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***‘Sua le au lapa uka’, ‘Sua le au lapa kai’***

***Searching the depths of sea and land to acquire resources in order to  
enrich the growth of Aiga, Community, Village, Nation***

**Samoan parental perceptions of early literacy practices at  
home and in the community for children transitioning from  
Aoga Amata to Mainstream primary school**

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

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## Abstract

Although there is an abundance of research which outlines academic failure and underachievement of Pāsifika students at all levels of education, there is very little research that looks through the lens of what Pāsifika children bring to education. Are Pāsifika homes barren or rich in literacy practices? This study explored the wealth of literacy learning young Pāsifika learners engage in, within the context of their homes prior to entering the compulsory schooling system. Based in a Samoan Aoga Amata (early childhood centre) from South Auckland, parental perceptions of early literacy practices at home and in the community were explored for children transitioning from Samoan Aoga Amata to mainstream primary school. Drawing on a Pāsifika-qualitative approach, and utilising Fa’afaletui as a methodological framework, photo elicitation was incorporated to capture deeper elements of human consciousness in which images as well as words were explored (Harper, 2002). In doing so, a culturally responsive and respectful process was created to enable Samoan parents to engage, share and feel safe within their own worlds. Findings of this study identified key knowledges and influences that impact Samoan children’s developmental abilities in literacy. Areas of strength based on literacy context (*where* and *what* learning occurs), methods of literacy (*how* Samoan children learn best) and parental priorities (what is *most* important) were uncovered. Furthermore, recommendations for those in school learning contexts, both at teacher and management levels, were identified. These are: the family as the nurturing agent of learning, the importance of recognising prior knowledge, the awareness of diverse learning strategies, and the importance of creativity and oral language. Limitations for children transitioning from Aoga Amata were also revealed as: not having established partnerships between Aoga Amata and primary school, changing teacher perceptions, and teacher workload, viewing the teacher as being the one with the knowledge, parents disengaging due to language barriers, and the cultural difference in practice between the Aoga Amata and receiving school. Overall, this study found Samoan children from Aoga Amata do come with an abundance of rich early literacy

practices from home, Aoga Amata and church community. The challenge, however, is for teachers and schools to tap into this knowledge and, as a result, provide better outcomes for Samoan children transitioning from Aoga Amata. This could be applicable to all Pāsifika children transitioning from Pacific language nests.



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## Glossary

Term	Meaning
Aoga Amata	Full immersion Samoan preschool
Fa'asamoa	Samoan-indigenous way of knowing, being and doing
Vā fealoaloai	Describes the relational space of learning and teaching with a more experienced other
Fa'afaletui	Samoan-indigenous process of collective wisdom gathering
Talanoa	An encounter where people share their story their issues, their realities and aspirations Vaiotele, (2003).
Fala	Woven mat
Ava Fa'aaloalo or Fa'aaloalo	Cultural engagement of respect in the Samoan culture
Fa'afeiloaiga	A Samoan culturally respectful process to welcome people.
Meaalofa	A gift
Faitau Pi	Samoan Alphabet
Fealofani	Relationship building
Fesoasoani	Helping one another
Pese Samoa	Samoan traditional songs
Lotu	A family devotion time in the Samoan language. It involves cultural spiritual songs, Bible readings, sharing and prayers.
Tauloto	Memorised Samoan cultural poem or Bible verse

Tausala	Samoa cultural Siva (dance) used to bring Samoa families, communities and churches together for fundraising purposes.
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# Chapter One

## Introduction

This chapter provides the rationale for the study. The background of the study is outlined in Section 1.1. Then in Section 1.2 the focus of the study is discussed and the aims and questions outlined.

### 1.1. Background to the study

Pāsifika educational achievement has always been a passion of mine as I was born to an inspirational mother who pioneered the establishment of Samoa Aoga Amata (Language nests/Early Childhood centres) throughout Auckland and across other North Island regions in Aotearoa New Zealand. As Early Childhood co-ordinator for Ministry of Education my mother worked tirelessly to support not only the establishment of Samoa Aoga Amata but also other Pacific language nests and Early childhood centres. She was recognized in research that captured the pioneering Pacific women of Early Childhood in Aotearoa New Zealand who “worked so hard to establish some of the first language groups and Early childhood centres in this country. Women such as Poko Morgan, Mii Teokotai in Tokoroa; Fereni Ete and Feaua’i Burgess in Wellington, Jan Taouma, Materena George, Alice Ripley, and Pepe Matautu Alefaio” (Mara, 2005, p. 1). As an educator with over 16 years’ experience, first as a classroom teacher and now as an RTLB (Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour) in South Auckland, my desire is to continue my mother’s legacy of pioneering educational development with a focus on transition from Samoan aoga amata to ensure children of our Pacific communities are able to flourish and thrive.

I have worked with the most high-needs students, the majority being either *Māori* or *Pāsifika*. Many of these students are labeled by the Ministry of Education as functioning ‘well below’ standard. They are often referred by teachers at Years 1 to 4 (5-8 years of age) with language concerns and labeled ‘at risk’ for future reading and writing problems. These problems tend to be identified after a child has had a year

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of schooling within the primary sector where they have been measured on School Entry Assessments (SEA) developed by the (Ministry of Education, 1997). This means that they are already assessed as being 2 to 3 years behind European (Pakeha) students based on school entry assessments (SEA) scores (Hattie, Brown & Irving, 2015). In a study focused on the performance of students on the SEA where age, gender and ethnicity were compared at ages five, six and ten, the results showed that children from Pāsifika homes had a greater disparity in reading preparedness than their Pakeha peers. The Pāsifika and Māori children were substantially behind (0.84 and 0.6 respectively) NZ-European (Pakeha) students at the start of schooling, while Asian groups were much closer to NZ-European (Pakeha) children (0.27 to 0.32). The study found “an effect size of 0.60 is roughly equivalent to 2 years learning, therefore Māori students start school about 2 years behind Pakeha, and Pāsifika students are about 3 years behind” (Hattie, Brown & Irving, 2015, p. 92). This suggested delay in literacy ability for Pāsifika students is the focus of this current study. This is because in other New Zealand research (Galuvao, 2016; May, Hill and Tiakiwai, 2004; Rau, 2005; Rau, 2008) the language of assessment is seen as problematic. Items used in the SEA and other assessments in New Zealand are deemed to be clearly fitting the strengths and experiences of the dominant cultural-group of learners in New Zealand i.e. New Zealand Pakeha rather than Māori and Pāsifika learners. Moreover, the gap subsequently widens because young Māori and Pāsifika students beginning New Zealand compulsory schooling are often positioned by educators as entering school with a lack of literacy knowledge and skills (Alton-Lee 2003; Crooks and Flockton, 2005; Flockton and Crooks, 2007; Franken, May, and McComish, 2005; McNaughton, 2001). Understanding what literacy practices exist for Pāsifika students and their families is therefore crucial in understanding the perceived gap in literacy ability for Pāsifika students upon entering school at primary school level.

## **1.2. Focus of current study**

In recent years, New Zealand’s educational system reforms have predominantly been driven by expectations and standards set within a right-wing agenda. All children

are expected to achieve a certain level 'at' or 'above' their age in both literacy and numeracy. A national review conducted by ERO in 2005 formed the basis of the National Standards and these were introduced in 2008. They became the cornerstone of education policy. Thrupp (2017) explains that the reforms aimed to address the inadequate reporting of schools to their communities. Their goal was to identify those students at risk of failing in literacy and mathematics and to inform the parents or caregivers. The National Standards policy Thrupp (2017) showed inequitable discrepancies between high socio-economic schools (in which there was a high proportion of students likely to be judged 'at' or 'above' for National Standards) and those in lower socioeconomic schools which frequently have higher proportions of Pāsifika and Māori students and have many students labeled as below or 'well below' the standards. Today the gap between our highest and lowest performing students remains one of the widest in the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Alton Lee, 2003; Crooks & Flockton, 2005; Fletcher, Parkhill, & Harris, 2011; Flockton & Crooks, 2007). The Ministry of Education (2011b) outlines how these low performing students are likely to be Māori or Pāsifika and from low socio-economic communities. As a result, Pacific nations scholars contend that "our educational system now faces an increasingly and significant challenge with the low academic achievement of Pāsifika at all levels of education" (Amituanai-Tolosa, McNaughton, Lai and Airini, 2009, p. 1). Pāsifika children make up 8% of the school's population in New Zealand and this is projected to double by 2051 when over 50 percent of students in education will be of either Māori or Pāsifika ethnicity (Wylie, 2003). Therefore, for many reasons, including the growth of Pāsifika children in education, research through the lens of a strengths-based model is warranted.

### **1.3 Chapter Summary**

The aim of the study is to explore the wealth of literacy learning young Pāsifika learners engage in, within the context of their homes prior to entering the compulsory schooling system. This knowledge can then be used in the New Zealand education system to acknowledge and incorporate the cultural wealth and rich

literacy practices preschoolers encounter in their home setting, which could be used to position them more equitably within the schooling system. The specific question used in this research looks at Samoan perceptions of literacy at home and in the community in three key parts: where and what learning is happening, how Samoan parents think their children learn best, and what Samoan parents think is important to their child's literacy and language development.

In this chapter the argument was made that school entry assessments are biased in a way that privileges the dominant European (Pakeha) groups in the New Zealand schooling system and disadvantages Samoan students. However, if the lens was widened to include in a strength-based approach, the many rich literacy practices Samoan students acquire in their home and community contexts, the results would be different. In the next chapter, further literature is explored which supports the need for a strength-based approach which draws on the students' funds of knowledge.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 Introduction:

This review of the literature examines the strengths and qualities 'Pāsifika' families and children bring to education in New Zealand. This chapter focuses on the importance of bridging the cultural mismatch to improve the transition to primary school of children coming from Pāsifika language nests such as Aoga Amata.

In this chapter, Sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 explore the complexities in the term 'Pāsifika' together with the cultural strengths of the family as the foundational platform to learning. Sections 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6 consider parental disengagement through cultural mismatch of the home and school. Sections 2.7, 2.8 and 2.9 outline the importance of first language and culturally responsive pedagogy which can lead to Pāsifika achievement in schools. Sections 2.10 and 2.11 review how the common knowledge and skills of the home can be used to support successful transition of Pāsifika learners.

#### 2.2 Understanding Pāsefika (Pāsifika, Pacific) - Who and What is Pāsifika?

Pāsifika (also known as Pāsefika, Pacifika, Pacific) is a collective term used and developed in Aotearoa New Zealand to describe various groupings of Pacific nation people who are descendants of nations of the Pacific region now living in and with children born in Aotearoa New Zealand. Some Pacific researchers (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu, Finau, 2001) define the term Pāsifika through the New Zealand Census (1996) as constituting New Zealand residents who originate from the six Pacific nations of Samoa, Tonga, Niue, Cook Islands, Tokelau and Fiji and include both Island-born and New Zealand-born. With the vastly different traditions of each Pacific ethnic community, the underlying values and common beliefs, while generic across all cultures, are also acknowledged as culturally diverse: the term Pāsifika being a homogenous term to describe a rich tapestry of diverse cultures (Alefaio-

Tugia, 2014; Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu, & Finau, 2001). In this research, it is vital to acknowledge the term 'Pāsifika' (Pāsifika, Pacific) does not describe the in-depth uniqueness of the languages and cultures each nation of the Pacific possess. Pāsifika is a homogenous blanket term derived in the New Zealand context to describe peoples from the different Island nations of the South Pacific. Suaali Sauni (2008) states the "Pāsifika case in Aotearoa New Zealand is complicated. It is complicated because there are many layers and agendas within the call for a Pāsifika voice or for Pāsifika representation. It is complicated because the fight for voice and representation occurs at many levels, with many different players, simultaneously" (p. 19).

The Tertiary Education Commission (2017) states that Pāsifika is a young, fast growing proportion of New Zealand's population, where by 2038 the Pāsifika population is projected to make up 10.9% of New Zealand's population compared to 7.8% in 2013. These changing demographics mean that there will be an increased reliance on improved education outcomes for Pāsifika to meet future skill and labour market needs. To do this, we need all Pāsifika equipped with the knowledge and skills they need for lifelong success. "This has specific implications for education, as at present, 1 in 10 New Zealand children are Pāsifika, however by 2051 it is predicted that this will rise to 1 in 5" (Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs cited Franken, May and McComish, 2005, p. 6).

### **2.3 Pāsifika experiences of the schooling system in Aotearoa New Zealand**

All students bring different strengths to the school setting on entry to school. Many research studies (e.g., Bills & Hunter, 2015; Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa'afoi, & O'Regan, 2009; Gorinski & Fraser, 2006; Hunter, 2010; Mara & Burgess, 2007; Tagoilelagi-LeotaGlynn, McNaughton, MacDonald & Farry, 2005; Tuafuti, & McCaffery, 2005) highlight the wealth of knowledge Pāsifika students bring to an educational context from their homes. However, these researchers suggest that a problem is caused by teachers who may not recognize the strengths these students bring. McNaughton

(2001) argues that when Pāsifika children entering school are categorized by school entry assessments, this does not take into account the cultural wealth which remains hidden and underutilised by educators. Differences are apparent between Māori and Pāsifika children on school literacy measures when entering low decile schools. The SEA (school entry assessments) national data shows significant differences on measures of alphabet knowledge, concepts about print and story retelling, (Hattie et al., 2015) while other studies indicate differences on measures of oral language, reading and writing vocabulary (Crooks & Flockton, 2005; Flockton & Crooks, 2007). However, when family and church literacies include memorisation, storytelling, tauloto (oral performance and recitation), song, poetry, dance and memorizing Bible verses in their first language, it is apparent that Pāsifika children's home and community environments contain an abundance of rich literacy experiences, that are not necessarily well matched with conventional school activities and assessments. (Bills & Hunter, 2015; Dickie, 2008; Hunter, 2010, McNaughton, 2001; Siilata, 2014).

Government initiatives in the past looked to 'close the gap' between Māori and Pāsifika underachievement by developing a Literacy Taskforce in 1998 (Tamarua, 2006). This taskforce together with literacy experts had the sole purpose of making sure every child that turned nine was able to read, write and do mathematics successfully (Tamarua). Other policy maker initiatives included improving the information of school assessments (known as the *Green Paper, Assessment for Success in Primary Schools*, released in May 1998). The Green Paper set new policy with an assessment package which monitored student achievement in relation to the New Zealand curriculum (Philips, 1998). However, these different initiatives rather than taking a strength-based approach towards what Pāsifika learners brought to school with them, still sat within what fitted with the more dominant cultural groups in schools. Assessment is a constant part of the school setting, the results of which are heavily relied upon in New Zealand. However, McNaughton (2001) suggests that its purpose towards supporting Māori and Pāsifika is debatable. As Houghton (2015) explains, the implications of such a rigorous assessment system can lead to an overload of standardized testing which channels teacher instruction towards more

relentless testing and content knowledge, eliminating other important curricular content and the cultural capital inherent in the knowledge of a child.

Drawing on the cultural knowledge and strengths of Pāsifika to access literacy practices at school is important. Alton Lee (2003) promotes the importance of tailoring teaching to learner diversity. She highlights the importance of families, wider affiliations and heritages as *influences* on the child to be used as a resource to engage learning within the classroom. What is more, she describes how “learner identity and background knowledge of the child is vital to the educational achievement or failure of a child, particularly when there is a cultural mismatch between the home and school” (p. 32). Therefore, it is vital for quality school management and pedagogy that these important factors are considered. Hattie (1998) suggests that excellent teaching as well as excellent school leaders make the difference, and that there are other ways to support student learning and achievement, including flexibility in processing, creativity, reduction of stress, socialization and inspiring love of learning. Thus far though, despite government initiatives on “closing the gap between the lowest and highest students” (Ministry of Education, 2011a, p. 8), and National standards, greater pressure and expectations on teachers have compounded the deficits for Pāsifika learners in Aotearoa New Zealand, thereby perpetuating the long trail of literacy underachievement for many Pāsifika children.

## **2.4 Parent and family impact on child development**

The foundations of literacy are laid for a child at the beginning of their life. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model of human development explores the child at the center in close collaboration with parents, family and school. According to the ecological model he proposed, parents within the family environment (or ecology) lay the core foundation of literacy beliefs and practices. In other words, parents are very influential role models on how their children view books and other literacy tools. Swick (1991) suggests that considerable interest needs to be shown in the role



parents play in the first six years of child development and suggests that different parenting styles can be either enabling or disabling. For example, parents whose children experience explorative play are more likely to initiate inquiry and develop oral language and cognitive skills much more quickly, compared to children with little to no experiences, who are more likely to develop a lack of functioning, being less inquisitive.

Parents as influential role models in terms of interest in literacy can be understood on two levels. First *the interpsychological level where* learning occurs with the interaction of a more knowledgeable other i.e. parent/s, and secondly at an *intrapsychological* level or inside the child (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky explained that a child is completely dependent on other people, and it is the parent who initiates the child's actions, instructing him/her on what to do, how to do it, as well as what not to do. As Turuk (2008) outlines: "parents are representatives of the culture and the conduit through which the culture passes into the child, to actualize these instructions primarily through language" (p. 246). Vygotsky's theory of child development implies that social interactions and the role of parents are vital for the child's learning, as it is within these parameters that a child connects language and learning.

## **2.5 Considering impact of cultural differences on children's development**

The social and interactive practices children engage in, in the home setting, differ widely between different cultural groups. An example of early social development and engagement for children in the home, can be seen in some indigenous American communities. For example, Mayan families in the Yucatan Peninsula engage their young toddlers with simple household work, such as picking up trash or feeding the chickens. This role not only is respected within the family, but the cultural learning experiences are enhanced for this child. In contrast, highly schooled European American mothers, in the research of Rogoff et al., (2017) chose not to engage their children in any household work. It was preferred that the mothers undertook all household work when their child was asleep, to avoid their child's attempts to help

around the house (Rogoff et al., 2017). Similarly, Fletcher et al., (2009) illustrate the way in which Pāsifika parents act as cultural conduits of different cultural practices. For example, in some families the values of respect for elders, teachers and ministers are paramount together with reading the Bible in their first language at home and at church. Collaborative interaction is also important and from a young age the children learn to share the chores. However, these strengths and contextualized knowledge from the home, may not correlate with the expectations of a mainstream school. Nevertheless, Biddulph and colleagues (2003) contend that teachers and schools who build on the cultural values and strengths of the home can achieve successful outcomes for Pāsifika learners.

The importance of schools knowing about and responding to the cultural values and practices of every community needs to be carefully considered. Fletcher and colleagues (2009) in a qualitative study shared examples of how schools and teachers can draw on such strengths passed down by the voices of Pāsifika students and their parents. These examples include, making sure the pronunciation of their names is correct, greeting a student in their first language and incorporating cultural songs in the classroom dynamics. Tamarua's (2006) qualitative study of four Māori children, their whānau and teachers, showed how important it was to connect family activities and practices into the classroom pedagogy. For example, the learning and teaching structure within the home, characterized whanaungatanga (extended family) as a key part to building cultural competence. This meant that Tuakana-teina, where the older and younger sibling work in collaboration with each other in a shared reciprocal role was a key part to learning. Importantly, Edwards et al., (2007) interviewing young Māori students about their families and the important roles that they play in strengthening positive resources, explained that: "Many participants in this research shared about being the tuakana with responsibilities to care for younger siblings to cook, to walk to school, to collect, to be responsible as well as to perform certain tasks to support the whanau; such as doing the dishes, mowing the lawns". The Allen & Robertson (2009) study continued on the notion of different cultural experiences by providing teachers with the opportunity to live in another culture where first

language is not their own. This study aimed to develop teachers' cultural self-efficacy and ability to influence positive change for Pāsifika. Teachers shared their experiences of collectiveness stating: "The way they all sleep together, hold the babies and talk to each other ... This is quite profound, as I know Pāsifika children need to work together, but now I know why, and I've seen how deep that need is." (p. 7). Another teacher shared about the importance of not only tapping into the prior knowledge of her students but to find ways of sharing the knowledge of her children with the other classes, "so that I can put them in the expert role rather than them trailing behind" (Allen & Robertson, 2009 p.10).

