



**Exploring the teaching of effective approaches for assessing young  
Samoan children’s learning in early childhood centres:  
Developing an authentic Samoan lens**

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## Executive Summary

The aim of this research study was to examine existing teacher education practice, with the goal of enhancing the professional practice courses and pedagogical processes that focus on the assessment of Samoan children's learning.

Lecturers at Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association (NZCA) through anecdotal conversations with Pasifika early childhood education (ECE) centre staff, Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa (NZCA) students, Professional Development facilitators and discussions amongst themselves found that student teachers and liaison/associate teachers in practicum centres do not consider mainstream assessment processes for Pasifika children to be a good fit. In addition, anecdotal evidence and reports from the Education Review Office (ERO) highlight serious issues of engagement with assessment practices. Some ERO review reports also refer to centres failing to engage Pasifika parents in meaningful discussions about their child's learning. By unpacking the issues faced by student teachers and their colleagues it was hoped to make some modifications to their initial teacher education preparation. As well as showing where improvements might be made to teacher education practice, the intention was to develop an authentic Samoan assessment framework that would assist in promoting better assessment of young Samoan children.

The research aimed to address the following questions:

1. How is assessment taught and learned in two NZCA initial teacher education programmes – the National Diploma of Teaching (ECE, Pasifika) and Diploma of Teaching, ECE?
2. How is assessment practice learned in their tertiary programme implemented by Samoan student teachers and recent graduates in early childhood centres, and supported by liaison and/or associate teachers?
3. How does the teaching of ECE assessment practice accommodate Samoan worldviews, and cultural values and practices?
4. How might the teaching of assessment for learning for Samoan children be improved, and how can teacher education related to assessment be reframed to accommodate Samoan worldviews, and cultural values and practices?

This small scale project focused on assessment practices in two Samoan early childhood education (ECE) centres in Christchurch over a period of six months. The study aimed to identify the reasons why some Pasifika educators did not engage wholeheartedly with 'perceived' palagi or Western assessment practices and how these processes might be

strengthened to take account of cultural aspirations. Certainly, one of the Samoan centres in this study viewed ECE assessment practices to be imposed on them and detached from their realities and culture.

The cultural conceptual framework that emerged from this research project was designed to create an authentic Samoan lens in which Samoan educators could then visualise when assessing Samoan young children, by taking into account the learning and/or behaviours that Samoan communities value. Drawing from Tanya Wendt-Samu's cultural Pou Tu model (2005, 2006, 2007) and Fuimaono Karl Pulotu Enderman's Fono Fale model (1998, 2001), the building of the Fale Tele [meeting house] is used as a metaphor in making explicit a Samoan worldview. This study built on the previous models by further exploring other aspects of the traditional Fale Tele model. So for instance, falling out of the three main cultural values, Alofa (Love and Commitment), Tautua (Service and Responsibilities) and Fa'aaloalo (Respect and Dignity) symbolised as the Pou Tu, this project identified a number of attributes, characteristics or dispositions, symbolised by the supporting posts around the perimeter of the Fale Tele, that a traditional Samoan society would encourage, nurture and value in children. The list is not exhaustive and the attributes or characteristics highlighted are only as many as could be assigned to the number of supporting posts shown in the diagram (see pg 61). This cultural framework is discussed more thoroughly in the last two sections of this report and aims to demonstrate how putting a Samoan lens on any assessment tool would enhance its relevance to Samoan children's learning and identity development.

This study has highlighted the importance of culturally appropriate and culturally responsive assessment practices in early childhood. The study not only challenges assumptions around current assessment practices, it speaks to the need for accommodating diverse world views and different ways of thinking when presenting new knowledge to diverse communities. This study explores this explicitly by developing the visual metaphor as described to assist in drawing out the specific cultural values that help teachers and students understand Samoan ways of thinking.

Moreover it also can assist in challenging our own Samoan communities and their assumptions around perceived cultural practices that do not align with the cultural values that underpin our Faa-samoa. At the same time this metaphor assists in showing how new knowledge, appropriate to new contexts and landscapes in which Samoan communities now find themselves, can be accommodated and embraced from within a Samoan frame.

