the primary school
2.0	Positive teacher characteristics
3.0	Establishment of a 'buddy' system
4.0	Educators are involved in regular observations of children

### *Category 1: Time in new entrants' class in the primary school*

This category refers to the participant observing ways in which children's spending time in a new entrants' class in primary school helps transition from the A'oga Fa'a Samoa to the primary school. Outcomes were reported to influence both the teacher and the child.

Examples are provided of ways in which time in a new entrants' class was reported to help in transition. Reported outcomes of time spent in the new entrants' class included:

- The teacher had understanding of the child and had begun to develop a relationship prior to the arrival of the child;
- The teacher is able to observe the strengths and needs of children about to transition into primary school;
- The teacher was able to use early knowledge of the newly arrived child to shape interventions to support the child's transition;

- Children had established an early rapport with the new entrants' teacher; and
- Children are enabled establish relationships with peers in the new entrants' class.

### *Examples*

AA: I have been involved in taking the junior class and bilingual class at the end of last year when I had the transition class coming in to us on Wednesdays and so I got to know some of the kids then.

AA: When [the new entrants] used to go outside for fitness and for sports there were a couple of kids who did not want to join in and everyone offered lots of encouragement and positiveness I had seen that it was like that before [when the children spent earlier transition preparation time in the class]. I knew it was going to take a while for them to be just sort of um on the periphery observing before they had the confidence to join in... In one activity we did, rather than just an individual thing, I got them to do a circuit with a friend and they would actually hold somebody's hand and do it as one. And that was the first time when they had actually joined in.

The incidents reported indicate important relationship building outcomes from time spent in new entrants' classes in primary school. The relationships enable teacher observation of student strengths and needs, informed interventions to advance student learning and transition, and enable children to establish a rapport with the teacher and the new peer group.

### *Category 2. Positive teacher characteristics*

This category refers to the participant observing ways in which the teacher's professional characteristics help children in their transition from the A'oga Fa'a Samoa to the primary school. Outcomes were reported to influence the child in particular.

Examples are provided of ways in which positive teacher characteristics were reported to help in transition. Reported outcomes of positive teacher characteristics included:

- The child has confidence in a learning environment;
- The child responds to teacher questions;
- Positive expectations and perceptions of the child as a learner;
- The child is popular with peers; and
- The child's anxiety is replaced by anticipation of involvement in something exciting; and
- The child's transition occurs more smoothly.

*Example*

BB: [The child] started off very reticent. [The teacher gave her] encouragement and kind words. And she was saying that at her previous school she was finding it hard but here it was really good. ....The cultural difference helped because it was Samoan. ... And all the children would come around her. She was confident and the teacher was asking her [questions] and she came across as the teacher's pet.

Interviewer:... The best kind of teacher's pet?

BB: Mmm [nodding in agreement].

The incident reported indicates important outcomes from positive teaching characteristics. Rapport, care, a sense of safety, and encouragement to join in feature as positive characteristics. Expertise in Samoan culture is cited as a further positive teacher characteristic for children involved in transition from the A'oga Fa'a Samoa. The teacher's 'mothering' attributes were noted as significant positive teaching characteristics.

*Category 3. Establishment of a "buddy" system*

This category refers to the participant observing ways in which providing the transitioning child with a "buddy" to assist with entry into the new learning environment helps children in their transition time. Outcomes were reported to influence the child in particular.

Examples are provided of ways in which the buddy system was reported to help in transition. Reported outcomes of the buddy system included:

- The child is more confident
- The child quickly feels at home in the new learning environment

- The child learns common rules and practices, e.g. storage of personal bag; &
- The child's transition occurs more rapidly.

*Example*

Interviewer: Can you tell me about that time when [the child] was helped because she was given a buddy?

DD.1: On that particular time the teacher asked if anyone wanted to be someone's special friend for the day and she would say that they would work on this or that. And another time she would ask for volunteers and maybe it wasn't the same buddy but she would make sure [the original buddies] sat together and would make sure that she was near a friend, and while she was playing she was keeping an eye out for her buddy.