Singh and Zhang, (2018) continued the notion of transferring the cultural knowledge within the home to school by analysing the viewpoints of three Pāsifika families and their views of early childhood education in New Zealand. An important aspect that came through in the research was the importance of cultural practice which includes the language, values and social institutions that make up a particular ethnic group's culture or society. All three families stated that, at home, they all taught their cultural values such as obeying authorities, respecting elders and the importance of gatherings with extended families to their children. One parent stated the importance of being able to "teach her son to speak in the Samoan language from when he was a baby" (p. 55).

## **2.6 Cultural disconnection of Pāsifika learners**

Today, schools in Aotearoa New Zealand are increasingly culturally diverse. There is a growing number of diverse learners with different socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural experiences and home languages. The challenge for schools is how to best cater for these culturally diverse learners. With a curriculum more structured towards the dominant culture of New Zealand, cultural misunderstandings and deficit theorizing between educators can lead to low expectations and cultural identity loss for many Pāsifika learners (Hunter et al., 2016; Spiller, 2012; Turner, Rubie-Davies, & Webber, 2015;). Deficit theorizing relates to the lack of

understanding between the beliefs and cultural practices in the homes of learners and those practised at school. Many researchers (e.g., Civil & Hunter, 2015; Dickie 2008; Fletcher et al., 2009; Siope, 2011; Tagoilagi LeotaGlynn et al., 2005) suggest that the barriers for Pāsifika children in engaging in school literacy practices are the lack of connection between home and school literacies. Many diverse learners experience a process similar to what is called the “Matthew effect” (Stanovich, 2009). In the concept of the Matthew Effect the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Drawing on this notion, it can be seen that when Pacific children enter school in classrooms where teachers have preconceived ideas of them as learners, label them ‘at risk’ for learning and group them accordingly, then their progress is put at risk. Schools perpetuate this ‘effect’ by not being able to identify the rich ‘cultural capital’ of the child. Schools focus on the label of ‘low’ or ‘well below’ rather than identifying the ‘cultural capital’ that culturally diverse learners bring. As a result of the deficit views held in schools those with a higher quantity of ‘well-below’ learners have a lower success rate compared to schools with lower numbers of ‘well-below’ learners, which have a higher success rate.

For many Pāsifika students, the choice to separate their cultural norms of family and community worlds from the school is a real reality. This means that the wealth of knowledge from home is left at the door and never tapped into by the teacher (Hawk & Hill, 1998 as cited in Siope, 2011). This disconnection of cultures is not only perceived by the students, but also by parents. For instance, Gorinski and Fraser (2006) described how Pāsifika parents are influenced by the advice and decisions of the teacher. Parents ascribe an ‘expert’ status to the teacher and as a result they disengage in their child’s schooling because they believe the teacher knows best. This often arises when the school dominates and influences decisions for parents without regard for any cultural information relevant to a students’ learning.

## 2.7 Cultural misunderstandings compound Parental disengagement

Gorinski and Fraser (2006) suggest further reasons parents disengage, including factors such as; English being the parents' additional language and their fluency in their home language which is not understood in the school setting. This forms a language barrier between home and school. Often too, the parents are working multiple jobs on a low income and have limited economic resources in the homes. Hedges and Lee's (2010) qualitative study of student teachers' experiences in other community areas different from their own, showed how making assumptions was not culturally appropriate. For example, one student teacher thought that for students who had both Samoan and Tongan parents, it was normal for them to converse in both languages. After further investigation it became apparent that not all her students could speak Samoan; for one family, Tongan was the most predominant language, as dad only spoke Tongan at home. Further to this, other cultural complexities in the research of Hedges and Lee, showed how a student teacher tried to meet with parents before and after school. This student teacher shared how difficult this was, as it was not just the "parents it was grandparents, aunties, uncles sometimes older cousins coming to pick them up as well. Sometimes, if the teacher has information that they need to pass on, it was sometimes hard to get that channeled through" (Hedges & Lee, p. 264). It is clear that there is a need to open cultural home and school partnerships in order to strengthen the Pāsifika, student and community voice.

In a study of parents' views on children's writing before school, McNaughton and colleagues (1994) provide a clear example of 'cultural mismatch'. Māori parents expressed strong readiness views about children's development; they considered that children learn things like writing their name when they are ready. Their view showed that they did not think that promoting writing was a family responsibility; they described it as the primary responsibility of educational professionals as they were the ones that knew what they were doing. In comparison, Pakeha parents tended to adopt explicit developmental goals, for example expecting children to

learn to write their name by five, before going to school. They spoke of preparing children for school and the importance of being able to do things i.e. write their name before going to school, otherwise they would be disadvantaged.

Other considerations in relation to cultural misunderstandings of Pāsifika children in Aotearoa New Zealand schools are Samoan parents' perceptions of New Zealand schooling. Fairburn-Dunlop (1981) highlights that while parents supported the school's instructional aims, parents believed that it was the school's responsibility to transmit high moral standards to students. These high moral standards are associated with Fa'asamoa (Indigenous Samoan ways of knowing, being and doing), which are inter-connected with faith through teachings within church. The parents described how they expected their children to display the right behaviour (polite) and show respect to the teachers at all times. This high level of respect is what Spiller, (2012) emphasizes in her research of teachers and student's views on Pāsifika values. Teachers in this research believed that Pasfika children would not engage, due to values of respect, humility and being embarrassed in front of their peers. This meant that teachers would avoid singling out students, instead quietly approaching them to see what they needed help with. Sauvao, (2002) in exploration into the views of teachers in primary school receiving students from full immersion Samoan Aoga Amata shares how teachers' perceptions were confounded with language issues. These issues were mostly viewed as Samoan children having a lack of English language proficiency stating "The child is competent but she doesn't take part in discussion". In such cases, the teachers appeared to be overlooking the fact that it was not the child's fault that the language of instruction has changed. (p. 18).

Fletcher et al. (2009) suggest that for many Pāsifika parents there is both the strong desire to engage and succeed in mainstream schooling, but also ensure that their children are able to maintain and uphold their cultural identity and language. A mixed methods study conducted by Siilata (2014) focuses on connecting worldviews of literacy experiences of Pāsifika learners, and teachers in English-medium classrooms. Siilata, reports that while English is a necessary requirement for

successful outcomes of Pāsifika, so too is their language, culture and identity. Their cultural needs and language need to be represented, valued and utilized as part of language and literacy learning in classrooms. An example of cultural mismatch is shared by one teacher stating “You know a lot of teachers will say Samoans don’t know how to read, they don’t know how to write, but we have had our literacies forever in a day. We have our White Sunday, when our children learn their tauloto (memory verses) and have to read the Bible. So at five years of age we are learning how to sit down with Mum and Dad and learn John 3:16 “For God so loved the world...”, and this is in Samoan. So I think the more teachers know about that and can make the time to find out a bit more about our children... the better teachers we can become... I think a lot of teachers group them and go, oh he’s a Samoan and all Samoans learn like this” (Siilata, 2014, p. 112).

## **2.8 Impact of Pacific languages in school**

Pacific languages and their use in schools has always posed a dilemma. Sauvao (2002) as cited in Gorinski & Fraser (2006) explains how parents view first language development as a critical aspect of their child’s development. In contrast, teachers saw very little difference and placed little importance on those children transitioning from Pacific language group centres and mainstream kindergartens where the language in use was English. To add to the problem, principals further cited administrative reasons, stating that a second language could not be achieved in school because there were no native language speakers on the staff. Where English-only schools do not fully appreciate the importance of language continuity for bilingual children, they indirectly and unintentionally alienate parents from being involved in the school. A continued development of Pāsifika languages and literacies not only enables learners to be successful in the worlds of their families and communities, but also has direct impact on their successful acquisition of English language and literacy (Baker, 2011; Cummins, 2008; Siilata, 2014).

A Ministry document called Effective Literacy Practice for children in Years 1 to 4 states the importance of using first language as a basis of supporting English acquisition. It states literacy development is “the ability to understand, respond and use forms of written language required by society and valued by individuals and community” (Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 3). Within this document it emphasizes the importance placed on educators using extensive knowledge of children’s language and literacies outside of school.

## 2.9 Cultural Capital

It is important for schools to pay attention to Pāsifika parents beliefs towards cultural practices and language to support Pāsifika learners entering a new school. Cultural capital is described by Bourdieu (2011) as existing in three different forms: *Objectified state*, which is the tangible capital of a person such as a book, instrument that the person owns and uses, *Institutionalized state*, which refers to the certification and degrees a person receives from an institution, and lastly the *Embodied state*, which is the skills and knowledge passed down from a more capable other e.g. John can play the piano because his father plays the piano for a band.

Cultural Capital within the embodied state is a form which McNaughton (2002) as cited in Alton Lee (2003, p. 33) elaborated on by stating that well-matched families and schools whose home life is “relatively well tuned to the knowledge and activities of the school can provide successful outcomes for students.” In contrast, for those families who do not match the cultural capital, where their experiences in the home neighbourhood and school is a hostile environment, “This can have serious consequences with schooling when continuing into higher education” (De Graaf et al., 2000, p. 93).

For students whose cultural capital is not that of the dominant culture in the schooling environment, they too can experience success. Research (e.g., Hunter & Anthony, 2011; Hunter & Hunter, 2017; Hunter & Hunter, 2018) suggested that when teachers draw on the cultural backgrounds and cultural capital of their Pāsifika



students this can lead to successful outcomes. Furthermore, Bills and Hunter (2015) suggested that if the cultural capital of students do not match the teaching and learning then shifting the ethos to include the student's prior knowledge and experiences is paramount. As examples the common use of grouping systems and individualized learning used in New Zealand do not fit with Pāsifika learners.

In a study (Bills & Hunter, 2015) which examined ways teachers built on the cultural capital of Pāsifika students, a teacher emphasized a shift in pedagogical practices from teacher-led to student-led knowledge. In drawing on his student's cultural capital he stated: *"you can share till the cows come home but if it doesn't make sense to them it's not going to"* (p. 112). This highlights an important aspect to teaching and learning where a child's contextual knowledge and cultural capital need to be included in order to optimize learning. Another teacher in the same study highlighted the power of sharing and discussing concepts as a family *"Family is big, it's everything. The way our classes are set up now, everyone has a chance to share ideas, and like a family everyone helps out, and nobody is left out because everybody has a job to do and that's the Pāsifika way and the Māori way"* (p. 113).

In a study of Samoan families across Samoa and New Zealand, Tagoilelagi (1995) explored cultural capital within the literacy behaviours of 18 Samoan families. During observations of parents reading to their children using familiar and unfamiliar texts the most common literacy behaviours that Samoan parents used were the performance routines and verbal exchanges also known as tauloto (a Samoan term which means a parent or child reads a word or words in a sentence and the child then memorises and repeats what has been said). The strong presence of the tauloto routine is consistent with cultural and religious beliefs (Fletcher et al., 2009). These researchers explained that learning for many Pāsifika children is shared through Bible readings at home and at church. This research advocated that tauloto and Bible readings are effective literacy tools for Pāsifika within the home (Fletcher et al., 2009; Tagoilelagi 1995). Research on the transfer of these skills within the home to classroom practice is yet to be established.

Siilata (2014) asserted the importance of cultural capital as key to the way forward for improved literacy outcomes, stating “Teachers need to explicitly teach English language and vocabulary by building on Pāsifika home languages and oral practices which include applying principles of second language acquisition and creating opportunities for Pāsifika language utilisation with oracy and literacy to encourage language learning across the curriculum” (p. 75). Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to make meaningful connections with their students by drawing from their culture, experiences, languages, literacies and worldviews. Making these links to familiar domains, such as home, market, church, beach, mall will help improve learning when teaching inference and critical thinking (Siilata, 2014). The challenge however for New Zealand schools is unlocking the rich ‘cultural capital’ possessed by culturally diverse learners.

## **2.10 Culturally Responsive practice**

The term culturally responsive teaching is premised on the idea that culture is central to students’ learning. The term had its beginnings in the early 1990s and was used by Gloria J. Ladson-Billings an American pedagogical theorist and teacher educator. In Ladson-Billings (1995, 2009) studies, she drew on a group of excellent teachers who provided exemplars of effective teaching practices for African American students. Ladson-Billings describes how African Americans have been burdened with history that has denied them equitable opportunities in education in the past. She drew on the different teachers’ practices to illustrate the culturally responsive pedagogical practice they used, which enhanced the learning outcomes with three key principles. These key principles included students experiencing academic success, maintaining his or her cultural competence, and developing a critical consciousness in being able to challenge the status quo of the current social order.

Other researchers have further established and contributed to the term culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2002) addressed the core issue regarding the impact of culture on student’s learning and behaviour by stating “Teachers’ knowledge about

and attitudes toward cultural diversity are powerful determinants of learning opportunities and outcomes for ethnically different students. For some students they facilitate academic achievement; for others they obstruct learning” (p. 613). Gay highlighted two critical obstacles to culturally responsive teaching. They are negative teacher attitudes and low expectations for students of colour. For Pāsifika children the obstacles identified by Gay are similar. For example, Spiller (2012) suggested “poor Pāsifika achievement is often attributed to three inter-related challenges: deficit theorising by teachers; issues relating to teachers not understanding Pāsifika students’ identity and lack of effective pedagogy, including building strong teacher student relationships” (p. 59). These issues arise through cultural misunderstandings and lack of training around being culturally responsive to the needs of children and their families (Spiller). Galumalemana, (2000) as cited in Penn, (2010, p. 14) stated “if language is the key value of culture, then schooling in Aotearoa New Zealand is culturally laden because the language of instruction is English. Thus, when the language spoken at home stems from one of the Pacific nations, then there is a serious mismatch here between the cultural capital of the home and the school.”

It is important for Pāsifika children to feel secure in their culture. They also need to see that there is a link between the culture and the language spoken at home and at school. By having this link, the child and parents feel empowered and feel safe to communicate in the dialogue with the teacher. There is acknowledgement of both languages in the class environment when this happens. Parents are better able to advocate for their children if they can use their first language (Taufuti & McCaffery, 2005).

Bishop and Glynn (1999) stated many educational practitioners continue to ignore culture as a central ingredient in educational interactions. Further, many educators remain ignorant of the fact that they bring to educational interactions their own traditions of meaning making that are themselves culturally generated. This invisibility of culture perpetuates the domination of the “invisible” majority culture.

However, it is not sufficient to simply raise awareness of other cultural backgrounds; it is also important for educators to critically evaluate how one set of cultural traditions (their own) can impinge on another and their students” (p.78).

## 2.11 Funds of knowledge

‘Funds of knowledge’ is a term that describes the common knowledge and skills a child learns within the home environment. Children labeled as the ‘minority’ are not empty vessels; they are representatives of the common knowledge and interests within the home. Although this common knowledge and interest may not correlate to the mainstream culture of a school, research (e.g., Cooper & Hedges, 2014; Hedges, Cullen & Jordan, 2011; Hogg, 2013) tells us that teachers who fail to capitalize on children’s learning gained in informal settings, ignore the rich source of children’s prior knowledge, experience, and interests in the home.

In their seminal research Moll and Greenburgs (1990) highlighted the importance of teachers recognizing their students’ funds of knowledge. Their intent was to improve outcomes for marginalised students in working class Mexican communities in Tucson. Within their research project, the teachers were trained to spot ‘*funds of knowledge*’ in the home. Some examples of the different practices used, were teachers observing code switching between two languages. For example, a father and son were conversing in both Spanish and English when fixing a barbeque. Teachers became ethnographers of their students’ world, seeking and making sense of their everyday lives for best practice in the classroom (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005).

Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez, (1992) revealed in their study the regularity with which some Mexican families cross the border between Mexico and the United States. This highlighted the need for teachers to include these personal experiences for Mexican students within the classroom culture. This was because when a child within the dominant culture spent their summers in Europe e.g. France, a big deal was made of it when the child was asked to share this experience with the class. However, when a Mexican child spent their summers crossing the border to Mexico

this was rarely talked about within the classroom (Moll et al., 1992, p. 136) These researchers suggested that tapping into the unknown world of a child's family can unlock the cultural silence in connecting funds of knowledge between the family and the school (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

Other examples of unlocking the cultural silence through funds of knowledge is seen through the research of Hensley (2005). Hensley showed how funds of knowledge within the home can be used to improve behaviour and family engagement. For example, a teacher who had difficulty with a child wanted to shift their approach when engaging with the family, as previous visits were always teacher driven. For the next visit, a change from teacher-directed to parent engagement and parent voice was used. This experience led to parent engagement where the teacher used the father's expertise as a groundsman, to help plan and develop a class garden for the children. The teacher explained that this father "was the perfect person to do just that, he helped us prepare and plant a vegetable and flower garden and as far as I was concerned I had already tapped into a fund of knowledge in which my project was a success" (Hensley, 2005, p. 143).

In New Zealand, Cooper and Hedges (2014) research, described how an early childhood centre drew on the funds of knowledge of parents who were Cook Island and Samoan in providing meaningful learning experiences for their child. Examples included teachers drawing on the interests in music, especially playing the drums. One teacher commented on the link with the child's natural ability of rhythm and playing drums. It was also noted in a form completed by parents to assist teachers that their son liked to play on his uncle's guitar. "When a teacher noticed his interest in the guitars and ukuleles during children's play, he was given some drums for him to play in order to join the group. The footage showed the skills, energy and passion that Hunter brought to his drumming" (p. 170). With a growing population of Pāsifika children and diversity within schools, funds of knowledge can be used as a theoretical framework in assisting families and centres to engage in collaborative partnerships to benefit their children's learning in school.

Further studies in New Zealand highlight the broad scope of knowledge teachers need to consider, before making curricular and pedagogical decisions for children's learning. A qualitative study by Hedges (2012) looked to explore teachers' funds of knowledge. This study found three common themes through teacher responses that effected pedagogical change. Firstly, '*Family based funds of knowledge*' which describes the qualities and skills a teacher brings with them to education from personal and family experiences. Secondly '*Centre-based funds of knowledge*' is the influence on child-teacher relationships. As the nature of learning constantly changes with children's interests, teachers need to seek knowledge outside their current understandings to support children in their learning. Lastly, '*Community-based funds of knowledge*' which are the practical outside learning experiences and influences of the child (Hedges, 2012).

Hedges (2012) highlights the importance of building a curriculum of learning around a child's strengths, and proposes a structured 'funds of knowledge' framework:

#### *Family based funds of knowledge*

- ✂ Participation in the household and domestic tasks
- ✂ Parents' occupation
- ✂ Parents' interest, talents and leisure activities
- ✂ Parents' language, values and belief
- ✂ Grandparents' occupations, leisure activities and interest
- ✂ Adult relations and family friends, their interests and occupation
- ✂ Siblings' and cousins' activities, interest and language, holidays and other community experiences

#### *Centre-based funds of knowledge*

- ✂ Peers' interest and activities
- ✂ Teachers' interest, language, experience

#### *Community-based funds of knowledge*

✕ Cultural events

✕ Popular culture

With an open landscape of 'funds of knowledge', families are the core source of influence on a child's funds of knowledge and interest. A funds of knowledge approach affirms the core principles of parents as the children's first educators. A teacher not only needs to consider the funds of knowledge a child brings with them from home, but they also need to find a way to make these connections work with their own cultural beliefs, family experiences, childhood relationships and practical experiences. For example, one of the children in the research of Hedges (2007) was interested in a Caltex carwash card and talked about going to get the car washed with Dad and then going to McDonald's. His teacher then set up sponges and soapy water in bowls for a carwash experience promoting an environment of discussion and language opportunities. This teacher encouraged the children to look at where the vehicles were still dirty and sets up a "drying room" with towels for the children to take their vehicles over to and dry them. Having an awareness of funds of knowledge can inform teacher knowledge, teacher education and professional learning in developing strengths and practices (Hedges, 2007, p. 135).

## **2.12 Successful transition**

Transitioning a child from early childhood to primary school is an important stage in developing a continuous positive experience of learning. If a child experiences a successful transition, it can lead to a virtual cycle of achievement (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; Yeboah, 2002). Transition from one education sector to another is a part of life where children need to manage and build resilience when change occurs. Teachers can support transition by encouraging a sense of self-worth, independence, and confidence by planning, communicating with a child's parents and their whanau (Education Review Office, 2015). Fabian and Dunlop (2007) in an analysis of transition studies within a number of different countries, identify key factors that contribute to the success of an effective transition from early childhood to primary

school. These factors include planning a range of transition activities such as pre-visits to schools, social stories and play-based learning activities that can be transferred into their new setting as contributing factors that can familiarize the child in their new learning environment. It is also suggested that building social competence in a child, so they can socially engage with other children and make friends, is an important part in transitioning a child, as children who start school with a familiar friend have higher levels of social skills and academic competence.