This has implications for teaching practice and for teacher education in general, as understanding other world views - in this case a Samoan world view – help students understand the importance of utilising diverse pedagogical approaches for presenting new knowledge and demonstrates that the dominant method or view is not always the best fit. Furthermore, this study proposes that a Samoan conceptual framework can be as an effective tool as any other regardless of cultural background in reflecting on who you are as a person, the professional teacher you aspire to be and the reasons why you choose to serve and teach our youngest citizens.

Most importantly for this project, the study provides insights into the requirements of authentic assessment for young Samoan learners attending early childhood services in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## Introduction: Background to the study

State-funded early childhood education (ECE) includes Pasifika services taught in children's home languages. An increasing number of Pasifika teachers are graduates of, or are engaged in, field-based initial teacher education through the Diploma of Teaching (ECE, Pasifika) at Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association (NZCA).

The lead researcher's interest in this topic was fuelled by her new appointment as a lecturer on the National Diploma of Teaching (ECE Pasifika). Having been employed in the community sector for a number of years prior to returning to the ECE sector, she found new methods, regulations and theories around assessment practices had shifted significantly since her time in the ECE sector. Researching and learning about current assessment practices led her to look closely at how they were being implemented in Pasifika centres.

Conversations with staff working in many Pasifika centres, colleagues and professional development facilitators suggested that assessment processes needed to be strengthened to take account of cultural aspirations. This project was hence initiated through subsequent anecdotal conversations with student teachers and some of their associate and liaison teachers who reported a common issue around assessment practices in Pasifika centres.

*Kei Tua o Te Pae* (Ministry of Education, 2004) is a series of exemplar booklets developed by the Ministry of Education to inform assessment practice in early childhood education. The books are designed as a professional development resource to enable learning communities to discuss assessment issues in general, both in terms of Te Whāriki (the Early Childhood curriculum framework) and in terms of their own specific settings. The exemplars introduce principles that will help learning communities develop their own assessments of children's learning. The framework for the development of the exemplars emerged from the philosophy of Te Whāriki. *Kei Tua o Te Pae* will be discussed in depth in the literature review following this introduction section.

For some centres there was a perception that assessment exemplars such as *Kei Tua o te Pae* (Ministry of Education, 2004) were yet another palagi or Western document mandated by government, although their official status is resource booklets. Therefore professional development connected to Ministry resources was undertaken with some resistance and little enthusiastic engagement by Pasifika practitioners. Moreover, Education Review Office (ERO) reports highlight some issues of engagement with assessment practices. Some refer

to the failure to engage Pasifika parents in meaningful discussions about their child's learning, yet we see that partnership with parents is one of the main purposes of assessment (Kofoed, 2009), particularly in early childhood education.

Further more the *Evaluation of the Implementation of Kei Tua o te Pae Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars: Impact evaluation of the Kei Tua o te Pae 2006 Professional Development Report* to the Ministry of Education also identified that:

Bicultural and Pasifika assessment practices were rare in assessment documentation, and these were acknowledged as low focus areas of assessment practice development in these services. Many services reflected New Zealand's bicultural and multicultural society in their day to day curriculum and teaching practices **but** this was not often reflected in individual assessments. (MOE, 2008, p. 9)

A gap in teacher education has become evident and needed exploring to ascertain the specific issues.

While Pasifika teacher educators were considering these dilemmas, Māori speakers at NZCA's annual conference emphasised the importance of understanding a Māori child's worldview. These presentations resonated with Pasifika lecturer's prompting discussion about the need for Pasifika to begin exploring and articulating Pasifika worldviews and cultural values throughout teacher education, just as Māori were. As Pasifika lecturers began exploring issues around assessment and reasons for the uneasy fit of *Kei Tua o te Pae*, an idea around researching this topic began to take shape.

The indicators of Pasifika graduates' low engagement in assessment for learning practices and their own admission of a lack of understanding around the value of assessment and hence effective engagement with assessment tools, signalled the need for a critical examination of teacher education in relation to Pasifika curriculum and assessment practices.

Not wishing to speak on behalf of other Pasifika peoples, NZCA Samoan lecturers decided to start by researching teacher education related to assessment based in their own Samoan culture. Discussions with the then Research Leader of Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa led to a meeting and the subsequent design of this project.