Interviewer: And what was the outcome?

DD.1: [The child] settled in a lot quicker as compared to [another child]. She felt more freer – the familiarity was there... You could find a location, find out where you are.

DD.2: The buddy system was interesting. We found out later that his buddy was the sister of one of his best friends. That made him feel comfortable.

The incident reported indicates positive outcomes from using a 'buddy' system for children involved in transition between learning environments. Increased confidence, and more rapid transition feature as outcomes. The importance of peer group relationships is seen as significant in helping a child through a transition phase.

*Category 4. Educators are involved in regular observations of children*

This category refers to the participant undertaking regular observations of children in a transition phase and applying those observations to pedagogical practice. Outcomes were reported to influence the teacher in particular. An example is provided of ways in which regular observation of children was appeared to help in education decision making around transition. Reported outcomes of regular observation included:



- Data on children is collected regularly and formally according to consistently applied criteria;
- The teacher identifies interventions appropriate for a child in a transition phase;
- The teacher develops understanding and empathy of the child's perception of the learning environment, including the child's perception of their relationship with their teacher.

*Example*

BB: I guess I could talk about two children because in a group of six children, and there are two that are two boys. I know the relationship between these two and the other four. They are still settling in. One of them picked up the end of the play phone to make a play call. I picked up the other end and answered it and he was so surprised and dropped the phone. I noted this in my observations.

I noticed he enjoyed playing with balls so I just take a ball in my pocket and just throw it and we just start playing, so the other one is still watching and still shy. Some of the children settle in straight away and well. I think they all are, but I could see little things that would help even more and that teachers could do to help. These things help in the bonding and building the relationship with the new teacher.

I realized when he dropped the phone when he heard my voice that the bond isn't there yet between him and me his new teacher. But then like I said, I know what he likes. He likes playing in the sandpit and give him a ball and he likes kicking it around so that's how I grow the bond – I give him a ball and kick it to him.

A: So you set aside time for observation?

BB I am responsible for doing the observation book so that's why I have been looking mainly at the basics in the observations.

The incident reported indicates positive outcomes from teacher being involved in regular observations of children involved in transition between learning environments. Increased understanding of the child's development, and appropriate ways forward featured as reported outcomes. The importance of

observations leading to interventions to support effective bonding between teacher and children were noted as an important factor in helping a child through a transition phase.

## **Discussion of Critical Incidents Results**

### *Research limitations*

This research was undertaken with a small group of enthusiastic educators and parents involved in the management and delivery of programmes at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa. To enhance reliability and validity the study would benefit from a widening of the participant group to include up to 8 participants each from teachers and parents able to comment on transition in and from the A'oga Fa'a Samoa. In addition, participants in interviews could be given the opportunity to undertake the interviews individually or in groups, in English or Samoan. Finally, to ensure adequate representation of perspectives from within the Samoan community, at least 8 participants could be from within Samoan cultural and ethnic contexts.

### *Steps forward in advancing understandings of transition in ECE*

Through the description of the categories of what helps in transition it is clear that this is a complex pedagogical and developmental process. Success is more likely where the complexities are fully observed and integrated into transition practices. Steps forward include:

- The categories suggest the need to gather more information about culturally relevant teaching practices that can help children in A'oga Fa'a Samoa through transition phases. This may lead to the promotion of culture specific training and professional support strategies that assist the development of culturally relevant, multi-dimensional approaches to transition. This may expand or amend the established mainstream approaches to transition.
- The categories can be used as a 'map' (Williams, 1999) for improving relationship management during transition phases. Taken as a professional development tool, this map could

encourage best practice aimed at meeting or exceeding internal and external requirements (Williams, 1993); and

- The professional development of the staff working in transition points with the A’oga Fa’a Samoa children can be shaped to integrate and explore the categories identified in this study. In addition the effectiveness of the categories could be examined through the establishment of further research in the categories and models of transition management.