In a qualitative study of twenty children and their families from different ethnic backgrounds, Hening and Kirova (2012) explored the importance of play in early childhood as a means of creating inclusion of home language and cultural traditions. Results showed that the presence of cultural artefacts and cultural practices of the children and their families, acted as cultural mediators, allowing the children's home culture emerge as the dominant one within the early childhood setting. This research resonates with the research of Podmore et al., 2003 where the research investigated culturally appropriate ways of interacting with Pāsifika families in building support for Pāsifika children, transitioning from Pāsifika early childhood centres to mainstream schools. Overall, the study revealed how important it was to provide a seamless transition which includes considering the child's cultural language and learning, into mainstream schools in New Zealand.

There are various factors that can contribute towards preparing early achievement for Pāsifika children in early learning (Dixon et al., 2007). Dixon and colleagues in their study explained that by increasing the number of Pāsifika children participating in quality ECE services, this can better prepare them with the foundational knowledge and skills before entering school. The study also focused on addressing barriers based on community and parent non-participation. Outcomes showed that the reasons for nonparticipation were socio economic concerns such as cost of providing ECE for their children and transport. One interesting factor different from the socioeconomic concerns was the lack of confidence Pāsifika parents had in ECE services to adequately provide cultural knowledge and beliefs around the



appropriate age at which a child should attend ECE. This places focus on the different expectations Pāsifika parents may have around successful transition to school.

For effective and successful transition to happen, McNaughton (2002) highlighted the need for continuation of culture and language learning into the school setting. This strategy of building on what is familiar within the child's setting to classroom practice, can be seen in the study of Amitunai-Toloa, (2005). The study examined the effectiveness of reading comprehension instruction in the context of six Samoan bilingual classrooms in two schools in South Auckland. It showed that the teachers' utilisation of Samoan out-of-school activities to engage students was minimal. The researcher argued that there is a need for teachers to modify their practice to enmesh more compatible ways of including students' background knowledge. For children with culturally diverse backgrounds, McNaughton (2002) argues that it is vital for the teacher to link the child's background knowledge in creating an effective learning environment for the child.

### **2.13 Chapter Summary**

An Education Review Office (2015) report highlighted that, successful transition for Pāsifika in Special Education only happened when collaboration and information sharing was regularly undertaken with school, parents, whanau and other services. It further showed that good practice happened when teachers at the Aoga Amata worked collaboratively, together with the bilingual units where the majority of their children looked to transition. This information sharing would be based on the child's learning and parents' learning aspirations for their child. It was also good practice when teachers supporting children worked collaboratively with mainstream school teachers in providing workshops about effective strategies when working with individual children. Lastly, successful transition for Pāsifika children in Special Education happened when early child hood teachers accessed the necessary agency supports such as resource teacher for learning and behaviour (RTLb) in ensuring

collaborative support with family continues. This study focuses on Samoan parental perceptions of learning to provide insights for successful transition of children in Aoga Amata (Samoan Early Childhood Centres) to primary school.

In summary, this chapter highlights the abundance of knowledge and home cultural practices many Pāsifika children and families bring to education. The challenge, however, is finding ways to build on this cultural knowledge as a way of supporting transition from Pāsifika language nests / Aoga Amata to primary school. In the next chapter, the methodologies will be explored towards finding culturally appropriate ways of collecting relevant data for research.

## Chapter Three

### Methodologies and Methods

#### 3.1 Introduction

As a researcher of Samoan descent, Pāsifika methodologies were utilised as a crucial part of being able to capture and understand the perceptions of Samoan parents in this research. It was important that I explored the different processes available when working with Samoan families to determine the most culturally appropriate approach for this research. In decolonizing methodologies, Smith (1999) places an important emphasis on the process of research methods, stating that methodological processes “need to be respectful, enabling people to heal and educate. They are expected to lead one small step further towards self-determination” (p. 128). The hope of this research is to not only provide a safe and culturally responsive space for parents to share their worlds, but also utilize culturally responsive methods in the process of gathering parents’ perceptions, thereby ensuring a culturally safe and relevant experience for all involved.

This chapter outlines the design and methods used in the study. Section 3.2 provides justification for drawing on qualitative methods as a Pāsifika approach. Section 3.3 describes the vast complexities of working within different Pacific methodologies, and the importance of drawing on Fa’afaletui as a Samoan methodological framework. Section 3.4 outlines Fa’afaletui as a Samoan culturally responsive approach through photo elicitation. Section 3.5 and 3.6 explain participant criteria, and ethical considerations, and outline the data collection process of: Faafeiloaiga, Fa’afaletui, and Meaalofa. Section 3.7 outlines the approach and steps taken to analyse the data through thematic analysis in the research.

### 3.2 Pāsifika-qualitative Approach

In this study Fa'asamoa (Samoan ways of knowing, being and doing) are vital for knowing 'how to approach' Samoan parents. As highlighted by Tamasese et al., (2010), "a person does not exist as an individual, it is the relationship with other people that drives a sense of wholeness and its uniqueness of belonging to a family, village, genealogy, language, and culture" (p. 21). As researchers working in Pāsifika communities, the beliefs embedded within western (or non-Pacific) research paradigms may not necessarily align with the values and beliefs of Pacific peoples. Therefore, as Amituanai-Toloa et al., (2009) explains, careful consideration regarding research methods should be at the forefront. A methodology should be culturally responsive and appropriate for Pāsifika in providing positive and effective outcomes for Pacific issues. Vaioleti (2006) outlines how a qualitative approach provides a safe and common space for participants to share their stories and experiences within the context of the research. This enables the participants to be able to share in their natural environment within a '*naturalistic method*' (Jeanty & Hibel, 2011 p. 644). This research project uses a Pāsifika-qualitative approach to explore Samoan parents' perceptions of literacy practices in the home and community. Qualitative research is where researchers set out to determine an issue or concern, commonly engaging with participants through interviews and observations to generate knowledge. The goal of qualitative research is to uncover the understandings that already exist in people's experience (Smythe & Giddings, 2007). Qualitative research does not isolate or control the environment, it provides opportunities for people to participate in the research in their natural settings, using their own language. A Pāsifika-qualitative approach incorporates Pāsifika values as foundational to the way in which participants are invited to engage, participate and share stories within the study.

### 3.3 Pāsifika methodologies

Pāsifika research methodologies encompass an ecological aspect to learning, where the voices of Pāsifika peoples, their cultures, and traditions are heard. A research community builds research capacity and a research culture where researchers are able to challenge their own thoughts and ideas (Vaiioleti, 2006). Suaalii-Sauni and Fulu-Aiolupotea (2014) advocate that a Pāsifika research community should not just happen by chance; a research community should build research capacity and a research culture where basic values and knowledge are understood and shared. A research community “should allow researchers to communicate and contest their ideas, so that their pursuit of knowledge is understood” (p. 332). Anae (2010) challenges Pāsifika researchers to be explicit about the purpose of their research and who it looks to target.

A Pāsifika framework presses researchers of Pāsifika peoples to work within the cultural parameters of that community. For example, when looking to collect data from parents, a questionnaire or survey can be culturally inappropriate. Therefore, as Anae and colleagues (2001) explain, being able to adjust and readapt to cultural practices is of great importance when working in Pāsifika communities. Many Pāsifika methodologies have been developed to support researchers working within Pacific communities. According to Amituanai-Tolosa et al., (2009) Pāsifika methodologies imply a richness of relevant cultural protocols and frameworks related to Pāsifika. Tamasese et al., (2010) also highlights that for Pāsifika researchers, voluntary service regarding research is not an individualistic activity benefitting only the researcher. It is a role or expectation for their family, their extended family, of giving back to their communities.

Research in Pāsifika communities, is a way of gaining insight into the world of Pāsifika families and hearing their stories. Overall it can strengthen and encourage new Pāsifika researchers to build on those positive relationships across ethnic groups, communities and schools (Anae, 2010; Anae, et al., 2001). With a growing

body of Pāsifika research methodologies entering new terrains, being able to draw from the strengths of new research is paramount for the future of Pāsifika research (Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014). Important studies by researchers (e.g., Cahill, 2006; Fletcher et al., 2009) illustrate how the perspectives of Pacific parents can be drawn on to build effective home and school partnerships for academic success. Within these different studies, value is placed on the cultural oral traditions and customs as a passed on lifestyle and used as a culturally responsive pathway to collecting data. Taking these into consideration, this study draws upon a Pacific research methodological framework to ensure a culturally responsive and respectful approach is undertaken.

Research specific to Pacific people and their communities by Pacific researchers has now grown. Pacific researchers recognize the importance of their cultural background as a source of informing their research. This lays the foundation for them to connect with something that is familiar and meaningful (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014). There are now a number of research methodologies and models developed by Pacific researchers. These include the **Kakala** framework by Konai Helu Thaman (1997, 2002) the **Tivaevae** model by MaUa-Hodges, (2000) and others from the Cook Islands, the **Te Vaka Atafanga** model from Tokelau (Kupa, 2009) the **Vanua** model from Fiji (Nabobo-Baba, 2006), the **Talanoa** approach (Vaioleti, 2006) and **Fa’afaletui** from Samoa (Tamasese, Peteru, Waldegrave, & Bush, 2005). Each model or approach to research is significantly important in making sure that the cultural practices and values are upheld when working in that specific environment. As a Samoan researcher conducting this study within a Samoan community i.e. with Samoan parents and children, it is important to consider a Samoan methodological approach to ensure a culturally responsive process. In this study, Fa’afaletui, a Samoan methodological approach, is used as a culturally responsive framework.

### 3.4 Fa'afaletui: A Samoan culturally responsive framework

As a way of gathering parents' perceptions, *Fa'afaletui* the Samoan-indigenous process of collective wisdom gathering was adopted (Alefaio-Tugia, 2014). In this study the wisdom of parents in their perceptions of literacy practices of their children in the home and community was sought. *Fa'afaletui* has a strong emphasis on collectivity which facilitates the gathering and validation of important knowledge within the culture. In the breakdown of the word *Fa'afaletui* Tamasese, Peteru, Waldegrave and Bush (2005) explain "*Fa'a*" is a causative prefix, "*fale*" means house or groups of houses and "*tui*" describes the form of weaving. Within the *Fa'afaletui* framework, Photo elicitation is incorporated. It is a process that draws upon participant's interpretations of their everyday experiences of early literacy practices, through their selection and discussion of photo-images. Photo elicitation allows the participant to provide their own open ended perspectives and interpretations of what they view as important while further providing a greater and larger analysis (Collier, 2001).

Figure 1.1 below is a visual diagram of the *Fa'afaletui* framework to illustrate the process of *Fa'afaletui* and the incorporation of photo elicitation within the *Fa'afaletui* framework.

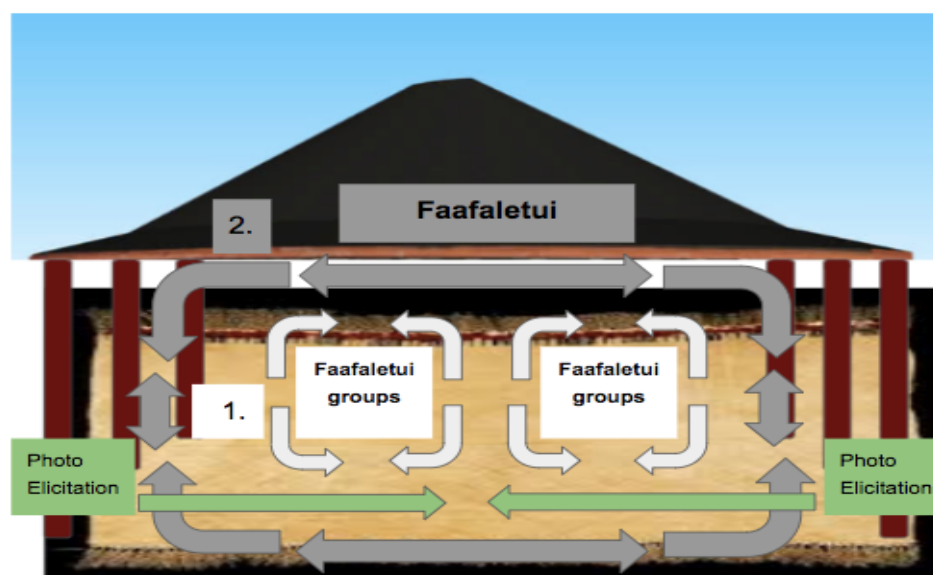


Figure 1.1: *Fa'afaletui* (Samoan-indigenous process of collective wisdom gathering)

In this illustration the visual representation of Fa'afaletui starts from the '*fala*' being the mat on the floor representing the welcoming gesture of inclusiveness towards collaboration and weaving of knowledge. The '*fala*' is the mat woven that covers the floor and represents photo elicitation as a tool to welcome parents' stories into their worlds. Photo elicitation as a representation of the *fala* opens and inspires a thousand words (White, Sasser, Bogren, & Morgan, 2009). Through photo elicitation the research participants are provided with time to reflect on their past, while also allowing them time to share their experiences. A participant photo-led *talanoa* (process of relational engagement through dialogue within appropriate cultural protocols), is a way of shifting the balance of power from the researcher to the participant, whereby the participant is able to share their experiences based on their learning (Dickie, 2008).

Using only words tends to imply surface sharing where it only utilizes a small area of the brain while photo elicitation evokes a deeper element of human consciousness in which the brain is processing images as well as words (Harper, 2002). Photo elicitation places ownership and decision making on the participants; they choose the time and place of what is photographed to represent an aspect of literacy learning for their child. Having an insider's view point not only provides the researcher with detailed information about their lives but it gives a clear picture deep into their family, and community activities that are important to them. Talanoa commits to ensuring the concerns of research participants are heard through the research process and through ongoing conversations and confirmation of stories. Each Talanoa, because of the different participants, arrives at a different consensus (Vaka, Brannelly, & Huntington, 2016).

In the visual illustration (Figure 1.1), the *fala* not only represents the welcoming of photo elicitation, the *fala* also represents the term '*tui*' from *Fa'afaletui* where the weaving of knowledge within the fale are connected to the pillars. The pillars of the fale represent the ideas, stories and knowledge of the people and village-community and the roof, represents protection where those that are sharing feel safe to share.



*Fa'afaletui* in the Samoan context is a collective process of searching for wisdom (Alefaio-Tugia, 2014). Suaalii-Sauni and Fulu-Aiolupotea (2014) highlight that *Fa'afaletui* is often referred to for more formal discussions; where the matter is less formal with unstructured dialogue, a researcher might adopt Talanoa (Vaioleti, 2006). As the focus of this research is to gather the perception of Samoan parents' early literacy practices within the home and community, *Fa'afaletui* as a methodological framework within a Pāsifika-qualitative approach was utilised. In doing so, a culturally responsive and respectful process is created to enable Samoan parents to engage, share and feel safe within their own worlds.

*Fa'afaletui* is described in two parts. Part one is where groups or houses (fale) meet separately with the facilitator to share their knowledge and stories based on the research question. After the first group discussion, *Fa'afaletui* then involves a delegation from each of the fale or houses to meet and build on this knowledge of sharing, where the threading and rethreading of specific knowledge encompasses the collective experiences of all participants (Tamasese et al., 2005). The framework of *Fa'afaletui* is a commonly used method within Samoan research communities where Suaalii-Sauni and Fulu-Aiolupotea (2014) contend that "its use enhances it and makes it similar and synonymous with European-termed social research methods, such as the focus group or interview" (p. 334).

### **3.5 Participants**

This research took place in the South Auckland region in an Aoga Amata (Samoan preschool). Participation in the research was on a voluntary basis. Six sets of Samoan parents were invited to participate in the study. Five participants gave consent to take part in the research. Of these six sets of parents, four were mothers and one was a mother and father. Of these parental sets one mother was born in Samoa, while five mothers including the set of mother and father were second generation Samoan, meaning they were born in New Zealand to Samoan parents.

The specific research requirements for potential interested parents were:

- ✕ The participants had to have a child between the age of 4 years and 4 years 11 months, attending a Samoan Aoga Amata (Samoan preschool) preparing for transition to mainstream primary school.
- ✕ The participants needed to be between the age of 30 – 50 years being either first generation or second generation born Samoan, meaning they could either be born in Samoa or be born in New Zealand by Samoan parents.
- ✕ The participants also had to have their child attend the centre for a minimum of 3 years to be involved in the study.

### **3.6 Data collection**

#### **3.6.1 Pacific cultural-ethical considerations and process**

This research aligns with the application for ethics approval for a low Ethical Risk Research project required by Massey University. To ensure that I was following Samoan values and protocols of the Aoga Amata, I had an initial meeting with the centre manager. Samoan protocols of engagement were undertaken in a respectful Samoan manner using Samoan language. I introduced the study and my invitation to the centre manager, and I was advised to write a letter in Samoan and English to the Board of Managers (see Appendix A and B). I was also advised to prepare a profile of myself, my background and my village in both English and Samoan (see Appendix C and D). The profile and letter established a relational engagement of Ava Fa'aaloalo<sup>1</sup> with the centre manager and board of managers.

Informed and voluntary consent by the research participants was adhered to with respect for the rights of privacy and confidentiality. All personal information from the participants were de-identified, to minimize harm. Full and open transparency

<sup>1</sup> Ava Fa'aaloalo – Cultural engagement of respect in the Samoan culture.

regarding the purpose, use of forms and data provided by the participants, and social and cultural sensitivity was demonstrated at all times towards each participant and their knowledge and life experiences.

The recordings, and notes are stored in a locked storage location with the supervisor with the Faculty of Applied Humanities. Six years after completion of this thesis research, all audio and recorded notes will be permanently destroyed.

### **3.6.2 Fa'afeiloaiga<sup>2</sup>**

In undertaking the research, Samoan cultural protocols were always maintained. At the first meeting Fa'afeiloaiga as a culturally respectful process to welcome people to the first meeting was used. Fa'afeiloaiga was undertaken with each set of parents by the centre manager and myself as the researcher in the Samoan language. During this process I introduced my profile (see Appendix C and D), and shared both the research letter and consent letter (see Appendix E and F). Cameras were also handed over to participants involved in the research, utilizing Samoan respectful language. By engaging through Samoan cultural protocols of Faafeiloaiga, parents were welcomed and acknowledged within the research process.

Fa'afeiloaiga was conducted over three days during the morning period when parents dropped off their children to the centre (refer to table 1 outlining Fa'afeiloaiga). This was advised as the most appropriate time by the centre manager for me to undertake the Fa'afeiloaiga (cultural welcome) for the study. The centre manager provided parents with meeting times with the researcher. This meeting included both Faafeiloaiga and the scheduling of dates and times for when Fa'afaletui would best accommodate the families. Because families had extra work and family commitments, this scheduling was done three weeks prior to Fa'afaletui

<sup>2</sup> Faafeiloaiga – Samoan cultural protocols of welcoming and greeting guests

taking place. In the three-weekly timeline, two weeks were allocated to parents for photos focusing on language and learning at home and in the community, while the third week involved the collection of cameras and parental notes, so that the researcher could develop the photos and prepare for photo elicitation within Fa'afaletui sessions. A confirmation letter outlining the times and dates were handed out to parents a week prior to when Fa'afaletui sessions were to take place (see Appendix G)

*Table 1.*

*Table outlining Fa'afeiloaiga (Samoan cultural protocol of welcome) to ensure engagement in the study*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time:</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Action</b>
July 4 <sup>th</sup> 2017	5pm	Researcher, board chairman, board members and Centre manager	Research proposal shared with the board of managers and approved. Researcher advised by the Centre manager to create a personal profile to help support Faafeiloaiga with parents.
July 10 2017	8.00pm - 5pm	All parents	Research letter consent and personal profile is handed out to parents by the Centre manager.
July 17 2017	8.00 - 5pm	Centre manager, researcher, all parents	Research consent letters are collected by the Centre manager and times are scheduled with the researcher for parental Faafeiloaiga.
July 25 2017	8.00 - 8.30	Parent 1	Faafeiloaiga welcoming by Centre manager including

			introduction to researcher. Sharing of research and personal profile including time for parent questioning
	8.30 – 9.00	Parent 2	Faafeiloaiga welcoming by Centre manager including introduction to researcher. Sharing of research and personal profile including time for parent questioning
July 27 2017	8.00 – 8.30	Parent 3	Faafeiloaiga welcoming by Centre manager including introduction to researcher. Sharing of research and personal profile including time for parent questioning
	8.30 – 9.00	Parent 4	Faafeiloaiga welcoming by Centre manager including introduction to researcher. Sharing of research and personal profile including time for parent questioning
July 28 2017	9.00 – 9.30	Parent 5 and 6	Faafeiloaiga welcoming by Centre manager including introduction to researcher. Sharing of research and personal profile including time for parent questioning
July 31 2017 – August 6 2017	week 1	All parents	Parents take photos of when they see language and learning at home and

			in the community with their child.
August 7 2017 – August 13 2017	Week 2	All parents	Parents take photos of when they see language and learning at home and in the community with their child.
August 10 2017			Confirmation letter of times and dates for parents when Fa’afaletui session would take place.
August 14 2017	8.00am - 9.00am and 4.00 – 5.00pm	Researcher, all parents	Data collection. All cameras and notes are collected by the researcher to prepare for individual and collective Fa’afaletui.
August 16 2017	5.00 - 7.00pm	Centre manager, researcher and Parent 1	Individual and collective photo elicitation within Fa’afaletui.
		Centre manager, researcher and Parent 2	individual and collective photo elicitation within Fa’afaletui.
August 17 2017	5.00 - 7.00pm	Centre manager, researcher and Parent 3	individual and collective photo elicitation within Fa’afaletui.
		Centre manager, researcher and Parent 4	individual and collective photo elicitation within Fa’afaletui.
		Centre manager, researcher and Parents 5 and 6	individual and collective photo elicitation within Fa’afaletui.