As the lead researcher was based in Christchurch it was decided that the literature review, analysis of NZCA teaching materials and the conceptual framework design would be done in this first phase in Christchurch. In light of time constraints, interviews from two recent graduates and group interviews from their centre staff, coupled with input from the Pasifika ECE network in Christchurch was considered sufficient to identify any specific challenges. Interviews with two of these Pasifika centres were considered additionally useful in ascertaining how this small sample of Pasifika centres in Christchurch responded to these challenges. We also wanted to see if and how the two recent graduates from NZCA working in these centres assisted in meeting the challenges of understanding and documenting assessment processes recommended by the Ministry of Education.

## Literature Review

The literature review is presented in two parts. First the wider picture of assessment in the New Zealand ECE context is examined before exploring assessment within the Pasifika context, specifically in relation to Samoan children.

### **Assessment in the New Zealand early childhood education context**

Assessment and curriculum go hand in hand. The image of the child shapes both. The ECE curriculum writers (Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 44) state that:

Holistic, active learning and the total process of learning are emphasised. Knowledge, skills and attitudes are closely linked. These three aspects combine together to form a child's "working theory" [about people, places and things], and help the child develop dispositions that encourage learning.

This statement signals that in ECE services teaching does not involve instruction in subjects, nor should aspects of the learner (social, intellectual and physical) be addressed separately.

The early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, states that "the purpose of assessment is to give useful information about children's learning and development to the adults providing the programme and to children and their families ... [and] for the purpose of improving the programme" (Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 29). The Ministry of Education (2004) emphasises that its approach is assessment for learning (also known as formative assessment), not summative assessment of learning (also discussed in Fisher, 1996).

In discussing the principle of 'Family and Community – Whānau Tangata', *Te Whāriki* acknowledges that different cultures have different beliefs and "may place value on different knowledge, skills and attitudes" (Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 42). The curriculum fosters "culturally appropriate ways of communicating" (p. 42), and moving away from our ECE curriculum is not contemplated. For assessing Samoan children, it is important to remember that the *Samoan in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1996b) was developed for both ECE and school use. It refers to *Te Whāriki* and its authors attempt to align the two curriculum documents.

Assessment for learning is described as “noticing, recognising and responding” (Ministry of Education, Book 1, 2004, p. 6). The Ministry states that “assessment for learning implies that we have some aims or goals for children’s learning. *Te Whāriki* provides the framework for defining learning and what is to be learned ... set out in strands” (ibid, p. 9). The document contains a “parcel of goals” for Māori education (all ages) and as espoused by Durie (2001), to live as Māori, to actively participate as citizens of the world, and to enjoy good health and a high standard of living. These goals are expanded in *Te Whatu Pōkeka* (Ministry of Education, 2010). There is no similar framework of goals for Pasifika children’s learning in ECE in *Kei Tua o Te Pae*, or elsewhere.

Assessment *for* learning during interactions between teachers and learners indicates teachers will develop ideas about “what next?” That is, the assessment will feed into planning. However, when complex learning is occurring and the teacher wants to be responsive to a diverse group of young children, the new directions are often uncertain.

Several strategies are proposed in *Kei Tua o Te Pae* for responding appropriately to such uncertainty:

- listening to the children;
- documenting the assessments both collectively and individually;
- keeping a view of learning as complex, say when learning is about relationships and participation in learning;
- documenting the surroundings, recognising that learning occurs through interactions with people, places and things; and
- Harnessing the power of assessment to motivate learners.

It may be argued that these strategies constitute important principles for socio-cultural assessment. However, they are not features of summative assessment.

Margaret Carr has been a powerful influence on assessment in ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand. She emphasises learning dispositions as learning outcomes; see for example, the learning outcomes model from *Assessment in Early Childhood Settings* (Carr, 2001, p. 5).

| LEARNING OUTCOMES |   |
|-------------------|---|
| (i)               | Skills and knowledge  |
| (ii)              | Skills and knowledge + intent = learning strategies   |
| (iii)             | Learning strategies + social partners and practices + tools =<br>situated learning strategies |
| (iv)              | Situated learning strategies + motivation = learning dispositions.                            |

Carr presented keynote addresses on assessment to the NZCA annual conferences in 2001, 2002 and 2004. In the foreword to the ensuing publication, Carr said, "Together, they set up three principles for assessment in early childhood" (2004, p. 5):

- Keeping it complex
- Keeping it connected
- Keeping it credible.