This research indicates areas for further investigation that may expand available knowledge on what helps children in transition in ECE. For the first time the accounts of teacher and parent observations of child experiences in transition in an immersion Samoan ECE setting have been described. Until now the research has been generic<sup>8</sup> and accordingly the theories associated with transition have been based on the adoption of Western approaches. The findings of this research provide some tentative signals that educators involved in an A’oga Fa’a Samoa employ unique competencies in transition, as well as recognised mainstream competencies. ECE educators may benefit from expanded knowledge about what helps transition in ECE, particularly where the transition phase supports greater alignment between ECE and Samoan peoples, their aspirations and their needs.

While the abandonment of mainstream practices is not advocated in this study, consideration of positive factors identified by those involved in transition in A’oga Fa’a Samoa could be explored further and where appropriate promoted through professional education programmes, information gathering and profiling of Pasifika models of ECE. This is important for Pasifika peoples as much as others. As Anae (2001) has suggested with regards to Samoan identity in New Zealand it is “precisely *because of* [experiences such as] formal education, changing personal networks, upward mobility” (Anae, 2001, p. 117) that a strong Samoan identity has been maintained by “New Zealand-borns”. These strong perspectives and practices are integral to New Zealand’s present and future.

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<sup>8</sup> With just a few exceptions, for example the work on transition by Sauvao (e.g., Sauvao et al., 2000).

Through this study the A'oga Fa'a Samoa perspectives of transition are valued as part of the body of knowledge for ECE. This should continue.

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## Appendix F

### Examples of Sustained Conversations in Samoan between Small Groups of Children and a Teacher: Co-construction of Learning

*Eneleata Tapusoa*

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Note: A teacher-researcher transcribed these data and coded the conversations across four strategies that Baker specifies are supportive in language education:

- indirect error correction and the use of repetition (in *italics*);
- restatement to ensure that children understand (in **bold**);
- role modeling (underlined);
- frequent use of praise (in **bold italics**).

Excerpts of the coded transcripts are included below, for the benefit of Pasifika services and parents, as examples of good practice in a Samoan-language immersion setting. They show the children being encouraged to think, construct meaning, and to verbalise it in Samoan.

Hinauri 18/11/04

(Hinauri aged: 3 years 11 months)

Ua tamo'e mai Hinauri i totonu o le fale ma fai mai,

“Ene I touch the sisivao”

Na e tago i le sisivao?

“Ioe”

Na e tago i le ulu

“Leai”

Ao fea?

“Nao i le taliga”

O fea le mea e tu ai le taliga?

“I luga i i” (ua tago H i lona ulu)

E uumi pe puupuu?

“E umi, nao le mata e puupuu.

Oi faapea lava au e uumi.

“Leai o le mata e laititi”

**O le a le mea na tupu?**

**“I touch the shell”**

**Oi na e tago fo'i i le atigi?**

“Ioe”

**O le a la le mea na tupu i le taliga ina ua e tago iai?**

**“It went down and then it went up again”**

Faasamoa mai lau tala

“Ua alu i lalo ma grow up”

Ua me'i i totonu.

“Ioe, na me'i i lalo ma me'i i totonu”

I totonu i fea?

“I totonu ole atigi”