### 3.6.3 Fa'afaletui (Individual and Collective)

Fa'afaletui took place with parents over a two-day schedule with a support teacher provided by the school to help supervise any children during this time.

#### Day 1: 16 August 2017 (1 hour after school)

Fa'afaletui Parents 1

Fa'afaletui Parents 2

Collective Fa'afaletui

Following the individual Fa'afaletui, parents would wait while I was conducting the next Fa'afaletui with the centre manager. While they were waiting they were offered food I had prepared, as this is the Samoan cultural protocol of *Meaalofa* (gift of acknowledgement) to reciprocate the gift of time and information that parents have provided for the study.

Parents 2 opted to go straight into the Collective Fa'afaletui without eating but took plates of food with them when they had finished.

#### Day 2: 17 August 2017 (1 hour after school)

Fa'afaletui Parents 3

Fa'afaletui Parents 4

Fa'afaletui Parents 5 and 6

Collective Fa'afaletui

Following the individual Fa'afaletui, parents would wait while I conducted the next Fa'afaletui with the centre manager. Food was also prepared as a Samoan cultural

protocol of *Meaalofa* (gift of acknowledgement), to reciprocate the gift of time that parents made available for Fa'afaletui sessions.

Each collective Fa'afaletui session was opened and closed with a tatalo (prayer in Samoan) conducted by myself and the Centre Manager.

### **3.6.4 Meaalofa**

As a way of giving back to the families and the Aoga Amata (Samoan preschool), I will be sharing the results of the study as a form of Meaalofa. (Meealofa is translated in English as gift: this means that the Aoga Amata would like me to present the results of the research with the parents, school and church community as a gift towards helping them with their transition information.

## **3.7 Data Analysis – Thematic Analysis**

As the research sits within the qualitative paradigm, researching systematical ways of gathering and analyzing information is paramount (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010; Creswell, 2002; Punch, 2013). Attride-Stirling (2001) stated that if qualitative research is to yield meaningful results, it is imperative that the material under scrutiny is analysed in a methodical manner.

### **3.7.1 Phase 1: Familiarisation**

A key area within the data collection process is the transcribing of relevant information data. Creswell (2002) stated that transcribing is the process of converting audiotape recordings into text data. This research project was transcribed by the researcher with every word and phrase written exactly how the parents had shared within their individual and collective Fa'afaletui. Ary et al., (2010) highlighted that when transcribing words or phrases, it should not be changed to make them grammatically correct as it can inadvertently change the sense or meaning of what is being said. It is important that every word being transcribed is correctly recorded to avoid potential bias in selection or interpretation.



### 3.7.2 Phase 2: Coding

Phase two of Thematic analysis was the beginning of the coding process. This included systematically sifting through data within the research and creating codes amongst the data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Creswell, (2002, p. 251) states that “coding is the process of segmenting and labelling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data.” From the transcribed data coded themes were then created under three key questions: where and what learning was happening? How children learn best? And what parents think is important for learning? (See Appendix H, I, J and K)

### 3.7.3 Phase 3: Search for themes

Phase three of thematic analysis, allows the researcher to analyse and categorize the codes into themes (Clarke & Braun, 2013) From the analysis in image 1.1 which also includes (Appendix L and M). Key themes were identified and categorised to ensure the themes correlate with the coded data.

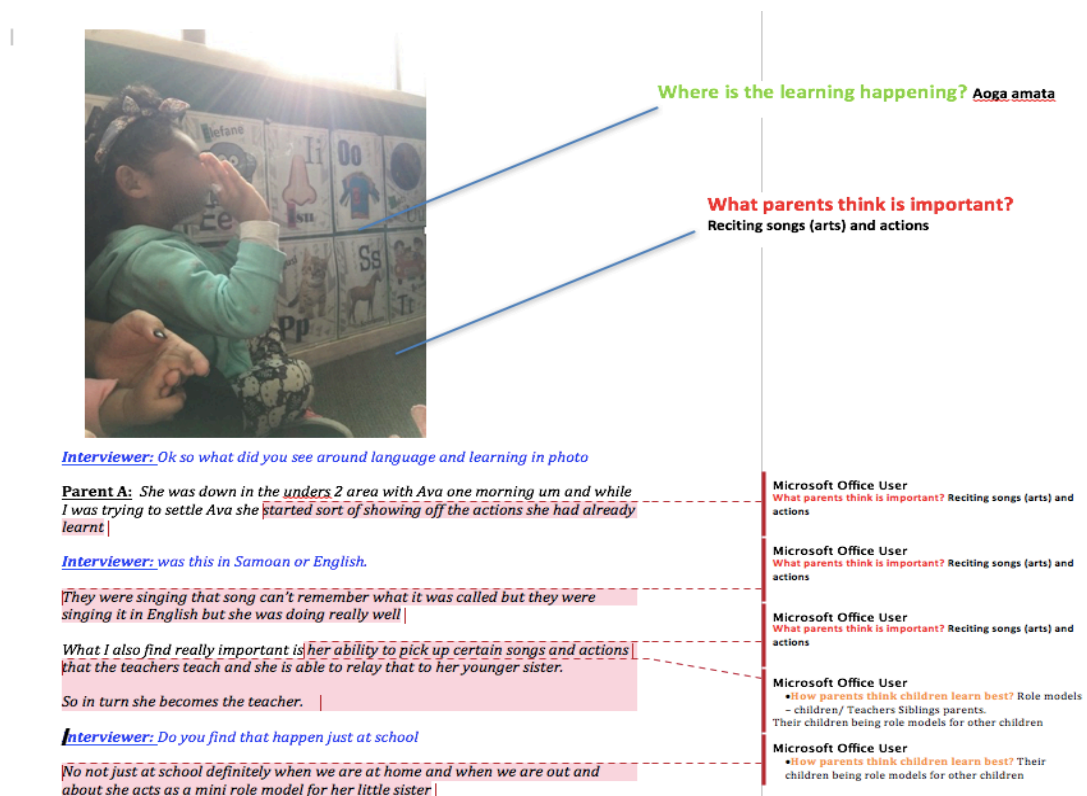


Figure 1.2 Excerpt of notes and coded themes divided into three areas of questioning.

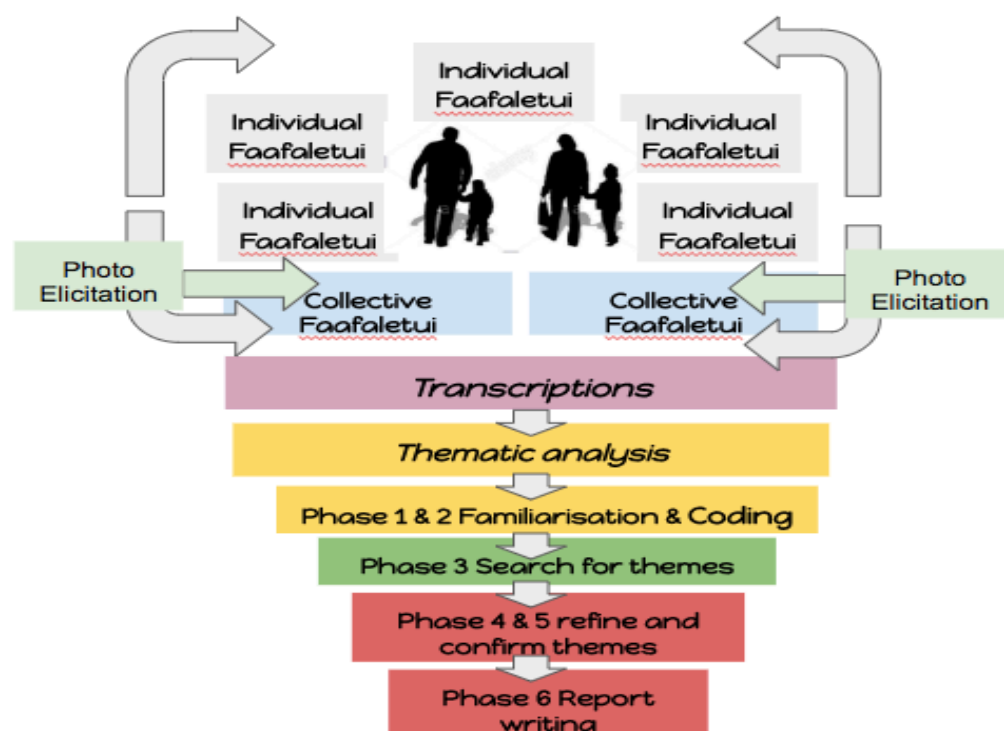
### 3.7.4 Phase four: Confirm themes

Phase four of thematic analysis looked to refine the key themes within the research (Braun & Clarke, 2007). This process encourages the researcher to check and make sure each theme aligns while Phase five is the confirmation of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2007). This phase determines the story of the data, giving the reader a more straightforward and detailed description of the theme and what it includes.

Confirming themes gives the researcher and reader conceptual and analytical clarity (see Appendix N, O, P and Q).

### 3.7.2 Final Phase: Final report

The final phase of thematic analysis, is the construction and development of the report; this phase refines the analytical narrative and weaves it together with the data extracts. Here the researcher is ready to present the themes with supporting academic literature in order to write a report (Braun & Clarke, 2007).



*Figure 1.3: Describes the data analysis process used within this research project*

## **Chapter Summary**

In summary, a qualitative research design was selected as the most culturally appropriate research method for this study. As a Samoan culturally responsive framework, Fa'afaletui, through photo elicitation was used as a catalyst to collect parental data from Samoan parents for children transitioning from Aoga Amata to primary school. Reliability and validity were ensured through systematic documentation and thematic analysis of data. Ethical principles were also maintained throughout the study. The findings of this study are documented in Chapter four.

## Chapter Four

### Findings

#### 4.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore Samoan parents' perceptions of literacy at home and in the community for children transitioning from Samoan Aoga Amata to mainstream primary. These findings are based on parental Fa'afaletui and photo elicitation as a catalyst for discussion. Section 4.2 describes where and what learning is happening within the home and community context of the child. Section 4.3 provides evidence of parents' beliefs on how their children learn best and section 4.4 describes examples of what Samoan parents think is important for their children's learning before transitioning to primary school.

A summary of overall findings (see Table 2) is explored further under the three main question areas:

1. Literacy contexts: where and what learning is happening?
2. Methods of literacy: how children learn best?
3. Parental priorities: what parents think is important for learning?

Overall findings identified 14 broad themes across each of the three main areas:

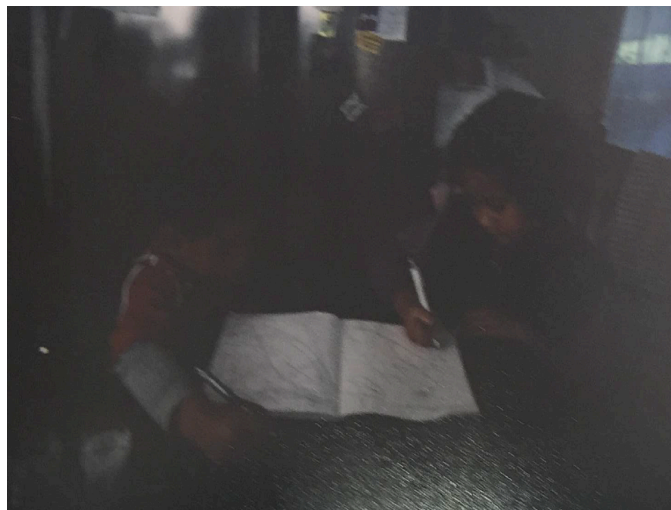
*Table 2: Key themes that arose from the analysis of findings.*

Where and what learning is happening? Church/ School /Home	How the parents think children learn best?	What parents think is important?
<p><b>Vā Fealoaloai (Role modelling)</b> children, teachers, siblings, parents, grandparents and the children themselves as role models. Context: home and Aoga Amata.</p>	<p><b>Memorisation through writing (rote learning)</b> memorizing letters of the Faitau Pi Samoa (Samoan alphabet) and the English alphabet, from memorizing and writing their own name to memorising colours.</p>	<p><b>Fa’asamoa</b> (Samoan Indigenous way of knowing, being and doing) and Samoan language learning the importance of faith and church.</p>
<p><b>Social Cultural artefacts of language learning maintenance:</b> Recite action songs and dance in Samoan. <b>Context:</b> of the home, Aoga Amata, Church.</p>	<p><b>Vā Fealoaloai</b> (role modelling) Includes: children, teachers, siblings, parents and grandparents.</p>	<p><b>English language development</b> memorising the English alphabet, interacting with text and imaginative play and being able to write own name.</p>
<p><b>Memorisation to writing:</b> Memorising Faitau Pi (Samoan Alphabet), English alphabet, colour, Bible verses and writing their name. <b>Context:</b> Home, Aoga Amata and church.</p>	<p><b>Oral language development:</b> through imaginative play and shared books experiences.</p>	<p><b>Personality, values and character building.</b> Being silly and happy together.</p>
<p><b>Outdoor environmental learning of developing child interest, emotional wellbeing and Social responsibilities.</b> Context: School garden, home outdoor area and community garden.</p>	<p><b>Outdoor environmental learning</b> through interest based questioning.</p>	<p><b>Contributing to family daily tasks.</b> Helping with jobs around the house.</p>
<p><b>Creative abilities:</b> imaginative play and shared book. <b>Context:</b> Home and Aoga Amata.</p>	<p><b>Social skills:</b> includes Fa’aaloalo (Respecting each family and other people) Self-regulation.</p>	

## 4.2 Literacy Contexts: where and what learning is happening?

This area focuses on contexts of learning. Specifically, this refers to where parents identified learning as occurring and what activities were described by parents as being part of their child's literacy learning.

All parents identified learning as happening all the time across a variety of different contexts. Parents (n=6) identified key places (contexts) of learning as the church, home, the outdoors environment and within the Samoan Aoga Amata. They all identified learning occurring through their children having access to role models. Some parents (n=3) described how older siblings acted as role models when supporting their child to write their name within context of the home. This is illustrated in photo 1 (see below) shared by a parent.



*Photo 1. Tasi older sister role modeling and teaching Tasi how to write his name*

As illustrated in Photo 1, the older sibling is coaching and modelling how to hold a pencil and how to form letters in the name. Other parents (n=3) highlighted how parents and grandparents all acted as role models of teaching children in their mother tongue (Samoan) at home. One parent shared the importance of her son being taught by his “Papa” (grandfather) stating: “Papa is speaking to him in

Samoan and helping him guide the mouse to where the numbers go. Yeah so what I value here is that dad speaks to him in Samoan and he understands the numbers”.



*Photo 2 Niva's Grandfather is a role model of the Samoan language as he is teaching his grandson Niva numbers in Samoan.*

What was evident was that all parents identified and recognized the importance of role models as conduits in their children's learning. The range of role models identified by the parents included: parents, grandparents, extended family, siblings, and even the children themselves as role models of knowledge. What the parents were drawing on was the concept of Vā fealoaloa'i<sup>3</sup>. In Samoan this concept describes the relational space between people – in this process of learning, it highlights the importance of the 'teaching relationship of respect' of a more experienced other (i.e. Matua - Elder) in scaffolding learning for a child/younger person. The parents identified that early literacy learning took place within many

<sup>3</sup>Vā fealoaloa'i - <sup>3</sup>Describes the relational space of learning and teaching between a more experienced other.

cultural contexts which involved a range of role models where the cultural knowledge of Vā Fealoaloi was used as a strength.

Alongside role modeling was the importance of the social cultural artefacts of learning the Samoan language and maintaining the Samoan culture. This was identified as a significant contribution to their child's early literacy learning by the majority (4 out of 6) of parents. Samoan cultural knowledge was learnt within specific cultural contexts including the church, home, and Aoga Amata. This learning included reciting songs and actions in Samoan at church and at school. Other learning included the sharing of Samoan songs that their child passed on to siblings at home. The importance of the children learning to recite cultural and spiritual based action songs was explained by one parent: "it teaches my child where she comes from, what her origins are, and how we celebrate certain things as Samoans". This is illustrated in photo 3 (see below) where a parent took a photo of her child participating in a Samoan activity at church and linked this to the development of early literacy.

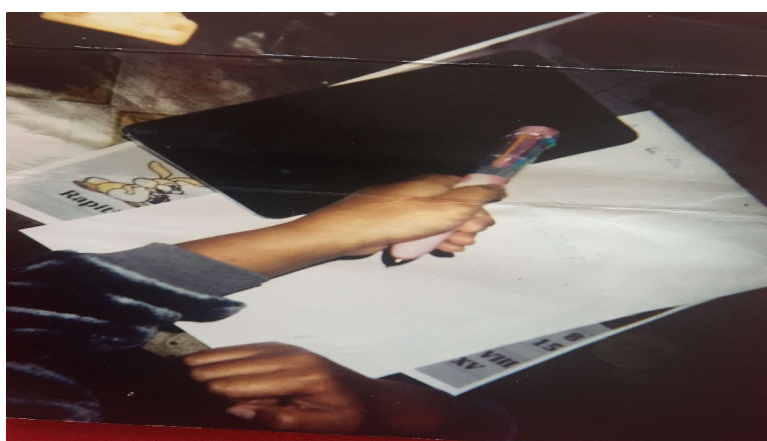


*Photo 3. Nita sharing her cultural Samoan action songs during White Sunday*



From these findings it is evident that parents recognized their children were developing a rich cultural basis of early literacy knowledge through observing others engaged in traditional and more recent Samoan songs and dances and when reciting Samoan songs. Parents highlighted the importance of children learning within the cultural context of Fa'asamoa (Samoan indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing). They affirmed the significance of learning that occurred when children were learning about their cultural identity and drawing on their language.

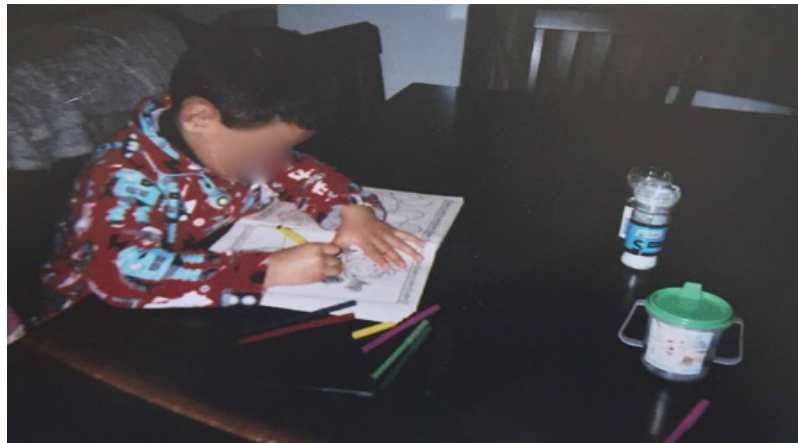
Memorisation to writing was another key tool identified in the learning that aids early literacy knowledge within the context of the home by all parents. Memorising the colours, Bible verses, Faitau Pi <sup>4</sup> and the English alphabet as well as memorizing how to write their name (see photo 4) was of great importance to parents within the context of the Aoga Amata and home setting. One parent stated that when their child learnt the Faitau Pi it gave them: “a sense of achievement in terms of their culture”. At the same time, they balanced the focus of learning the Faitau Pi, with learning the English Alphabet and saw this as important also. Other parents shared about memorizing the English alphabet as an important aspect of early literacy learning because “if you know the basics then it will be easier to start learning his words, well to me that’s what I see.”