In her keynote address on "Keeping it complex", Carr (2001, p. 7) argued for capturing and protecting complexity of what children might be learning, because if what we record is too simple, then we will not in any way do justice to, or respect:

- The complexity of *Te Whāriki*, which does not separate out the social, the emotional, the cognitive and the physical;
- The close connection between the children's learning and the three Rs (reciprocal, responsive, and respectful) relationships between people, places and things in our setting;
- Any uncertainty about what is going on here; and
- The idea that outcomes include a sense of identity as a competent and confident learner.

Carr (2001) makes the point that formative assessment can and should be part of the relationship between the learner and people, places and things. Adults' comments in assessments will be read back to the child signalling that he or she has value in the centre. Carr (2001, p. 13) concludes that 'keeping it complex' has the following implications for assessment:

1. Acknowledgement of the part that teachers, and the activity, play in the child's learning, and including that in the assessment wherever possible;
2. Taking a wide view of the outcomes that integrate the physical, intellectual, the emotional and the social;
3. Allowing children the opportunity to make their own assessments, and to play a part in what goes into their portfolio; also asking their views;
4. Including multiple perspectives on a learning episode; and
5. Keeping in mind the notion that adults are integrally involved in developing children's identities as learners and this is best achieved by modelling and creating a culture in which learners and their achievements are valued.

Worth noting is that many of these features fit with earlier curriculum and assessment practice requirements set out in the Ministry of Education's (1998) *Statement on Desirable Objectives and Practices*. In her "Keeping it Connected" lecture in 2002, Carr cited Etienne Wenger's writing on learning communities. Wenger (1998, p. 271) describes a learning community as a "place of engagement". Carr (2004) says participation in a learning community means:

making meaning and engaging with others: keeping a connection with people, places and things. ... It's also about communities that provide opportunities for developing theories, solving problems, finding out, expressing ideas and thoughts so that others can contemplate them too, caring for others and getting community work done. (p. 19)

According to Carr (2004), some of the connections include those:

- with families;
- with our view of competence;
- between the short-term review and what happens later;
- between assessments and the child's identities as a learner (which include roles in the community, such as artist, jam-maker; learning dispositions such as caring, collaborating, critical inquiring, curious, creative, compassion; making meaning and developing and trusting one's own goals);
- with opportunities to learn in a learning community that encourages competence; and
- over time (learning as 'work in progress').

Credibility was the focus of Carr's third keynote lecture in 2004 on assessment. She sees credibility as synonymous with validity, but the measures differ in ECE. Carr advises that consideration must be given to assessing whether the learning is valuable or powerful, that is, learning that will stand learners in good stead both now and later. Carr presents four aspects of powerful learning:

1. Powerful learning 1 – whakamana: empowering the child to learn and grow
2. Powerful learning 2 – ngā hononga: children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships
3. Powerful learning 3 – multiple identities: children seeing themselves as competent and confident learners and communicators
4. Powerful learning 4 – children being 'learning fit': knowing what's worth learning, knowing they are good at learning, knowing who can help, knowing the best learning tool for the job, knowing how to face confusion.

Carr (2004) identifies three sites for credibility for assessment: the centre, the home and community.

1. Credibility at the level of the EC centre. To evaluate it at this level, she asks: Is the assessment fair? Does it make a difference? Are there several voices? Can children be involved? Does it assess what is valued in the curriculum?
2. Credibility at the level of the wider world of family and whānau. Two questions are posed: Is the assessment accessible? Is the assessment procedure permeable? Can children and families have a say? “Credibility is increased by seeking a number of different perspectives. ... New voices can be expected to provide new facets to the learning” (p. 37).
3. Credibility at the level of the community-at-large. The question Carr poses is: Does this method of assessment have credibility and status outside the particular childcare community?

Carr’s examples of credibility of narrative assessments include those involved in individual education programme (IEP) meetings, ERO evaluations, the connection between the curriculum’s key competencies and strands in *Te Whāriki*, and confront the incredible, the unbelievable and the amazing; ... and change our beliefs about what children can do” (2004, p. 39). She argues that learning stories do this. This notion of credibility of assessment will be discussed later in regard to Pasifika children’s learning.