O fea la ua alu iai?  
 “Inside, it went inside the big school.”  
 Ua alu i luga i le Aoga?  
 “Ioe, i Richmond Road”  
 Oi ua 5 tausaga o le sisivao ua alu ai i le aoga?  
 “O le sisivao aoga”  
 E alu atu nei la le sisivao fetai ma Sapati ma isi tamaiti i luga i le aoga a?  
 “No”  
 Oi ae a, e ese lava le aoga a sisivao ia?  
 “Ioe, e piniki ma mumu le fale o le sisivao”  
 Ae a le fale o le Aoga a Richmond Road?  
 “I don’t know” ua savali Hinauri i fafo ma tilotilo i luga i le aoga ona fai mai lea,  
 “E lanu samasama ma le lanu moana.”  
 Ae a oe, o afea e te alu ai i luga i le Aoga?  
 “E 5 o a’u e alu i luga i le aoga a Richmond Road”  
 O a au mea e ave pe a e alu i le aoga i Richmond Road”  
 “O le ata ma le \_\_\_\_\_ I don’t know”  
 A’o a mea a Sapati e ave pe a alu i le aoga?  
 “E ave e lo’u tama le lunch, o le sanuisi ma le karoti ma le broccoli”  
 Ao le a lau mea ai e te manao e ave pe a e alu i le aoga?  
 “O le sukalaki ma le ato, ma le sanuisi, ma lua moa i totonu o lo’u lunchbox, ma tasi le masi, ma 3 umm sanuisi i totonu o lau lunch box”  
 Tua tele au mea ai, ae e te le fia inu?  
 “Ioe ma le vai inu i totonu o la’u lunch box”

Sa gaugau le ma tagamea ma Hinauri.  
 Ua latalata ina ta le lima ua vaai Hinauri ua tau leai ni tamaiti ona fai mai lea,

“Ua alu uma pepe ma alu uma tamaiti i le fale”  
 Ao le a le taimi e te alu ai?  
 “Five o’clock”  
**Oi la na vili mai lou tama e tuai mai, toeititi lava taunuu mai.**  
**“My mum said yesterday when she’s late she’s early.”**  
**Sei faasamoa mai lau tala?**  
**“E piki e lou tina au pe early ma late”**  
**Oi e vave mai lou tina e piki oe ae le tuai?**  
**“O lou tina e piki au pe a vave ae le tuai”**  
**Oi, e sau lou tina e piki oe pe a vave uma**  
**“Ioe”**  
**Ia toetiiti lava o’o mai lou tama.**

Ua tau atu le gaugau a le teine i le mitiafu ona fai mai lea,

“My dad has a tshirt like this but he throw it away”  
 O le ofu lena o lou tama lea sa aumai e solo ai tatou laulau.  
 “Leai, my dad throw it away”  
 Vaai e iai se ata faapea i le ofu o lou tama?  
 “Ioe,”  
 O le a lea ata?

“O le teine lea e faapea” ua faataitai e H le siva a le taupou la e i le ofu, ae tau atu loa lana vaai i lona tama, oso loa i luga ma valaau “Daddy”

Ua sau le tama o H ma fai mai o lona ofu tino le la sa aumai e faaoga i le aoga.

7/12/04 Elias i le tusi o manu  
(Elias aged 4 years, 4 months)

O le a lena ata?

“O le povi, o lea e ai le povi”

Ae a le ata lea?

“O Peniamina ma Sophie, lea e nofo Peniamina ma le povi, o lea e nofo Sophie ma le oti.”

O a lanu o na manu?

“E lanu enaena ma lanu pa’epa’e”

Ua vaai i leisi ata ona fesili lea o le faiaoga, O a mea a ia tamaiti e fai?

“O lea e sauni e alu i fafo ma matamata le manu lea i fafo o le pa.”

Ua vaai i leisi ata ona fai mai lea, “O Mane ma Anya lea e tago i le tino o le povi”

O a mea a tamaiti ia e fai?

“La e nofo i lalo i le laina”

Ua nonofo o le a i le laina?

“La e matamata i le povi e maua mai ai le yogurt ma le susu ma le pata ma le sisi ma le asi kulimai”

Ua tilotilo i le ata o le gutu o le povi ona fesili lea poo le a le la ata ae fai mai Elias

“Lea e faasino le nifo”

E a le nifo

“E leai se mea i luga”

Aisea?