*Photo 4. Lemu learning to write his Samoan and English Alphabet*

<sup>4</sup> Faitau Pi – Samoan Alphabet

Not only was memorisation to writing of the Faitau Pi Samoa (Samoan Alphabet) and English Alphabet held in high regard by parents, but the ability to memorise colours and Bible verses was as equally important. One parent shared how important it was for her child to learn his colours before entering school as “I don’t want my child going in blind to school”. Photo 5 is an example of a child memorising his colours through practical home experiences of colouring in.



*Photo. 5 Tasi learning his colours in Samoan and English when colouring in at home*

This activity involved the child colouring in and at the same time learning which colours matched and their names.

Another parent indicated the importance of her son memorizing Bible verses in both English and Samoan. The activity she stated made her happy “when he tries to say it”.

From the photos shared by parents above, it is evident that their perceptions of early literacy learning are largely developed through the skill of memorising to writing, Faitau Pi Samoa (Samoan Alphabet), English Alphabet, their name, colours and Bible verses. Traditionally within the Samoan culture memorisation akin to rote learning is a cultural way of learning and a life-skill passed across generations. It is particularly used for learning that occurs orally and was seen by these parents as a way of building funds of knowledge. Parents of this study signaled that they saw

that the learning of literacy skills could be developed in the same traditional ways as their parents used i.e. through memorisation such as rote repetitive oral learning.

Outdoor environmental learning that develops child interest, emotional wellbeing and social responsibilities, was identified by parents (n=3) as a key part to early literacy learning. Parents identified the school garden, home outdoor area and community garden, as key places (contexts) where learning was happening. One parent shared how her child's outdoor experiences brought about her direct interest in insects where she was able to *"learn about her environment and what's around her even if its tiny...especially outdoors"*. The photo below illustrates literacy learning that occurs outdoors and the importance of the outdoor environment for facilitating key learning skills as seen through the eyes of a parent.



*Photo 6. Nita learning outdoors with her sister*

Outdoor environmental learning was also shared by another parent as a way of developing emotional wellbeing through family experiences as a support to transition their child into school learning. One parent shared about her experiences of being outdoors as a way of giving them and their children opportunities to engage in a different environment. These parents shared their experiences of being a lot more free when engaging with their children; they felt that they could be a lot more

*“silly and happy which is important in the way they act as parents”*. Photo 7 (see below) illustrates how the outdoor environment provides an emotional resting place for parents and their families thereby supporting emotional wellbeing and a future support for risk-taking and being open to new learning.



*Photo 7. Nita's outdoor experiences of being happy and silly with her father at the community gardens*

Other parents indicated how the home and outdoor environment provided early literacy learning being shaped through their taking part in socially responsible roles. One parent shared how the outdoor home environment engaged learning through family chores, stating that *“because her child, was too young to help his dad with the lawn mower, he was given the blower instead to help.”* This parent, as illustrated in Photo 8 below considered that the outdoor home environment provided the child with opportunities to learn through such activities.



*Photo 8. Tasi outdoors learning by using the blower to help out around the house. He is not yet old enough to use the lawn mower so instead has been given the blower to use.*

It is clear parents recognized that their children's engagement in outdoor activity grew their funds of knowledge. They outlined how learning in the outdoors allowed an exploration and the development of interest and emotional wellbeing. But also, being able to learn outdoors was also seen as relevant for early learning through the social expectations placed on the child towards contributing to activities as a family member.

The last theme of Area 1 focused on how children were able to use their own creative abilities within the context of the home (noted by 3 parents). One parent described how her child created play and was creative with the use of a cardboard box stating "She found an old cardboard and they started playing with it and cut some holes into it, to try and turn it into a bus but failed so they just started wearing the box". Photo 9 (see below), illustrates the value parents place on a child's creative abilities through play in the context of the home. Again, the parents were also identifying other early learning behaviour that supports their child on transitioning into a school environment. They were identifying the way in which creative play allowed them to use their imagination, to explore and make errors and then rethink what other ways of approaching a problem; all important skills to support early learning of literacy.





*Photo 9. Nita using her creative abilities when playing with a card board box with her older brother.*

From the findings outlined in Area 1, it is clear parents valued the need of creative play as it encompassed the use of oral communication, imagination and fine motor skills. Using creative abilities was viewed by parents as a way to enhancing a range of skills for literacy learning which they could support within the context of the home.

#### **4.3 Methods of literacy: How parents think children learn best?**

This area focuses on methods of literacy, specifically the views of parents and how they think their children develop early literacy skills.

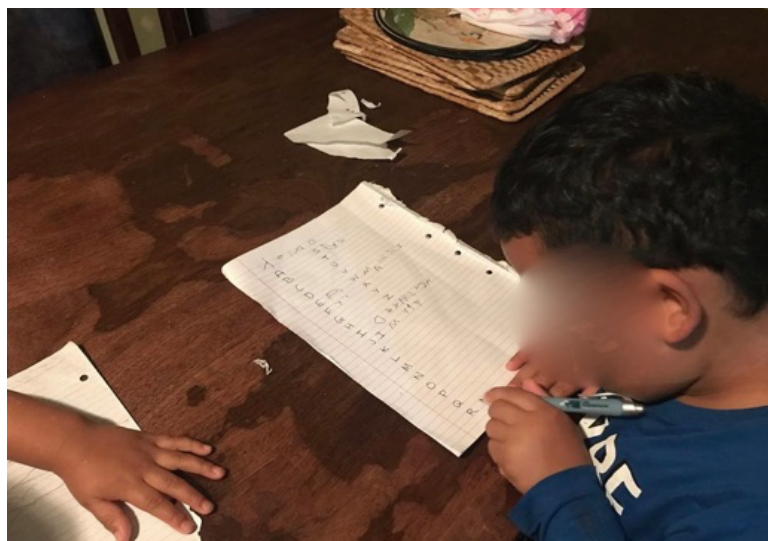
All parents identified the importance of memorisation through writing (rote learning) as a key characteristic of how children learn best. Memorisation through writing referred to their children memorizing letters of the Fāitau Pi Samoa (Samoan alphabet) the English alphabet, memorizing and writing their own name (see photo 10) to memorising colours. Some parents shared how providing their child with a pen and paper to copy down and memorise the Fāitau Pi Samoa and the English Alphabet was the best way for their child to learn stating *"I really want my son to learn some more Samoan. He tried to write down the letters and try to draw the picture, but yeah if he does this, he can pick the letter for his name and his last name"*. Photos 10 and 11 (see

65

below) identify how memorisation is used as a key skill to writing the Samoan and English Alphabet.



*Photo 10. Lemu memorizing his Faitau pi Samoa by writing it down*



*Photo 11. Penina learning to write letters of the English Alphabet.*

Other parents indicated how important it was for their child to memorise and write their name (photo 1 describes a child learning to write his name from a more capable sibling). Other key skills identified by parents was the ability a child had to

memorise his colours. The photo below describes two brothers' discussion of colours through a song memorised at school.



*Photo 12. Lemu singing and pointing to the colours in the book from a song he memorised from school*

All parents shared their personal stories of how their child memorised their name, Samoan alphabet, English alphabet and colours. From these findings, it is clear that parents identified memorisation as a key skill to developing early literacy.

Together with memorisation, came the importance of learning through role modelling or Vā Fealoaloi<sup>5</sup>. All parents (n=6) highlighted Vā Fealoaloi through role modelling as a way to how children learn best, this included other children, teachers, siblings, parents and grandparents. One parent shared evidence of cooperative learning and role modeling with teachers during mat time. The Photo below displays

<sup>5</sup> Vā Fealoaloi'i - <sup>5</sup>Describes the relational space of learning and teaching between a more experienced other.



a clear example of a child learning Samoan songs and actions through Vā Fealoaloai and role modeling by a teacher at her school.



*Photo 13. Nita learning action songs in Samoan and English during mat time.*

Subsequently, evidence from other parents shows how the children themselves became role models for their siblings as they taught others in the family songs from school (Photo 12 shows evidence of a child teaching his brother colours in Samoan from a song taught at the Aoga Amata). For some parents, Vā Fealoaloai and role modelling was made explicit through their children's behaviour and values. This included modelling their values inherent in the behaviour that parents wanted their children to display at home. One parent stated *"I want my boys to be able to bond, play and be nice to each other...so it's important for them to be able to bond"*. (Illustrated in photo 14 below is the importance of cooperative learning and role modeling of one child to another, bonding through play).



*Photo 14. Penina and Tavae role modeling respect with each other and with others through play. (Fa'aaloalo)*

Another parent shared how important it was for them to be role models of happiness stating, “the way I act in front of my children... will define how they will become as they grow older. Monkey see, monkey do it’s really important, because it’s not only when you are just playing around but how you act in front of your children and how you carry yourself that is important” (Photo 7 above describes Vā Fealoaloai and role modeling of happy and silly behaviours parents display for their children in promoting emotional well-being).

From these findings, Vā Fealoaloai and role modelling the Samoan language through songs, together with setting values and expectations for children, are how parents believe children learnt best. Vā Fealoaloai and role modeling aligns with the concept of Tuakana-teina as a cultural model of teaching that aids early literacy learning.

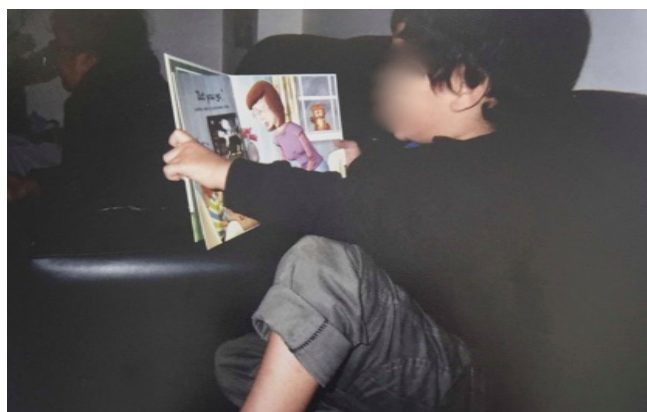
Oral language development through imaginative play and shared books, was viewed by (n=5) parents as how their child learnt best. One parent described how her child was able to use oral language through creative play stating, “*she was really creative, as it was her way of looking outside the box instead of doing nothing... she found a way to entertain herself*” (Photo 9 above describes how a child’s creative abilities with a cardboard box supports oral language development). Another example is also shown in the photo below. This photo describes how the child pretends each of the toys are his

friends from school. The parent further explains his views on how important it is for his son to “*interact with objects, as it is an important factor to his learning ability.*”



*Photo 15. Penina using oral language through creatively playing with his toys.*

Oral language through shared books, was also represented in the examples given by parents. Parents outlined the importance of their child re-enacting and explaining what they saw in the pictures with their siblings. Some parents explained their happiness when they saw their child orally explain what they were seeing in the pictures to one of their siblings (Photo 12 above shows evidence of a child sharing the colours he has learnt from Aoga Amata in the book to his brother), while the photo below is an example of a child orally sharing in his own words what he sees in the book to his mother.



*Photo 16. Niva looking at the pictures and interpreting what he sees in the book.*

From these findings it is evident that oral language development was seen as a direct link to how children learn best. Parents' feedback shows how creative play and shared book experiences promote oral language as a way forward in developing early literacy learning for the children.

Environmental learning through interest based questioning was identified by (n=3) parents, as how their children learnt best. One parent described how the outdoors environment triggered her child's interests in insects (see photo 6 above). This parent stated that when her

*"child is interested in something, she interacts in an intelligent and inquisitive way with other children, where they are able to really get along in conversation for a good 5 to 10 minutes."*

Not only did environmental learning spark interest, but it also helped with engaged questioning. This parent stated from the experiences her child encountered with bugs out in the bush,

*"It led to her daughter wanting to learn more about bugs and insects."*

Another parent shared her experiences of how her child was:

*"learning to be an engineer or a mechanic he is asking questions like what is this and what is that"*

Through sharing the photo below, the parent highlighted how they recognized that the child's home environment was a key part of learning. They understood that new practical experiences fueled interest, encouraged questioning and new learning.



*Photo 17. Tasi helping dad change the car battery outside.*

From these findings, environmental learning through interest-based questioning was perceived as a key part of how children learn best. Examples by parents show how environmental learning can act as catalyst to interest-based learning and questioning in developing early literacy learning for children.

The last theme noted by parents in area two, was the ability for their child to socially engage (n=3). Parents shared how it was important for their child to respect each other through Fa'aaloalo<sup>6</sup> and Fealofani<sup>7</sup> stating:

*"for me personally it is important that both my sons have a sense of respect not only with each other but with us as parents and with their grandmother. You know everything starts at home, so what we want to see is for them is to treat others the way they want to be treated so that was the kind of message I got out of that one."*

Further to this another parent shared her experiences of how her daughter is:

<sup>6</sup> Fa'aaloalo – Respecting other children and elders

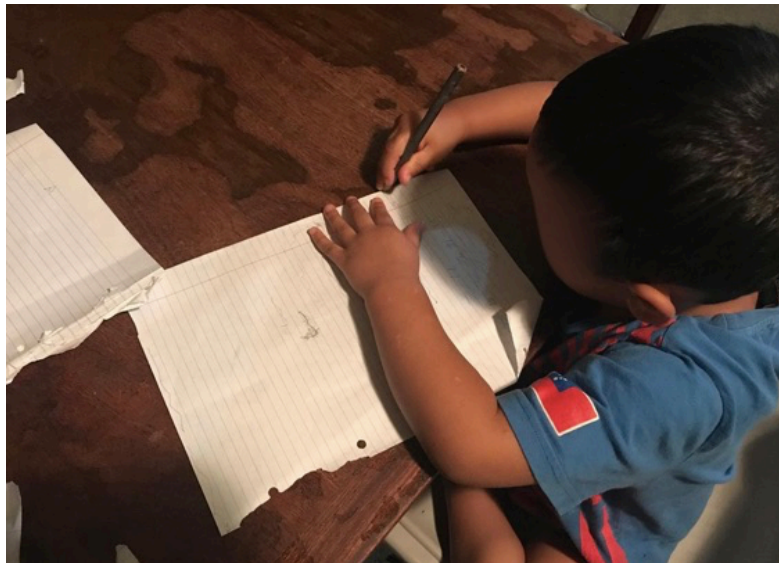
<sup>7</sup> Fealofani – Forming a respectful relationship with one another

*“extremely caring, she likes to correct her little sister, where if she finds her little sister might be playing up with something she shouldn’t, she will come along and she tends to try and encourage her in her own little way to not play with that and tries to protect her little sister from getting into trouble.”*

(Refer to Photo 13 which demonstrates how a child is able to engage and be caring during mat time; this attitude is transferred home in supporting her little sister)

What was also noted was how social engagement linked to self-regulation and concentration. Parents described how it was important for their son to *“concentrate for a long time by copying something like the alphabet written by an adult for him.”*

Photo below shows how Tavae is concentrating before he is given the task of copying the English alphabet.



*Photo 18. Tavae concentrating on what he is going to write before writing.*

Both parents shared how their son *“has got a lot more concentration now on with his hands to paper he thinks about what he is going to draw first before he draws it, it’s about him concentrating that I see as important “.*

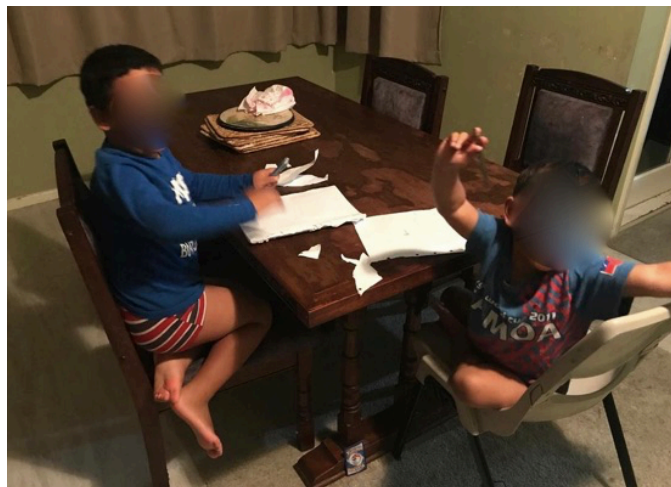


From these findings, it was evident that the parents considered social engagement, self-regulation and concentration as a key characteristic to how a child learns best. Evidence from parents shows how respecting each other through Fa'aaloalo and Fealofani together with being able to concentrate and self-regulate are key skills for early literacy learning.

#### **4.4 Parental priorities: what parents think is important**

This area focuses on parental priorities of literacy; specifically, what parents think is important for literacy learning to occur.

Fa'asamoa<sup>8</sup> together with Samoan language and faith based learning at church, was noted by all (n=6) parents as a priority for a child's early literacy learning. Some parents highlighted Faitau Pi<sup>9</sup> as an important aspect of learning the Samoan language. The photo below shows how two children are successfully working towards writing their Faitau Pi (Samoan Alphabet)



*Photo 19. Penina and Tavae learn to memorise and write the Faitau Pi Samoa*

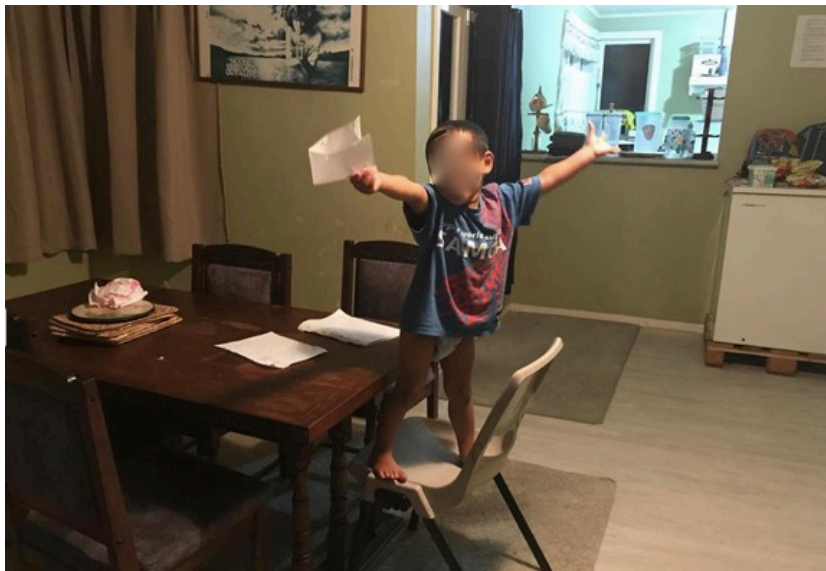
<sup>8</sup> Fa'asamoa: Samoan Indigenous way of knowing, being and doing

<sup>9</sup> Faitau Pi (Samoan alphabet)

Other parents acknowledged the importance of Fa'asamoa, through learning the language from a more knowledgeable other (photo 2 above depicts the learning a child makes through the Vā Fealoaloai with his grandfather). Other areas of learning Fa'asamoa, came through the learning of Pese Samoa.<sup>10</sup> One parent shared how important it was for her daughter to learn songs in Samoan, as

*“it teaches her where she comes from what her origins are and how she can celebrate certain things as Samoan.”*

The photo below describes how a child transfers his knowledge of learning a Pese Samoa taught at Aoga Amata to presenting and teaching it to his family at home.