### **Learning stories**

Carr (2001) coined the phrase ‘*learning stories*’, and argues for a narrative approach, *inter alia*, to minimise fragmentation and to steer the sector away from fixing on a performance-indicator approach that has little to do with meaning making. Learning stories move away from deficit models of assessment to a credit base. Carr cites Jerome Bruner’s views that a narrative is a mode of thought *and* a vehicle of meaning making (Bruner, 1996, cited in Carr, 2001). She saw learning stories as a way to enhance ECE settings to become learning communities, and predicted educators would find them practical and useful because documenting the stories of learning would feed forward into future teaching and learning.

Cooper (2009, p. 30) explains how learning stories “when used effectively” can support and enhance infants’ passion for learning. Using narrative accounts effectively requires an understanding of sociocultural theory, which is based on the premise that learning is socially and culturally constructed. ERO (2007) notes that the learning story approach connects with

the four principles in *Te Whāriki*. Effective use of the approach entails teacher discussion and reflection on assessment practices and documentation.

As the term implies, learning stories sit within the narrative genre (Hatherly & Sands, 2002). The authors explain that “objectivity is gained through making multiple voices visible”, that is, when a variety of perspectives are recorded, assessing learning dispositions are given priority. “Progress in learning flows from paying attention to children’s strengths and interests”, and “teaching as well as learning is ... documented” (ibid, pp. 10–12).

Learning stories has become a mode of thought amongst ECE teachers in New Zealand. Its adoption was supported by Ministry of Education funded research on assessment and evaluation in 1995 as *Te Whāriki* was being finalised. The Ministry’s adoption was confirmed by the publication of the *Kei Tua o te Pae* books, and by Ministry-funded professional development (until the late 1990s) that focused on their use. An evaluation framework also emerged from related research, known as the ‘teaching stories’ framework (May & Podmore, 2000).

### *Critique*

There is some dissension in the literature about assessment in early childhood. Ken Blaiklock (2010) comments that the *Kei Tua o te Pae* booklets focus almost exclusively on learning stories and do not give any coverage of “internationally recognised assessment methods such as running records, time sampling, event sampling, diary records, criterion referenced measures, and checklists” (pp. 105–6). Although teachers should use a range of assessment methods, narrative assessment has become dominant in the ECE sector, probably because it is compatible with New Zealand’s sociocultural curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. Yet it may not suit all purposes, or all ECE centres.

Blaiklock (2008) has expressed a range of concerns about the heavy emphasis on assessing children’s dispositions, with little attention to knowledge and skills, and despite difficulties with showing changes in children’s learning over time. However, proponents for sociocultural assessment are likely to say Blaiklock’s assessment proposals are “individualistic and reductionist” (Fleer & Richardson, 2004, p. 144). Very recently, Blaiklock (2010) has described the inadequacy of learning stories as portrayed in *Kei Tua o te Pae* for assessing children’s language development, despite the fundamental importance of language development in the early years. For example, communication is in the foreground in the aspirations for children expressed in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996a). An

indicative statement is: “Children will grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators ...” (ibid, p. 9).

Young children’s language learning is something that parents and whānau are keenly interested in, particularly if their child is a second-language learner, such as a Samoan child learning English or Samoan as a second language. They generally see learning and development as primarily an individual achievement, unlike Cowie and Carr (2004, p. 79) who see learning and development as “distributed over, stretched across, people, places and things”.

Despite the aims of the ‘architects’ of our assessment approaches, the exemplars in *Kei Tua o te Pae* are primarily focused on individual children in the moment, although the authors encourage records of the “learner-plus-the-surround” and of “continuity of learning” (Cowie & Carr, 2004, p. 95). Blaiklock (2009, p. 9) argues that general information in the literature supporting learning stories is not sufficient for “showing changes in children’s learning and development over time”. Blaiklock (2010) examines the exemplars in *Kei Tua o Te Pae’s Communication/Mana Reo* booklet and finds that they are not *specific* about children’s language development, despite statements in the introduction saying the assessments give specifics about verbal communication. Anecdotal accounts of Pasifika parents’ dissatisfaction with learning stories as assessment records are likely to be reflecting the same unease that learning stories do not showing progress in specific learning, albeit without academic analysis. Lack of specificity is also seen as inappropriate for teaching children with disabilities (Dunn, 2004).