“E pei lea e ai le lima”

**E le ai ai le lima?**

**“E pei o tatou e iai le mea i luga ma le mea i lalo, we've got teeth and we can bite and it hurts”**

**Faasamoa mai lau tala.**

“E ai le lima o tatou ma tiga”

**Oi ae a leai ni nifo i luga e le tiga pe a u?**

“Io, e leai se nifo o lau pepe”

**E leai se nifo leaga o la e pepe.**

“E iai le nifo o Olivia, o le pepe o lo’u cousin”

**Io leaga e matua Olivia i lau pepe, ua fia le matua o lau pepe?**

“E le iloa”

“Vaai, o lea laa alu le taavale, sa sau le tamaititi alu i tua”

Ua vaai i leisi ata ona fai mai lea, “O le puua lapoa ma le puua laititi ma le oti laititi”

“Vaai o la e susu le oti” Ua tilotilo i leisi ata ona fai mai lea, “O le moa la e tilotilo i fafo i le pa” Ae a lea ata? “O le fulufulu o le mamoe, e fai ai le ofu mafanafana ma le mea lea i le family corner”

O le a o le kapeta?

“O le fulufulu, vaai i le mamoe pepeti lea”

Ae faafefea le tino o le a lona aoga? lea e alu lou tina faatau mai?

“Ioe i le fale oloa, e ai le fasi mamoe.  
Ae a le ata lea?  
“O le siusiu”  
**O le a le aoga o le siusiu?**  
**“Pe a sau le lago tu i le siusiu ma sau loa ta”**  
**Ioe, e fuefue ai lago pe a o mai tutu i le tino o le povi.**

Sophie 19/11/04  
E sau le faiaoga o taalō Sophie i le play dough. O le tele ia o ana tamai polo.  
O a au mea na e fai?  
“O le mince”  
E ese le tele o au mince, e fia au mince na e fai?  
Ua faitau e Sophie le “tasi lua tolu fa lima seia oo lava i le luasefulu male iva”.  
O le a le numera e sosoo? \_\_\_\_\_ O le tolu sefulu  
Fai mai Sophie, “Tolusefulu.”  
E ai ni au mince i le fale?  
“Ioe, o le mince ma le noodle”  
O a isi mea e te fiafia e ai?  
**“O le siamu ma le toast ma le falaoa”**  
**O le a le toast?**  
**“O le falaoa”**  
**E sa’o oe, o le falaoa ae faapa’u. O a isi mea e te fiafia e ai?**  
“O le chocolate”  
O le sukalati  
“Ioe, o le sukalati ma le asikulimi”  
E te faia le kuka i le fale?  
“Leai.  
A’o ai e faia?  
“O A.  
O ai A.  
“A is my mum”  
Oi o lou tina.  
“Vaaia”  
O le a lena foliga? \_\_\_\_\_ e tafatolu pe tafafa?  
“E lapotopoto”  
Ae a le mea lea?  
“O Poppy”  
O ai Poppy?  
“O la’u pusi”  
O le a le lanu o lau pusi?  
“O le grey”  
O le a le faasamoa o le grey? \_\_\_\_\_ lima elefane? (a song we sing)  
“Elefane efuefu”  
E fia tausaga o lau pusi?  
“E tasi le tausaga, leai e lua”  
Oi e laititi la lau pusi, e fai la sona napi?  
“Leai, e leai se napi o le pusi”  
Ae a oe e fai sou nappy?  
“Leai, e le pepe a’u”  
Ua sau Lilly fai mai o le aso fanau, ona fai mai lea o Sophie,



**“My birthday is at T’s work”**  
**E fai lou aso fanau i le fale faigaluega a T?**  
**“Ioe, fale faigaluega”**

19/11/04 Lilly ma Hinauri  
(Two children are conversing with the teacher:  
Lilly aged 3 years 5 months;  
Hinauri aged 3 years 11 months)

Lilly

“Ene, can you take this off”

Aisea?

“It’s all muddy”

Faasamoa mai lau tala.