*Photo 20. Tavae singing a Pese Samoa at home learnt from school*

It was also noted by this parent that he could see improvements in his sons speech in Samoan, stating:

<sup>10</sup> Pese Samoa (Samoan traditional songs)



*" he didn't know how to speak properly, I think through singing he is starting to be more clear now in both Samoan and English. It is telling me he is taking something in"*

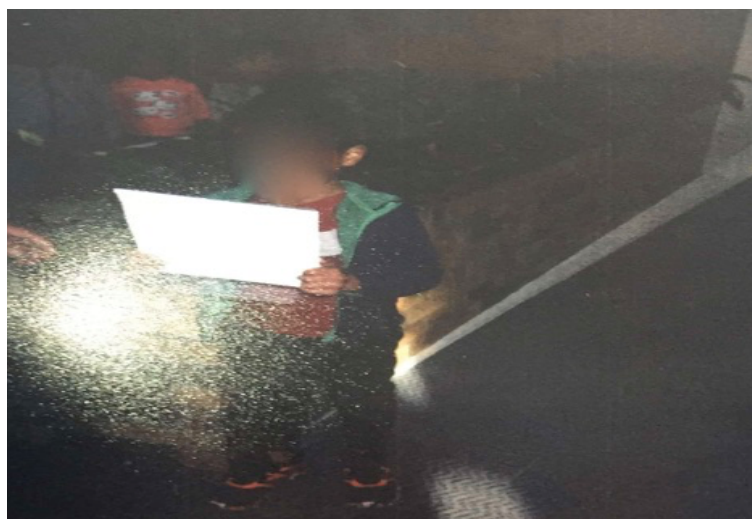
Fa'asamoa through faith-based knowledge and church was also noted by parents. Some parents shared how important it was for their children to learn the Samoan language through Sunday school, and church activities stating:

*"I like his attitude and that he was memorising a verse in the Bible one in English and Samoan"*

Another comment from a parent shared the importance of respecting church by stating:

*"O le mea e fa'atauā ia oe le lotu e aoga. Auā e fesoasoani mai le Atua" (One of the key parts to learning is the church. It is important for my children, because it comes from God and that is key)"*

Photo 21 below, shows an example of a child learning to memorise his memory verse in both Samoan and English for Sunday school.



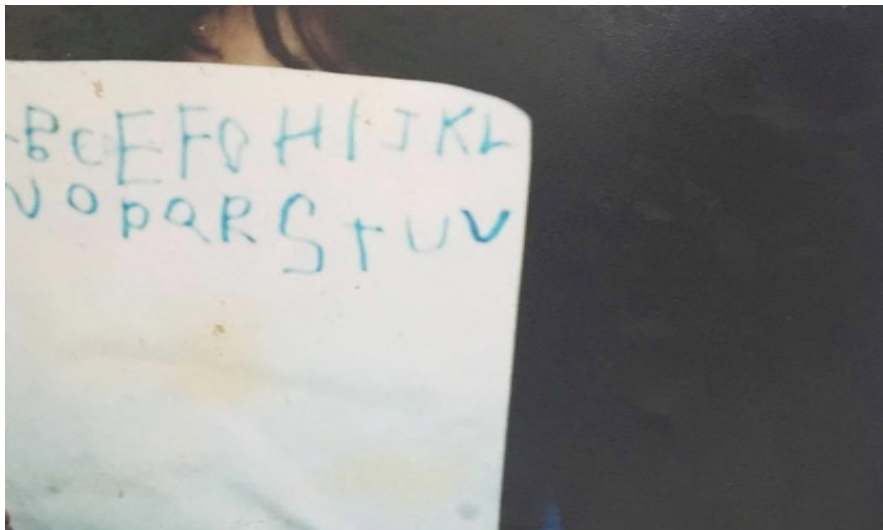
*Photo 21 Lemu memorizing his Bible verse in Samoan and English.*

From these findings, parents acknowledged the importance of Fa'asamoa<sup>11</sup> . Fa'asamoa included opportunities for learning the Faitau Pi (Samoan alphabet), from a more experienced other through the Vā Fealoaloi, sharing Pese Samoa (Samoan songs) with family from the Aoga Amata to memorising Bible verses. The following examples are all key indicators of Fa'asamoa that construct the cultural ways of how a child should behave in their language at home, school, church and community and is a key part that parents feel is important as early literacy learning.

English language development was also noted by (n=4) parents, as having parental priorities of literacy learning. These key aspects include: memorising the English alphabet, interacting with text and imaginative play and being able to write own name. One parent stated how learning the English alphabet was learning

*"the basics, it helps make things easier when learning new words."*

Photo 22 below, shows how parents view memorisation to writing of the English alphabet as a key priority for their children before entering school.



*Photo 22. Niva during free time chooses to write the letters of the English alphabet*

<sup>11</sup> Fa'asamoa: Samoan Indigenous way of knowing, being and doing

Together with memorising the English alphabet; interacting with text and imaginative play was also identified by parents as an important part to early literacy learning. (Photos 12 and 16 above) identify how children interact with shared picture books. Both children show how they are capable of making up a story when sharing with others in the family. Interactions children have with objects is also identified by parents as an important part of early literacy learning. (See photos 9 and 15.) Both photos are examples of how children are able to interact with object such as a cardboard box and toys. One child creates a cutout object with a cardboard box (see photo 9) while the other child creates a playing environment with toys that are named after his friends from the Aoga Amata (see photo 15).

Parents also noted the importance of a child learning to write their name as an important aspect to early literacy learning.

*"I want him to go into school writing his name."*

From these findings, it is evident that English language development such as: memorisation of the English alphabet, imaginative play, interaction with text, to writing name are all key skills held in high regard by parents as important to early literacy learning development.

A key factor highlighted by (n=4) parents to having great importance, was a child's personality, values and character. One parent noted how it was important for her child to see how parents act and play, stating

*"It was important to be silly and be happy as it contributes to their personality and character." (see photo 7)*

Another set of parents highlighted how important it was for their sons to get along with one another.

*"I want my sons to bond, play and be nice to each other to not argue or anything so that's what I got from that photo to respect each other through va fa'aaloalo and through fealofani." (see photo 14)*

It is clear that from these findings, that parents place an important emphasis on a child's character, personality and values. It shows that parents place a certain expectation on how their children behave which is an important aspect to early literacy learning.

The last theme, identified by (n=1) parent, was the child's ability to contribute to family daily tasks. One parent described how important it was for her child to help out around the house stating that:

*"He wanted to mow lawns but was not able to so he was given the blower instead"*

It was also noted how important it was for her son to help his father with the changing of the car battery at night time stating that

*"Ben is always helping out and asking questions I see it as team work"*

From the evidence above, it is clear that a child's contribution to daily family tasks is an important aspect to early literacy learning. While these activities involve outdoor tasks, other tasks such as indoor tasks can also be relevant. Contributing to family tasks is highlighted by parents as an important skill to have before transitioning to primary.

## **4.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the findings of the study in relation to how Samoan parents perceive literacy practices at home and in the community for children transitioning from Samoan Aoga Amata to mainstream primary. Evidence is clear that Vā Fealoaloai (Role modeling), Fa'asamoa and language learning maintenance, memorisation,

outdoor learning, family tasks, creative abilities, social skills, values, oral language and English language development were all key aspects to early literacy learning.

Overall, evidence in this chapter points out, that Samoan parents do believe in creating cultural early learning experiences for their children. However, the challenge is how do teachers draw on these cultural learning experiences for Pāsifika achievement. Examples of key areas of strength and improvement will be analysed and discussed in further detail in Chapter five.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter Samoan parental perceptions of early literacy practices are identified and discussed in relation to key knowledges and influences that impact Samoan children's developmental abilities in literacy. The findings of the current study are put into context of the wider literature on parental and family impact on children's development and how these surface as cultural differences and ultimately cultural disconnection for Samoan children transitioning to school learning environments in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Analysis of the findings has identified key areas of strength and areas for improvement within the findings from the study. The key areas of strength and improvement will be discussed in separate sections. In Section 5.2 key areas of strength have been categorized according to the three main questions this study aimed to explore: literacy context, methods of literacy and parental priorities. Section 5.3 outlines and discusses areas of improvement as recommendations that can be considered by those in the school learning contexts – both at teacher and management levels. These areas of improvement are: family as the nurturing agent of learning, importance of recognising prior knowledge, awareness of diverse learning strategies and the importance of creativity and oral language. Section 5.4 addresses limitations faced for children transitioning from Aoga Amata. These include: not having established partnerships between Aoga Amata and primary school, changing teacher perceptions and teacher workload, viewing the teacher as being the one with the knowledge, parents disengaging due to language barriers and the cultural difference in practice between the Aoga Amata and receiving school.

## 5.2 Analysis of key areas of strength in Samoan children early literacy practices

### 5.2.1 Literacy context: the strengths of *where* learning occurs

Considerable interest needs to be given towards the family environment of the child within the first six years of their development. Parents whose children experience explorative play within their environments are more likely to initiate inquiry and develop oral language and cognitive skills much more quickly, compared to children with little to no experiences of exploratory play (Swick, 1991). The home environment was the most common space for early literacy learning by all parents in the research. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model highlighted how important the family environment is for a child to grow in their cognitive development. He proposed that parents and family are at the heart of influencing learning, laying the core foundation of literacy beliefs and practices. From the photos and Fa'afaletui of parents in the study, the home environment provided the children with the opportunity to learn their Samoan language, explore creativity and contribute in day to day family tasks. Turuk (2008) explained the importance of the home, where parents are the cultural conduits through which culture passes into the child.

Aoga Amata, together with the church, were learning environments that provided early literacy development for Samoan children in this research. These environments provided children with the opportunity to learn Samoan songs, dance and tauloto (memory verses). Parents felt that these environments helped their children identify with who they are and where they come from. While these learning experiences may not correlate to the mainstream culture of a school, it is clear that Samoan children's experiences in the Aoga Amata and church literacies are rich sources of learning. This parallels the findings of many other studies (e.g., Dickie, 2008; Podmore et al., 2003; Siilata, 2014; Sauvao, 2002; Tagiolelagi, 1981).

Environmental learning outside the home and Aoga Amata was also identified as a key strength that supported interest-based learning and character building for children in this research. Parents shared that when their children were exploring and playing outside, they developed curiosity and interest in learning. They also explained that when their child was involved in outdoor family tasks, it helped develop a sense of responsibility and character. This knowledge and understanding by the parents in this study aligns with research that describes the importance of environmental, home and centre-based funds of knowledge that can be used to engage the learning at school (e.g., Hedges, 2012). ‘Family-based funds of knowledge’ describes the tasks, interest, talents and activities based in the home environment, while ‘Centre-based funds of knowledge’ involves children’s interest and outdoor activities within the Aoga Amata. The importance of outdoor learning also came through the children’s voice in the research of Podmore et al., (2003) where although children enjoyed a range of learning experiences at home and at Early childhood centres, they were more likely to identify with outdoor play as their favourite activity at school than at home.

The environmental examples shared by parents describe the rich wealth of knowledge Samoan children experience at home, Aoga Amata, outdoors and at church. This knowledge highlights the importance of culture and identity, interest-based learning and character building. It is evident through the findings of this study that the ecology (environment and context) of Samoan children is a key strength in supporting the transition of Samoan children from Aoga Amata to mainstream primary school.

### **5.2.2 Literacy context: the strengths of *what* learning occurs**

A Samoan metaphorical proverb which is common in Fa’asamoa and often used by parents to induct children into their customs “*E iloa lava le tamalii i lana savali ma lana tautala*” means the aristocrat of noble birth is recognized through his or her respectful noble way of walking and speaking (Tuafuti, 2010). Samoan people value their



culture and language as it encompasses their identity. In this study, parents shared early literacy strengths in what learning was happening for the child. This learning involved: memorizing the Faitau-Pi (Samoan alphabet), Samoan songs, tauloto (poems and verses) at the Samoan Aoga Amata. The Faitau-Pi (Samoan alphabet) can be viewed as a cultural artefact that Vygotsky (1978) identified as important in child development. Cultural artefacts according to Hennig and Kirova (2012), are materials within the social context of the child that can be used to engage the learner in becoming a part of their cultural world.

As a cultural artefact the Samoan Alphabet incorporates both the letter and corresponding word, for example A – Ato (bag), E – Elefane (elephant), I – Ipu (cup), O – Ofu (clothes), U – Uati (watch/clock). See figure 1.4 for a visual illustration.



*Figure 1.4 (Faitau-Pi or Pi Tautau)*

The Faitau Pi (Samoan Alphabet) was important to parents in this research as a primary source of literacy learning. Combined with oral tauloto (memory verses) and

Pese Samoa (Samoa songs), these were vital to early literacy learning. These findings are supported by research that also found the strength of oral tauloto (memory verses) for supporting the learning of Samoan children in school (Tagoilelagi, 1995). In relation to child development there are Samoan early literacy practices that occur through the use of cultural artefacts such as Faitau Pi, oral Tauloto and Pese Samoa that support cultural identity and language.

### **5.2.3. Methods of literacy: the strength of *how* Samoan children learn best**

Parents viewed the oral practice of memorisation as a key skill to early literacy learning development. Memorisation is akin to rote learning where the function of memorisation is to remember, recall, and say. Examples from parental Fa'afaletui included photos showing how their children memorised their Faitau-Pi (Samoan alphabet), English alphabet, colours and Bible verses. These skills of memorisation are identified by other researchers as cultural learning practices that have been passed on from many generations across varying Samoan families (Dickie, 2010; Siilata, 2014; Tagoilelagi 1995). The recognition of memorisation through the voices of parents in this research echoes the values of Samoan families in the study of Tagoilelagi (1995). These Samoan parents used performance routines known as *Tauloto* which is a Samoan term that describes parents, and children reading a word or words in a sentence and then memorizing and repeating what has been said, as a support strategy to encourage reading. The strength of *Tauloto* as a literacy practice is used most often in Samoan families within church/faith-based contexts. Other studies explain that learning for many Pāsifika children is shared through Bible readings at home and at church. Moreover, that the skill of memorisation and rote learning through Tauloto and Bible readings are an effective literacy tool for Pāsifika within the home is illustrated in other research (e.g., Siilata, 2014; Fletcher et al., 2009; Tagoilelagi, 1995).

Vā Fealoaloa'i is a Samoan cultural principle that nurtures social-cultural development. It is a holistic way of inter-relating across relationships and contexts

for one's overall well-being. Vā Fealoaloa'i is a conduit for learning where role-modelling of Samoan language and protocols nurtures the deep respectful inter-relations for one's well-being. The learning that occurs between parents (as role models) culminates in Vā fealoaloa'i. The findings of this research highlight the strength of parents as role models for nurturing and ensuring Vā fealoaloa'i. Role models also include: teachers, grandparents, extended family, siblings and even the children themselves as role models of knowledge. Teachers were role models through the singing of Samoan cultural songs during mat time, while parents, grandparents, or older siblings guided learning through revising Bible verses, numbers, colours and alphabets in both English and Samoan. One parent described how her child learnt to write his name from his older sister, while another child learnt his numbers in Samoan from his grandfather. These shared examples of learning demonstrate what Vygotsky (1978) described as process of learning occurring at the inter-psychological level. The inter-psychological level, describes how a child is solely dependent on the knowledge of a more experienced other when approaching a new task.

Sauvao (2002) described how the concept of Vā fealoaloai (role modelling) shared by parents in this research was used to support transition of Samoan children from Aoga Amata in their study. Children who had difficulty with transition had access to a close relative or 'special helper'. This helper was able to support the settling in processes for two to three hours a day. Parents were also key participants in the Vā fealoaloai (role modeling) processes where they were encouraged to be with their children before and after school and share their home knowledge and culture with the teacher. These practices known as whanaugatanga by Tamarua (2006) align with findings of this research, where the concept of 'Tuakana - teina' - learning together with, and from one another, provides a culturally safe space for children to share (Fletcher et al., 2009; Sauvao, 2002; Tamarua, 2006; Tuafuti, 2010). Vā fealoaloai (role modeling) provides children with the option to share and compare their ideas in pairs or in a group as opposed to being singled out and embarrassed to share individually in front of their peers (Spiller, 2012).

It is evident that both memorisation and Vā fealoaloai (role modelling) are effective cultural strategies shared by parents in this research. These strength-based strategies are able to support the transition of Samoan children moving from Aoga Amata to mainstream schools.

#### **5.2.4. Parental Priorities: the strengths of *what* is most important**

Fa'asamoa describes the Samoan Indigenous way of knowing, being and doing. For example, when walking past a Matua (Elder) one must bow the head and say "Tūlou". In bowing the head together with saying "Tūlou", the *knowing* of Samoan cultural protocols is displayed, reflecting one's *being* and identifying who is *doing* the respectful behaviour displayed. Samoan parents in this study viewed Fa'asamoa as most important. Learning respect and social engagement were high priority to support early literacy development. Parents expected their children to respect each other, teachers, and elders of the family and in the community. These key principles underpin the essence of cultural knowledge of Fa'aaloalo<sup>12</sup>. Evidence from this study concurs with the voices of parents in the research of Singh, Dooley, & Freebody, (2001) as cited in Fletcher et al., (2009) where parents noted how their children needed to respect their teachers. This notion of respect involved listening and doing what they were told and not talking back to their teachers. Although the requirement for respect varies, the authoritarian approach is very much the norm in Samoa as opposed to the schooling in New Zealand. The notions of Fa'aaloalo together with fealofani shared by parents in this study are still key values that very much exist across the Samoan cultural landscape of communities in New Zealand. Parents' views in the study of Fairburn-Dunlop (1981) align with the views of parents in this research. Parents in the study of Fairburn-Dunlop felt that schools needed to acknowledge the high moral standard of Fa'asamoa. These high moral standards

<sup>12</sup> Fa'aaloalo- Respecting others and elders

described how children needed to display the right behaviour (polite) and show respect to the teachers at all times. These were inter-connected with faith through teachings within the church.

Fa'asamoa encompasses a whole range of values. These values are not only about respect, but how to focus and manage oneself. Examples from this study include children being able to concentrate and write down their name, letters of the alphabet and memorise tauloto and colours in both Samoan and English. The prioritization of managing oneself by parents of this study is a key strength that is also supported by other research. Fabian and Dunlop (2007) found that building the social competence of the child, so they can socially engage with other children and make friends, is a key component in preparing a child for transition. If a child starts school with a familiar friend, or family member, they will have a higher level of social skills and academic competence. In understanding the essence of Fa'asamoa which encompasses a cultural holistic approach to how children should respect, socialise and engage in society, teachers and management at primary school can appreciate the key cultural values and expectations of how a Samoan child should behave.

### **Section 5.3 Analysis of key areas of improvement**

The main question from this research was to explore Samoan parents' perceptions of early literacy practices within the home and community. The findings of this study confirm that the home, extended environments of Aoga Amata and church literacies are all rich sources of foundational knowledge for children. Parents, siblings, grandparents, teachers and even the children themselves were advocates of their own Samoan culture and language, where learning the Faitau Pi – (Samoa alphabet), Tauloto (poem/verse), and Pese Samoa (Samoan songs), were all practices Samoan parents believed were important to early literacy development. The abundance of knowledge and learning practices evident through Fa'afaletui and photo elicitation with Samoan parents in this study challenges the current status quo for Pāsifika learners in today's education system in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Do we continue to

silence the cultural wealth Samoan children bring from home, Aoga Amata and church, or do we harness the rich cultural knowledge and identity of the child to not only lift engagement but to also raise the achievement levels of Pāsifika students in Aotearoa-New Zealand? The key areas of improvement in this discussion highlight ways to harness the cultural wealth Samoan children bring from home, Aoga Amata and church environments to help transition to primary school for the overall aim of lifting engagement and raising the achievement levels of Pacific children in education.

### **5.3.1. Family as the nurturing agent of character**

Research shows how the home environment is the platform and foundation to a child's cognitive development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Swick, 1991; Turuk, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). It is where the child develops their cultural knowledge and understanding of the world around them. All the parents in this research wanted their children to succeed in mainstream European culture while being grounded in their own cultural identity. Primary schools in New Zealand need to understand the value of Fa'asamoa and the language learning aspect from Aoga Amata and church literacies as a vital part to supporting transition of Samoan children. Evidence is clear that when the cultural context, language and identity of the child is in alignment with the classroom learning, better outcomes and increased parental partnerships take place (Bills & Hunter, 2015; Fletcher, 2009; Siilata, 2014; Singh & Zhang, 2018). If schools do not find a way to include the cultural knowledge and language of the child, that child can easily disengage from the classroom content and feel culturally disconnected. This disconnection will not only put the child at risk of underachievement, but further push away the engagement of their parents.