In trialling the learning and teaching stories framework, some difficulties were uncovered for diverse centres. Carr, May and Podmore (2002) reported:

With the diversity of centres came very different levels of knowledge and confidence in assessment practices and in working with *Te Whāriki*. For centres at the novice end of the continuum both the Learning Story framework and the Child’s Questions [evaluation questions] helped participants make more sense of the curriculum document itself, while for those already acquainted with *Te Whāriki*, the framework was judged to be a good balance between giving direction and allowing flexibility. (p. 121)

The researchers position the teachers as novices and as having difficulties, without acknowledging that the framework itself may need to be evaluated. In the last decade, increased numbers of qualified teachers and professional development courses have reduced the number of novice centres. Yet, anecdotal evidence and data from ERO (2007)



point to ongoing issues. Carr et al. (2002) attribute such issues to Pasifika cultures having different beliefs and placing value on different knowledge, skills and attitudes. This is a valid comment. Perhaps there are also issues of credibility (Carr, 2004) in relation to the assessment framework and/or the exemplars for Pasifika populations?

### **Assessment in the Pasifika context**

The current gap in the literature makes it difficult to know whether it is the valuing of different knowledge, skills and attitudes, the lack of visibility of Pasifika learning and teaching in official resources, the Learning Story approach to assessment, the lack of training in assessment (ERO, 2000) or other factors that are causing concern.

These concerns were first articulated about Kaupapa Māori assessment (Rameka, 2009). Rameka advises that Māori assessment does not have to parallel current ECE assessment practices. She considers it “all right to be different – in fact that difference was crucial in order for it to make sense to Māori” (ibid, p. 34). In other words, rather than the focus being “finding the right way to do assessment, it should be about finding our right way to do assessment” (ibid, p. 34). Rameka’s Kaupapa Māori assessment concept could be adapted to the Samoan culture, where assessment should be about being Samoan in the ECE assessment context and about “embedding these understandings within practice” (ibid, p. 36).

As “assessment lays the foundation for quality teaching and learning” (Fisher, 1996, p. 163), the present study on assessment in Pasifika ECE centres is likely to be important. This research project was triggered by observational data in some Pasifika centres that indicated low uptake of the learning stories approach (Luafutu-Simpson, Sei, & Tuuga-Stevenson, 2009). However, they have been used effectively in other Pasifika centres such as the A’oga Fa’a Samoa centre of innovation (Podmore, with Wendt Samu and the A’oga Fa’a Samoa, 2006).

Families should be part of the assessment and evaluation of the child’s learning and development (Ministry of Education, 1996a) and this is considered paramount within the Samoan context (Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2010). In the same way that Rameka (2009) used the traditional Māori narratives (e.g., stories about Maui-tikitiki-a-Taranga) as a Māori assessment framework, Tagoilelagi-Leota (2010) uses the cultural celebration of displaying fa’alegāpepe [woven mats] to conceptualise a Samoan assessment process. Within an early childhood context, children hold a similar status and value to that of the ietoga [fine

mat] so this metaphor fits with the concept of quality assessment for Samoan children in aoga amata or Samoan ECE services. By depicting a child's development through collective stories told by the whole aiga potopoto [extended family of three generations] or village, the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and information acquired from fa'alelegāpepe provides and consolidates quality assessment of each displayed ietoga.

In Tonga this metaphor is further extended to capture the talanoa [conversations] that take place during the weaving of the ietoga and in both of these nations these conversations make fa'alelegāpepe "a living assessment" (Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2010, p. 39), with the whole concept able to be generalised to the child within an early childhood service who is observed and assessed by the family, early childhood teachers and wider community.

*Kei Tua o te Pae* reflects both the goals of the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, and the four main strands of the Samoan Language Document, *Ta'iala mo le gagana Samoa i Nui Sila* (Ministry of Education, 1996c). Furthermore, learning stories provide space for parents and grandparents to participate in children's assessment of their learning (Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2010). Nevertheless, according to Tagoilelagi-Leota, current assessment tools such as portfolios, anecdotes, running records and learning stories only document a small proportion of the child's record of learning and fail to portray the "living spirit of fa'alelegāpepe" (2010, p. 39), because the intergenerational record is not visible in those traditional forms of assessment. This is even more problematic with technological forms of data-gathering to assess children's learning and development, because of the complexity and added challenges of adequately capturing cultural and sociolinguistic interactions (ibid).