“Ua palapala”

*Aisea ua palapala ai?*

*“Ua alu a’u i le muddy”*

*Ua alu oe i le palapala?*

*“Ioe”*

Hinauri

“Ene vaaia”

O le a lena mea?

“O le masi”

O le a le foliga o lau masi? \_\_\_\_\_ o le faatafafa tutusa?

“Leai o le faatafafa le tutusa”

A’o le a le mea lea?

“O le masi”

O a mea sa fai ai lau masi? \_\_\_\_\_ sa ave iai se suka?

“Ioe, ma le panikeke”

O le a ma leisi mea na ave iai?

“Sa ave iai le pata”

ma le a? \_\_\_\_\_ ae a le mea lea e lapotopoto lea e aumai ta’e faapea ma tu’u i totonu?

“O le fuamoa”

*Poto oe, aumai se ta lima. Ma le a ma leisi mea?*

Lilly

“Ma le banana, ma le sukalaki ma le susu ma le stawberry ma le rasberry”

Hinauri

**“E fai le pati a tatou”**

**Pati o le a?**

**“Pati o oe”**

**Pati a a’u?**

**“Ioe e fai e au le keke o oe, le aso fanau o oe”**

**Oi o lo’u aso fanau, ua fia o’u tausaga?**

Lilly “E iva”

Hinauri, “Leai e sefulu”  
E iai la ni a’u mea alofa?

Hinauri, “Ioe o le, o le \_\_\_\_\_ camera”  
O le mea pu’eata?  
“Ioe”  
Ta’i manaia, ae a oe Lili o le a lau mea alofa mo a’u?

Lilly “Aaa \_\_\_\_\_ I know maybe I can get a picture”  
Faasamoa mai lau tala.  
*“E fai le pepa”*  
*Oi e tusi lau ata ma a’u? ta’i manaia, o ai la e iai i le pati?*

Hinauri “O a’u ma Lilly, ma Sophie ma Miara (tilotilo solo) ma Christian  
ma Kalden ma ma ma Mane”  
O a la tatou ofu e ofu?  
“O le ofu vae ma le ofu ma le skirt”  
O le laulavalava, ae a pe a sulu so’u ie?  
“Ma le ie”  
“Ua uma le keke a oe”  
O fea a ave iai?  
“E tu’u i le ogaumu faapea”  
E tao muamua faavela a ea? E fai la ni ta’aloga i le pati?  
“Ioe”  
O a taaloga e fai?  
“O le Barbie fashion”  
Ae leai sa’u Barbie.

Lilly “Ene ua buy e a’u le Barbie a oe at St Lukes”  
Faafetai Lilly, e iai sau tupe?  
“Um huh”  
**I fea?**  
**“In my house”**  
**E tele tupe a lou tina?**  
**“Ioe, oh no”**  
**Ae a lou tama?**  
**“I think he goes and buys some money from somebody”**  
**Na ave lea i fea?**  
**“I lou faigaluega”**  
**Oi e faigaluega lou tama e aumai tupe?**  
**“Ioe e aumai le coffee, ma le vai inu ma le susu”**

**Hinauri “Ua uma le keke Ene”**  
**Ua vela?**  
**“Ioe don’t touch it’s hot”**  
**Oi e vevela?**

Ua alu Hinauri ao mai ipu ona savali lea i leisi laulau.

Oi e fai le tatou pati iina.

“Ioe o le nofoa lea o oe e samasama, o le nofoa lea o Lilly e mumu ma le nofoa lea o a’u e mumu, e tutusa ma Lilly.”

***E ese le manaia o lau fa’asamoa a ea?***

Ua usu le pese o le aso fanau e Hinauri ona fai lea i le faiaoga,

“Feula lau keke Ene”

Ia faitau upu e lima,

Ua faitau upu e lima ona feula faatasi lea o le moliga’o. Ua fai faamanuia ma tipi loa le keke ma ai loa. Yuummmmy.