Teachers need to provide opportunities for children from Aoga Amata to use their first language with other children, staff or Samoan parents of the school. These supports could include cultural mapping of the child, highlighting where their parents come from, their village, and language, culture and church literacies in the

community; giving opportunities for children, parents, Aoga Amata teachers to share Tauloto (poem/Bible verse) or Pese Samoa (Song) with the class to form better connections with the family, Aoga Amata and school. Children from Aoga Amata should not have to leave their cultural identity and language aside when entering the classroom. Their language, culture and identity need to be included in the classroom learning so that their cultural self-efficacy is maintained, and the transition from Aoga Amata to mainstream schooling is seamless.

### **5.3.2. Recognising the importance of prior knowledge**

Samoan parents shared how their children develop in the common knowledge and interests of the home, Aoga Amata and church literacies. It was clear that although the common knowledge and interests of children may not correlate to the mainstream culture of the school, many researchers (e.g., Cooper & Hedges, 2014; Hedges, Cullen & Jordan, 2011; Hogg, 2013) highlight that teachers who fail to capitalize on this knowledge, ignore the rich source of children's prior experiences, and interests within the home and community. Hensley (2005) explained that funds of knowledge within the home can be used to improve behaviour and family engagement. The example provided in Hensley's study showed how using the expertise of parents within the school, helped plan and develop a class garden for the children. Bills and Hunter (2015) noted the importance of shifting the class ethos to include the student's prior knowledge so that learning becomes meaningful and purposeful.

New Zealand schools and teachers need to draw on the framework of Hedges (2012), in making sure children's prior knowledge and experiences are shared and upheld. These experiences include family-based funds of knowledge which are the parents' language, values and beliefs within the home. This could be a child's experiences

through family Lotu<sup>13</sup> (family devotion) or Tauloto (Bible verses) learnt at the Aoga Amata. Hedges (2012) also noted the importance of a child's prior experiences through their community-based funds of knowledge. Community-based funds of knowledge for children transitioning from Aoga Amata could be their experiences through *Tausala*. A *Tausala* is when the community such as families, schools, church come together to provide financial support through Samoan Siva (dance). It involves a family representative (usually a child) who will dance, while others in attendance can join in and donate financial support.

Children in this study are representatives of the common knowledge and interests within the home, Aoga Amata and church literacies. This means that teachers who fail to capitalize on children's learning gained in informal settings, ignore the rich source of children's prior knowledge, experience, and interests (Cooper & Hedges, 2014; Hedges, Cullen & Jordan, 2011; Hogg, 2013). Making these connections not only builds child and teacher relationships but also parental engagement in achieving better outcomes for Pāsifika learners in schools.

### **5.3.3. Awareness of diverse learning strategies**

Clearly evident in this research was the cultural strategy of memorisation. This strategy has been used by many Samoan families from generation to generation (Tagiolelagi, 1995). Memorisation, as a strategy for Samoan children, provides a clear link to the learning strategies of Samoan songs, Tauloto poems and Bible verses for children coming from Aoga Amata. Siilata, (2014) stated that teachers need to explicitly teach English language and vocabulary by building on Pāsifika home languages and oral practices. This means that teachers who provide opportunities for children to learn their first language through church literacies, memorisation,

<sup>13</sup> Family Lotu: Is a family devotion time in the Samoan language. It involves cultural spiritual songs, Bible readings, sharing and prayers.



Tauloto (oral performance and recitation), song and dance prepare a clear cultural pathway of learning for children transitioning from Aoga Amata.

Vā fealoaloai (role modelling) was also noted by parents in this study as a strategy that was less threatening and more supportive, when it came to the literacy learning of their child. Tapping into the knowledge of others through Vā fealoaloai (role modelling) was a supportive way of building child and teacher capability (Tamarua, 2006). Vā fealoaloai (role modelling) is a cooperative strategy that lets children feel safe and free to share in their class environments. It does not single out a child, making them feel embarrassed to share. It rather provides a choice in which a child can choose and share their ideas with someone who they feel comfortable with. Spiller (2012) suggested poor Pāsifika achievement is often attributed to issues related to teachers not understanding Pāsifika students and a lack of appropriate and effective pedagogy. Teachers need to provide opportunities for parents, grandparents, extended family and even the teachers within the Aoga Amata to share as role models. Samoan children transitioning from Aoga Amata need to be provided with opportunities to share their cultural experiences in their own language. Creating this culturally safe space of Vā fealoaloai not only draws on parental and Aoga Amata partnerships, it further moves the child from a space of not knowing into a space of knowing, where they drive their knowledge and understanding of learning.

Incorporating memorisation for Samoan children transitioning from Aoga Amata as a literacy strategy into the classroom learning can help reinforce the strategies used at home and in Aoga Amata, and draw in the knowledge of others within the home, school and wider community.

#### **5.3.4. Nurturing creativity and oral language.**

Evidence from parents in this study shows there is an abundance of knowledge being explored in the creative minds of children. Teachers however need to find a way to tap into the cultural silence of parents in order to find the creative imagination and

oral literacy success. A way of identifying the creative learning of a child is highlighted through the research of Cooper and Hedges (2014). In this research, one teacher draws from the child's interests of playing the drums; during mat time observations, he showed his creative energy and passion towards learning and this was encouraged. Furthermore, the Education Review Office (2015) stated that teachers need to provide experiences that promote creative thinking and exploration so that children make sense of their world in which they live in. These coincide with findings of the study which found that when a child's creative strengths were encouraged it brought about new learning through oral language and conversations. For example, a parent in this study reinforced the importance of her child talking with an older sibling while suggesting her interest in bugs and insects. This example reinforces the importance of creative learning and interest and how it goes hand in hand with oral language as a key part of early literacy learning. Siilata (2012) explained that oral language is a key area of learning that precedes reading "if they're not confident with the oral language, then they're not confident with the reading" (p. 28). Evidence from the findings is clear that creative learning and oral conversations were key concepts of learning highlighted by parents in this research. Parents believed that if their child was able to engage in a subject of interest, their creative learning and oral language would be improved.

It is important to find ways of engaging with parents and students to identify how to nurture creativity and oral language of learners coming from diverse learning environments such as Aoga Amata. This could be done formally through a strengths and interest based section in an enrolment, parental interview or informally through parent and child conversations and observations. These ways of identifying the creative strengths of a child are important for nurturing creativity and enhancing oral language abilities.

### **5.3.5 Analysis of Limitations of the research**

As a Samoan male researcher, eliminating gender biases and facilitating a culturally safe space for participants who were predominantly mothers was important. In remediating the gender control and creating a safe space for mothers, the female centre manager of the Aoga Amata helped provide support in the Fa'afaletui discussion with parents. As this research was in South Auckland in one Aoga Amata, this is a limitation as it does not provide an overall picture regarding practice in other Aoga Amata in New Zealand. Having a small number of parents and only having views of Samoan parents forming one Aoga Amata is also a limitation as the views of parents in this research may not capture the overall views of parents in other Aoga Amata in New Zealand.

## **5.4. Analysis of Implications**

### **5.4.1. Non existing partnerships between Aoga Amata and Primary school.**

Not having an established transfer of information between children of Aoga Amata to primary school is an area yet to be established in New Zealand. Current processes do require the transfer of information from their current school. This however can place the child in learning isolation, where the language of instruction in the class is different to the language of instruction being taught at home and Aoga Amata.

### **5.4.2. Teacher perceptions**

Spiller, (2013) already emphasized the deficit theorizing of teachers towards Pāsifika children. This deficit thinking is attributed to issues relating to teachers not understanding Pāsifika children and lack of effective pedagogy. Changing teacher perception is a process that can take time, especially if there have already been negative experiences with trying to engage the learner and parents within the school culture.

### **5.4.3. Teacher workload**

With the already overloaded expectation on teacher workload, finding the time to engage with parents and Aoga Amata can add extra tasks for the teacher then the implementation can be rushed, leading to ineffective support for the child.

### **5.4.4. Parents' views of the teacher being the one with the knowledge.**

Samoan parents can be influenced by the advice and decisions of the teacher. Parents ascribe an 'expert' status to the teacher and as a result they disengage in their child's schooling because they believe the teacher knows best (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006).

### **5.4.5. Parents disengaging due to Language barrier and work commitments.**

Parents can disengage due to English being the parents' additional language and the lack of understanding in the school setting of their home language in which they are fluent. This forms a language barrier between home and school. Often too, the parents are working multiple jobs on a low income and have limited economic resources in the homes (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006).

### **5.4.6. Differences in cultural norms in both Aoga Amata and schools.**

Samoan parents in this research considered the importance of their child using memorisation as a commonly used Pāsifika literacy strategy (Tagiolelagi, 1995). This cultural way of learning, however, clashes with the Pākehā/Palagi literacy strategy of opinion sharing and critical thinking. The predominant learning strategy of opinion sharing and critical thinking, places emphasis on teacher instruction leaving the strategy of memorisation predominantly used in Aoga Amata out of the picture.

## **5.5. Opportunities for Future Research**

By bridging the gap in transition for children moving from Aoga Amata, change needs to happen at both the teacher level and management level of education. This

means that supporting newly trained teachers at the ground level of training is paramount. This training should involve an interim transitional package for teachers receiving children from full immersion units such as Samoan Aoga Amata. It should provide newly trained teachers with culturally responsive strategies on how to support children from Aoga Amata. Teachers who are already working in schools, will also need to be provided with this same support. These support systems could include professional workshops, tailored towards preparing teachers with cultural support when receiving children from Aoga Amata. This is an area which needs to be carefully researched.

Other areas for future research, could be the development of a culturally responsive framework for children transitioning from Aoga Amata to primary school. This pedagogical framework could include the key strengths and concepts shared by parents in this research to support the pedagogical practice of teachers in schools. This framework could be researched in its development and in its extension. Another common area for future research could focus on how to build connections and strengthen key partnerships with local Aoga Amata and primary schools.

## **5.6. Chapter Summary and concluding thoughts**

While this research has focused on parents' perceptions of early literacy practices at home and in the community, local primary schools are still misinformed on what Samoan Aoga Amata provide for children in early childhood education. These concepts shared by parents in this research, are more than just surface features that promote cultural dance, and cultural food. They are the deep features of learning that make up the holistic cultural identity of a child. It is clear that cultural knowledge of children transitioning from Aoga Amata is yet to be recognized in schools today. The hope however, is to uncover the rich cultural knowledge that children from Aoga Amata bring to school, and further studies from other cultural groups with Early Childhood centres such as Cook Islands, Tonga, Fiji, Tokelau, Tuvalu will provide greater insights and understandings of the rich Pacific cultural tapestry.

The findings of the study have been discussed in relation to Samoan parents' perceptions of literacy practices at home and in the community. The discussion highlights the importance of key areas that focus on the depth of early literacy practices occurring within Samoan homes, school and church contexts. Learning and maintaining the Samoan language is of the utmost importance for Samoan parents as this ensures Fa'asamoa (Samoan-indigenous way of knowing, being and doing) is maintained. Deep cultural ways of relating respect such as Vā fealoaloa'i is upheld through role modelling which was deemed by parents as vital in ensuring children's behaviour and learning is sustained. It is paramount that a learner's prior learning through literacy practices such as memorisation, environmental learning, interest-based questioning and the importance of family tasks are considered when transitioning into primary school. In doing so, diverse learners such as Samoan students from Aoga Amata are valued in their transition to Primary and their cultural capital becomes an inherent feature of what they bring to the mainstream classroom context.

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## Appendices

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## Appendix A: Overview research Letter to the Centre supervisor of the Aoga Amata.



**Talofa lava, Kia Ora & Greetings.**

My name is Simatavai Alefaio and I am completing my Master of Educational Psychology degree with Massey University in 2017. My thesis research plan looks to find out what pacific parents do to support their children's language and learning development at home and in the community. This study specifically focuses on parents with early learner's age four who are preparing for transition to primary school from a Samoan full emersion early childhood centre.

To investigate parents' perceptions of language and learning development in pacific homes and in the community, this study will look to select four parents from your school as participants of the study. Each of the parents will be given an information sheet about the study, consent form and a disposable camera to use over a period of 2 weeks. Each parent will be asked to take photos of when they see language and learning development at home and in the community with their child. Parents will be asked not to take photos of other people's faces without asking their permission first. Parents will be given a notebook to help write down their ideas. Disposable cameras and notebooks will be collected after three weeks and will be used at final interview to be scheduled.

During the final interview a parental talanoaga (discussion) will firstly take place with individual parents and then secondly as a parental Fa'afaletui (collective discussion) Photos parents have taken of language and learning development activities within their home and wider community environments will be used as catalysts to drive talanoaga. If any photographs were to be subsequently placed in my thesis, permission will be sought from the participants.

I am writing to formally request the permission of the board of manager's, consent to approach and inform parents with children aged 4 at the school who may be willing to participate in the study.

All data recordings, including, school names, pictures and journal notes by participating parents will be kept strictly confidential. To maintain anonymity, the school name and names of all participants

will be assigned pseudonyms to eliminate participant identification. Data will be stored until such time as it is destroyed.

### **Participants Rights**

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation to participate in the study. If you decide to participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study and ask any question about the research at any time during your involvement. You will be given access to a summary of the findings of the research upon conclusion

If you have further questions about this project you are welcome to discuss them with me personally:  
Simatavai Alefaio, phone [REDACTED], email [REDACTED]

*This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.*

*If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Research Ethics, telephone (06) 350 5249, email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz) .*

Faafetai Lava

Simatavai Alefaio

## Appendix B: Overview of letter for the Board of Managers of the Aoga Amata (Samoan).



### Talofa lava.

O lo'u igoa Simatavai Alefaio, o lo'o ou taumafai i le fa'aailoga (degree) "Master of Educational Psychology" i le Iunivesite o Massey tausaga 2017.

O lenei su'esu'ega "Thesis Research Plan" va'avaai, sailiili – pe fa'aapefea i matua Samoa, ona lagolago, le atina'eina ole gagana a tamaiti i aiga, ma nu'u.

O lenei su'esu'ega, e fa'asino tonu i matua o tamaiti i aoga amata e 4 tausaga, ua sauniuni atu mo le isi la'asaga, o le primary school. O le aoga lea sa iai le tamaitiiti na o le gagana Samoa – Samoan full immersion.

E su'esu'e, le talitonuga o matua i le gagana, ma lona a'oa'oina, i totonu o aiga ma nu'u. O lenei su'esu'ega e filifili ni matua se to'a sefulu (10), mai totonu o le aoga. O i latou ia e auai fa'atasi i lenei su'esu'ega.

E tofu lava le matua ma pepa e famalamalama ai. Pepa e fa'ailoa mai ai lau ioe i lenei su'esu'ega.

O le mea pu'eata, e fa'aaoga i totonu o le lua (2) vaiaso. E ta'u i le matua, e aua le pu'eina ata o isi tagata, e aunoa ma le latou ioega. E tu'uina atu i matua le api, e tusia ai o latou manatu, (ideas)

O mea pu'eata, ma api o le a toe ao mai, pe a uma le tolu (3) vaiaso, ole a fa'aaogaina i le fa'atalatalanoaina i le taimi mulimuli, e logo atu.

A iai ni ata, o le a tu'uina I totonu o lenei su'esu'ega (thesis) , e saili muamua le fa'atagaina ma ia i latou sa auai I lenei su'esu'ega (participants).

Ua ou tusia lenei tusi, ma le fa'aaloalo, e talosaga aloaia le Komiti Fa'afaoe o le Aoga , mo sa outou fa'atagana, ou te talanoa ma logo I matua o tamaiti ua 4 tausaga I le aoga , e fia auai I lenei su'esu'ega.

O fa'amaumauga uma lava e iai le igoa o le aoga, ma ata, tusitusiga a matua sa auai I lenei su'esu'ega, e malu puipuia, ia aua le iloa . I le ma lea, a iai se taimi, ona fa'aleaogaina lea.

**Aia tatau a i latou sa auai I lenei su'esu'ega:**

- E le fa'amalosia oe e talia lenei talosaga, ete auai I lenei su'esu'ega. Afai ua e manatu e te auai, e mafai fo'i ona toe alu ese ma lenei su'esu'ega. E te fesili fo'i iso'o se taimi I lenei su'esu'ega, o au aia tatau ia. E tu'uina atu foi ia oe le i'uga, o le tu'ufa'atasiga o lenei su'esu'ega i lona fa'aiuga.
- A iai nisi fesili e fa'atatau tonu i lenei mataupu, fialia e talanoa mai ia Simatavai Alefaio (telefoni [REDACTED], imeli [REDACTED])
- A iai se isi mea fia fesili ai ile fa'afaoeina o lenei su'esu'ega ,pe e te mana'o e fesili i se isi tagata ese mai I le tagata lea e faia le su'esu'ega, fa'amolemole fa'afeso'ota'i Professor John O'Neill ,Director,Research Ethics ,telephone (06)3505249, email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz)
- O lenei galuega sa"evaluate"iloiloina e faiaoga ma ta'ita'i e le afaina ai nisi i lenei su'esu'ega . O lona uiga e le toe sailia e le Komiti Human Ethics a le Univeste lenei suesuega auā e leai se afaina tele i e lo'o auai I lenei suesuega. O e o lo'o ta'ita'iina lenei suesuega o le latou matafaioi tonu lea (ma e responsible ai latou I le ethics o lenei suesuega)

Faafetai Lava

Simatavai Alefaio



## Appendix C: Personal learning profile for parents (English).



**Simatavai Alefaio** B.Ed. Auck, PGDipSpecTchg, Canterbury  
**EDUCATOR**  
**Resource Teaching of Learning and Behaviour (RTLb)**

### Talofa lava

My name is Simatavai Alefaio and I am currently working as a Resource teacher for learning and behaviour in Manurewa. I have worked in education for over 12 years working with children from years 1 through to year 10 in high school. My father's name is Simatavai Alefaio from the villages of Manunu, Upolu and Fagamalo Savaii and my mother's name is Pepe Matautu Alefaio from the villages of Matautu tai Upolu and Fagae'e Savaii. My father is a retired minister of the Papakura Pacific Island Presbyterian church and my mother was a Ministry of Education worker who helped license a number of Aoga Amata in Central and South Auckland. My wife and I have three daughters two daughters in primary school one aged 7 and 6 years and a daughter who is three years attending Aoga Amata. All of my daughters have attended Aoga amata where I believe it has embedded in my children the love for learning through Aiga family, culture and spirituality.

As a Samoan male educator and father, I am interested in learning about children's learning & development in Samoan homes and in the community where I am undertaking research in this particular area. I am hoping that you can find time in your busy schedules that include children's sports activities, cooking, cleaning, washing and the list goes to help support my research.

The outline of my research is attached to this personal profile with a consent form, should you choose to participate.

I hope you will look favorably on my request to support this research.

Faafetai Lava

Simatavai Alefaio

## Appendix D: Personal learning profile for parents (Samoan translation).



**Simatavai Alefaio** B.Ed. Auck, PGDipSpecTchg, Canterbury  
Faiaoga  
Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour (RTLb)

### Talofa lava

O lo'u igoa o Simatavai Alefaio. Ou te faigaluega i totonu o Aoga i le matafaioi o le faiaoga fa'apitoa e fa'atunuina ai aoaoga ma amio o tamaiti (**Resource teacher for learning and Behaviour**). O lenei galuega e feagai ma faiaoga o lo'o mana'omia le fesoasoani mo taimaiti o lo'o maua i amio fa'apenei.

E sefulu ma le tolu nei tausaga o galue i totonu o aoga primary school ma secondary, e amata mai i le vasega 1 sei oo i le vasega 10. E to'a tolu la'u fanau. E fitu tausaga o lo'u afifine matua, soso'o ai lea ma lo'u afafine e ono tausaga, ma lo'u afafine e tolu tausaga. Na amata le latou aoaoga i totonu o le siosiomaga o le Aoga Amata. O i na, na fofoaina ai i latou i tu ma aga Fa'asamoa. O totonu o le Aoga Amata na fa'aaogina le gagana Samoa, aganuu ma le ola Faaleagaga.

O lou tama o Simatavai Alefaio, mai le alalafaga o Manunu, Upolu ma Fagamalo Savaii. O lou tina o Pepe Matautu Alefaio mai le alalafaga o Matautu tai Upolu ma Fagae'e Savaii. Ua malolo mai nei lou tama mai lana galuga faifeau i totonu o le ekalesia a Papakura Pacific Island Presbyterian church. O lou tina na faigaluega i le Ministry of Education ma sa faiaoga/centre supervisor i totonu o Aoga Amata. Na fesoasoani foi lau tina, i le laiseneina o Aoga Amata i totonu o Aukilani.

O lenei tausaga, o lo'o ou taumafai i le fa'aailoga (degree) "Master of Educational Psychology" i le l'univesite o Massey tausaga 2017. Su'esu'ega "Thesis Research Plan e" va'avaai, sailiili – pe fa'apefea i matua Samoa, ona lagolago, le atina'eina ole gagana a tamaiti i aiga, ma nu'u.

Ou te i loa, o se taimi pisi lava lea mo outou matua aua feau ma galuega. Ae ou te talosaga atu ma le agaga faaaloalo, mo la outou auai i lenei suesuega ma le faaaloalo lava

Faafetai Lava

Simatavai Alefaio

## Appendix E: Overview research letter for parents

Ethics number: 4000018004



Talofa lava, Kia Ora & Greetings.

My name is Simatavai Alefaio and I am completing my Master of Educational Psychology degree with Massey University in 2017. My thesis research plan looks to find out what pacific parents do to support their children's language and learning at home and in the community. This study specifically focuses on parents with early learner's age four who are preparing for transition to primary school from a Samoan full emersion early childhood centre.

To investigate parents' perceptions of language and learning in pacific homes and in the community, this study will look to select a group of six parents as participants. Each of the parents will be given an information sheet, consent form and a disposable camera to use over a period of 2 weeks from **Monday 31<sup>st</sup> July to Friday 11<sup>th</sup> August**. Each parent will be asked to take photos of when they see language and learning at home and in the community with their child. Parents will be asked not to take photos of other people's faces without asking their permission first. Parents will be given a notebook to help write down their ideas. Disposable cameras and notebooks will be collected after two weeks and will be used at final interview on a day of your choice on either **Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> August or Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> August from 5pm to 6.00pm** where a support teacher will be available to supervise your children during this time.

During the final interview a parental talanoaga (discussion) will firstly take place with individual parents and then secondly as a parental Fa'afaletui (collective discussion) Photos parents have taken of language and learning activities within their home and wider community environments will be used as catalysts to drive talanoaga and an elder matua will help facilitate talanoaga. If any photographs were to be subsequently placed in my thesis permission will be sought from the participants.

I am writing to formally request your permission to participate in the study. You will be required to provide photo evidence of your child's learning language development over two weeks using a disposable camera provided. Your involvement in this study will be no more than what occurs in your normal daily lives at home and in the community just an additional camera to capture the learning moments with your child. In addition, we will interview you based on your photos and notes both individually and as a group.

All data recordings will be stored in a secure location, with no public access and used only for this research. In order to maintain anonymity, the school name and names of all participants will be assigned pseudonyms in any publications arising from this research. At the end of 2018, a summary of the study will be provided to the school and made available for you to read.

Please note you have the following rights in response to my request for your child to participate in this study:

- decline you and your child's participation;
- withdraw you and your child from the study at any point;
- you may ask any questions about the study at any time during you and your child's participation;
- you provide information on the understanding that your name and your child's name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded;
- decline you and your child being video recorded;
- decline you and your child being audio recorded;
- decline to allow copies of you and your child's photos and notes to be taken.

If you have further questions about this project, you are welcome to discuss them with me personally:

Simatavai Alefaio, phone [REDACTED], email [REDACTED]

*This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.*

*If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Research Ethics, telephone (06) 350 5249, email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz).*

## Appendix F: Consent letter for parents



### Exploring language and learning in Samoan homes and in the community.

#### CONSENT FORM: Parents participating in the study

**THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE (5) YEARS**

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to taking photos of my child's language and learning at home and in the community for a period of two weeks **Monday 31<sup>st</sup> July to Friday 11<sup>th</sup> August.**

I agree/do not agree to sharing the photos and notes of my child's language and learning at a follow up interview on (please circle) **Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> August or Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> August from 5pm to 6.00pm.**

I agree/do not agree to being audio taped during interview sessions.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

**Appendix G:** Confirmation letter for parents outlining the times and dates for  
Fa'afaletui.



**Talofa lava, Kia Ora & Greetings.**

Faafetai lava and thank you for taking part in this study. Thank you for taking the time to capture learning moments with your child over the past two weeks to share in our follow up meeting which will explore your views of where you see your child's language and learning development at home and in the community. Please note that you don't have to prepare anything all photos will be available for you to talk to, there are no right or wrong answers it is just your viewpoint.

Please refer to the following times for your interview

**Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> August**

Parent 1: 5.00 -5.10

Parent 2: 5.10 -5.20-

Parent 3 & 4: 5.20 - 5.30

Fa'afaletui 5.40 - 5.50

**Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> August from**

Parent 5: 5.00 - 5.10

Parent 6: 5.30 – 5.40

Fa'afaletui 5.40 - 5.50

If you would like to change your day please feel free to contact (Centre manager name) or myself.

Food (Meaai) & refreshments will be available for parents & children. Someone will also be available to look after your children while we meet in transition room to discuss your photos

If you have further questions about this project you are welcome to discuss them with me personally: Simatavai Alefaio, phone [REDACTED], email [REDACTED]

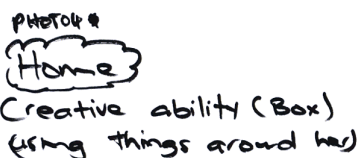
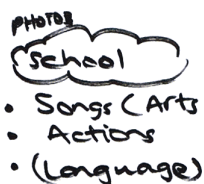
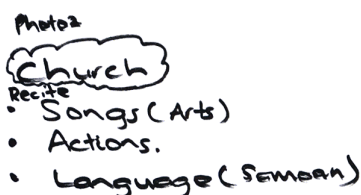
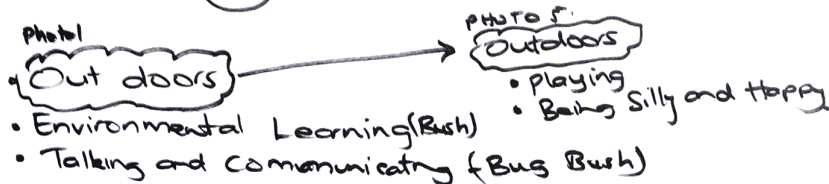
Faafetai Lava

Simatavai Alefaio

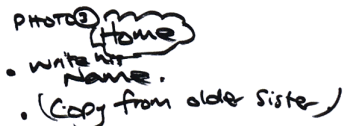
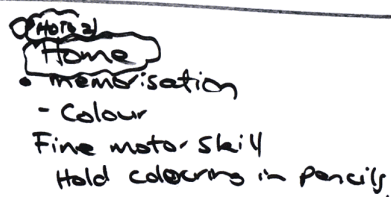
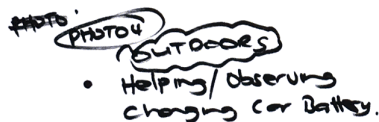
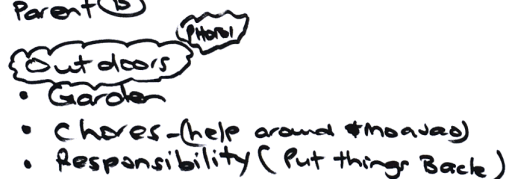
## Appendix H: Coding where and what learning is happening?

Parent (A) (Where & What learning is happening)

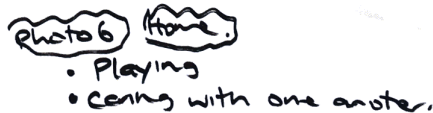
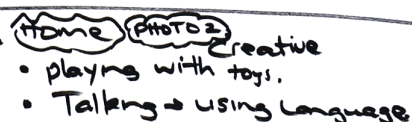
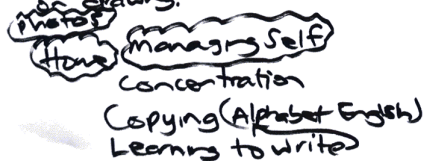
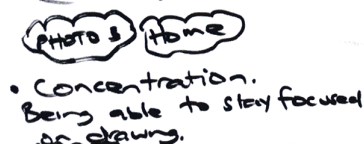
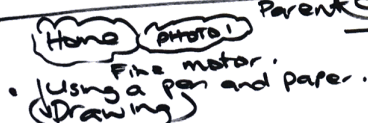
1.



Parent (B)



Parent (C)





## Appendix I: Coding where and what learning is happening?

1.

Where & what learning is happening.

Parent (D)

Photo 1 Home

- Writing letter
- Writing ~~his name~~ using
- Pi tatau Samsan Alphabet

Photo 3

- Home
- Writing English Alphabet using Tablet Youtube.

Photo 5

- Home -
- Learning to read
  - Helping him to read
  - Reading with him

Photo 2

- Home
- Write English Alphabet using Youtube. Letters of Samsan (A) / Prout and write his name.

Photo 4

- Home
- memorising and reading English / Samsan Bible verse.

Photo 6

- Singing - and memorising Colours
- Being a role model - teach Colours

Parent (E)

- Photo 1 Home
- Counting the coins in his money jar.

Photo 3 Home

- matching numbers with ~~start~~ Grandpa.
- talking to him in language Samsan.

Photo 2 Home

- Reading and looking at the Bible explaining our words in English

Photo 4 Aunties Home

- Write Letters Alphabet English Pen paper.

### 3. How do parents think children learn Best?

Parent(A)

- Interest Based.
  - Singing/Action
  - Find Something new
  - Asking Questions
  - Role models  $\xrightarrow{\text{children}} \text{Teacher/Siblings}$  children learning from ... Teachers/chn S.b.
  - Role models  $\rightarrow$  Children being role models for other children.
  - Being Creative (Box/Toss)
  - Play and being playful
  - Memorisation - colours / Alphabet <sup>writing</sup> / English / Name / Last Name
  - Helping (Battery)
  - Managing themselves (Concentration)
  - Reading ~~with them~~ a book with them
  - Showing what they see in or through the pictures in a Book
- observing

## Appendix K: Coding what parents think is important?

- Parent A) What parents think is important
- 2.
- Environmental Learning
  - Cultural Identity → Creativity learning to use different T-leaves.
  - Language ~~parent A/c/o~~ → Speaking Language.
  - Personality/character
  - Values - Caring & protecting
  - Play & Happiness
  - Learning (Alphabet/Samoa)
  - Singing/Actions
  - memorising and writing <sup>Alphabet</sup> Samoa English/Name/Bible Verse
  - Reading with children
  - Counting
  - Interpreting and sharing what he sees in a book

## Appendix L: Example of analysis and categorisation of codes into themes



Where is the learning happening?

Outdoors

What parents think is important?

Environmental learning

**Interviewer:** Ok so what did you see around language and learning in the first photo

**Parent A:** I found that both girls when they are interested in something they are very interactive and quite intelligent in their own way. I'm

They conversed actually really well (name) in a lot of her baby talk. But (name) being her older sister she seems to understand what the older sister was saying and because they were really interested in what they had found um they actually really got along and that lasted for a good 5 to 10 minutes before (name) was distracted and wondered off. But (name) she stayed put and she was still investigating what she found

**Interviewer:** So with language and learning where else did you see this?

I'm I thought that she was quite creative when she was explaining things to her little sister. She was also learning through finding something new

They were talking about the bug in the bush but then she was also about the lady bug but then she was also interested in what else was in the bush. She also became very inquisitive as well

She began asking more questions after that too. Wanting to learn about this bug and this insect.

**Interviewer:** So you see this as?

I felt that she was learning about her environment - what's around her even if it's tiny.

**Interviewer:** So you find that as important?

Yes, definitely

Microsoft Office User  
Interest based IB

Microsoft Office User October 04, 2018  
Talking and communicating Where and what learning is happening?

Microsoft Office User  
Talking and communicating Where and what learning is happening?

Microsoft Office User  
Interest based How parents think children learn best?

Microsoft Office User  
Talking and communicating Where and what learning is happening?

Microsoft Office User  
Interest based How parents think children learn best?

Microsoft Office User  
Asking Questions How parents think children learn best?

## Appendix M: Example of analysis and categorisation of codes into themes



Where is the learning happening? Church

What parents think is important? Reciting songs (arts) and actions

*Interviewer: So where did language and learning come in on photo 2*

**Parent A:** This was the white Sunday celebration at the school and church. I was quite surprised how quickly (name) picked up a lot of the songs and quite a lot of the actions she likes to perform. Obviously a lot of the inspiration comes from the children around her and her teachers.

I thought that her learning all these new songs and actions especially sung in Samoan opens up her creative ability

*Do you find that important*

Yes very – as it is a stepping-stone to her personality and character is developing.

It is extremely important because it teaches her where she comes from what her origins are and how we celebrate certain things as Samoan.

Microsoft Office User

How parents think children learn best? Singing and actions

Microsoft Office User

• How parents think children learn best? Role models – children/ Teachers Siblings parents.

Microsoft Office User

How parents think children learn best? Singing and actions

Microsoft Office User

What parents think is important?

Language speaking the language (Samoan)

Microsoft Office User

• What parents think is important? Personality and Character

## Appendix N: Overall analysis of coded themes.

Where and what learning is happening?	How the parents think children learn best? Individual parental feedback	What parents think is important?
<b>Outdoors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental learning</li> <li>Talking and communicating</li> <li>Playing</li> <li>Being silly and Happy</li> <li>Garden / Chores – helping around the house</li> <li>Responsible to put things back</li> </ul> <p>Helping and observing change car battery.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interests/Asking questions</li> <li>Samoan singing and actions</li> <li>Role models – children/ Teachers Siblings parents.</li> <li>Their children being role models for other children</li> <li>Collaborating respecting other children</li> <li>Being creative</li> <li>Writing and then memorizing</li> <li>imaginative play and dialogue</li> <li>Play and being playful</li> <li>Memorization</li> <li>Managing concentration</li> <li>Sharing about the pictures in the book (Role modelling)</li> <li>Reading together with the child book (Role modelling)</li> <li>Counting (Role modelling) / Rote learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental learning</li> <li>Language speaking the language (Samoan) x3</li> <li>Personality and Character</li> <li>Values – Caring and protecting</li> <li>Playing and Happiness</li> <li>helping around the house and at school -Chores</li> <li>Singing and actions</li> <li>Memorizing and writing English and Samoan Alphabet</li> <li>Colours, name, bible verse, numbers, matching</li> <li>Reading together</li> <li>Talking about the pictures in a book</li> <li>Counting</li> <li>Matching numbers</li> <li>Church and faith</li> </ul>
<b>Church</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recite songs (Arts)</li> <li>Actions</li> <li>Language Samoan</li> </ul>		
<b>School</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recite songs (Arts)</li> <li>Actions</li> <li>Language Samoan</li> </ul>		
<b>Home</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creative ability (using things around her/ playing with toys)</li> <li>Memorizing colour</li> <li>Fine motor skill holding a colouring in pencil on paper. Using pen and paper to Draw</li> <li>Concentration Being able to stay focused when drawing</li> <li>Memorizing and writing English alphabet</li> <li>Memorizing to write Pi Samoa Samoan alphabet</li> <li>Learning to care and play with one another</li> <li>Singing (Recite songs from school)</li> <li>Learning to Read (Reading together)</li> <li>Memorizing to write name</li> <li>Memorizing and reading <u>samoan</u> and English bible versus</li> <li>Counting in Samoan</li> <li>Matching numbers in Samoan</li> <li>Retell pictures in book in own words</li> </ul>		

## Appendix O: Confirmation of coded themes on where and what learning is happening?

Where and what learning is happening? (Photo image elicitation)	What learning is happening? Broader themes	What learning is happening Themes identified
<p><b>Where: Church/ Aoga Amata/Home</b> Parent A, B, C, D, E 6/6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role models – children/ Teachers Siblings parents.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cultural language/mother tongue</b> Parents A, C, D 4/6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recite Action songs (Arts)</li> </ul> <p>Parents C, D 3/6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Memorizing to write Pi Samoa Samoan alphabet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role modelling – Teachers being role models, Sister role models, grandparents, brothers.</li> <li>Cultural language/mother tongue</li> <li>Memorisation Memorising <u>Faitau</u> Pi (Samoan Alphabet) English alphabet, colour, bible verses and writing their name.</li> <li>Outdoors /Environmental development. Interest asking questions</li> <li>Imaginative play / Creative abilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Va fealoaloai (Role modelling)</b> (learning with and from others)</li> <li><b>Social Cultural artefacts of language learning maintenance</b> (pese Samoa)</li> <li><b>Memorization to writing</b></li> <li><b>Outdoor learning of developing child interest</b> emotional wellbeing and Social responsibility.</li> <li><b>Creative abilities</b> through imaginative play and dialogue.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Where: Home Environment</b> <b>Memorisation</b> Parents C, D, E 4/6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Memorizing and Samoan alphabet</li> <li>Memorizing and English alphabet</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent B, D, E 4/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Memorizing colour</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent B, E 2/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Memorizing to write name</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent D 1/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Memorizing samoan and English bible versus</li> </ul> <p><b>Outdoors: Play and social responsibility:</b> <b>Where: Outdoors 3/6</b></p> <p><b>Parent A</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental learning Parent</li> <li>Talking and communicating</li> <li>Playing</li> <li>Being silly and Happy</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent B</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Garden / Chores – helping around the house</li> </ul> <p>Responsible to put things back</p> <p><b>Where: Home / Outdoors Creativity</b> <b>Parent A &amp; C 2/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creative ability (using things around her/ imaginative play and dialogue</li> </ul>		



## Appendix P: Confirmation of themes on how parents think children learn best?

How the parents think children learn best?	How the parents think children learn best? Broader themes	How the parents think children learn best? Themes identified
<p><b>Parent A,B,C,D,E 6/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Memorisation</b> to writing</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent A, B, C, D, E 6/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Role models</b> – children/ Teachers Siblings Parents, Singing and actions, social responsibilities, role modeling of siblings and wider family members.</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent C, D,E 5/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Oral language</b> through imaginative play and Shared interpretation of pictures in a book.</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent A, 3/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Outdoors</b> - Interest based and social responsibilities</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent A 1/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Questioning</b> – Bug and insects</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent C 1/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborating respecting other children</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent C 1/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing concentration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Memorization to writing</li> <li>• Va Fealoaloai (Role modelling) learning through role modeling.</li> <li>• Oral language through imaginative play and shared book</li> <li>• Outdoors insect interest, helping with changing battery using blower because can use lawn mower</li> <li>• Questioning: Child interested in insects in the bush started to ask a lot of questions about it.</li> <li>• Respecting: Parent share of wanting sons to respect each other and other children in the school</li> <li>• Developing Social skills and Managing self-control and concentration (Self-regulation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Memorisation through writing</b></li> <li>• <b>Va Fealoaloai (Role models)</b> emphasis through singing and Actions (Arts)</li> <li>• <b>Oral language development</b></li> <li>• <b>Outdoor /Environmental learning and interest based questioning</b></li> <li>• <b>Social skills development –</b> Faaaloalo (Respecting others) Self-regulation and concentration</li> </ul>



## Appendix Q: Confirmation of themes on what parents think is important?

What parents think is important?	What parents think is important? Broader themes	What parents think is important? Themes identified
<p><b>Culture and language- Mother tongue</b>  <b>Parent A,B,C,D,E 6/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language speaking the language (Samoan)</li> <li>Reciting songs</li> </ul> <p><b>Foundational knowledge: Memorisation</b></p> <p><b>Parents C, D, E 4/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To know and write Pi Samoa</li> <li>Samoan alphabet</li> </ul> <p><b>Parents C, D, E 4/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To know and write the English alphabet</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent B, E 2/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To be able to write their name</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent A, C, D 4/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personality and Character</li> <li>spiritual wellbeing</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent D, E 4/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Imagination be able to share about pictures within a book</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent C 2/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Playing and Happiness /Caring and protecting</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent B 2/6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>helping around the house and at school -Chores</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent learning Samoan songs at school, learning faitau Pi, Hearing language spoken to at home</li> <li>Learning English alphabet and writing own name,</li> <li>Parent shares of happiness, children respecting each other. Emotional wellbeing</li> <li>Sharing of tasks around the house blower and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Faasamoa and Samoan language learning/ Importance of Faith and church.</b></li> <li><b>English language development</b> Interacting with texts (Books)</li> <li>Personality, values and character building</li> <li>Contributing to family daily tasks</li> </ul>