Like others who have researched the importance of culture (see Rogoff, 2003), Tagoilelagi-Leota (2010) warns that Western assessment methods focus on the child only as an individual and do not reflect the Pasifika child's family and the cultural influences that they bring to their aoga amata. Pasifika families do not believe the assessment to be authentic if it only takes into account what is happening within the ECE centre and not the wider influence of the child's home and community environment. Tagoilelagi-Leota (2010) states:

The concept of fa'alelegāpepe reminds us to rethink and develop our own assessment tools appropriate for our learners. Aoga amata along with other Pasifika early childhood services no longer need to navigate the mainstream winds in search of solutions to improve children's achievements for the prosperity of Pasifika. Rather there is an urgency to change the winds. (p.43)

This review has identified a gap in the research literature and provides a rationale for undertaking a study to explore the issues around appropriate and meaningful assessment for Samoan children attending early childhood services in New Zealand. Developing a living assessment framework for Samoan children is timely.

# Contextual Background

## Introduction to Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association (NZCA)

NZCA is a national provider of field-based early childhood teacher education and graduates a high proportion of Pasifika student teachers. It began as the New Zealand Association of Child Care Centres Incorporated in 1963. Still an incorporated society, NZCA provides a wide range of professional services to centres, individuals and students.

As the largest single provider of early childhood teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand, with 15 teaching bases across New Zealand, the student cohort is catered for by a faculty of about 70 academic staff who manage, teach and administer the Diploma of Teaching (ECE), National Diploma of Teaching (ECE, Pasifika) programmes and the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) degree.

In 1990, NZCA was registered as a Private Training Establishment. In 1997, it was accredited by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and approved by the Teacher Registration Board (now the New Zealand Teachers Council) to deliver the level-7 Diploma of Teaching (ECE). The programme was subsequently re-developed and re-approved in 2002 and 2007. In 2010, NZQA and New Zealand Teachers Council approved NZCA offering a Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) from 2011.

## Review of teaching materials on assessment

This project was initiated through the researcher's desire to learn more about assessment and assessment practices. In 2007 she was new to lecturing and had been out of the ECE sector for a number of years. Her training had not included *Kei Tua o te Pae*, and assessment practices in ECE centres had shifted to a more narrative approach in recent years.

As previously stated in the introductory section of this report, anecdotal conversations with student teachers and some of their associate teachers, liaison teachers and professional development facilitators found that there were common issues around assessment practices in Pasifika centres. It is also important to note that it was not only in Pasifika centres that there were difficulties in staff grappling with this newer narrative approach in assessment practice. Indeed as has been previously mentioned there were a few Pasifika centres that were embracing it with little resistance.

### *Assessment learning in National Diploma of Teaching (ECE, Pasifika)*

The National Diploma of Teaching (ECE, Pasifika) programme is three years in duration. All students who enter the programme work in an early childhood centre and continue their studies in the work context. Each week, the study programme requires students to complete:

- face-to-face tutorials of 6.5 hours and 3 hours (1½ days);
- a minimum of 6.5 hours of independent study; and
- 15 hours of supervised practice in an early childhood centre.

Each year of the programme includes a four-week practicum in another centre; twelve weeks in total. A further four days out of ratio teaching occurs at stage three in the Pasifika Studies 3 [3PS-P] module. The modules are delivered in stages. The credit value of each module varies according to the number and credit value of the embedded unit standards. The full programme is 362 credits. The programme is organised into three modules that have three stages and one module of two stages [Aotearoa Context 1 and 2].

### *Learning, Development and Culture*

In the Learning, Development and Culture [LDC-P] strand, students learn to use learning stories as part of their observations and evaluations throughout their assignments. Moreover, assessment processes are a major focus in the third stage of this strand. Also included in this strand are guidance strategies, planning, and evaluation for children's learning and development based on *Kei Tua o te Pae*.

Lecturers are given guidance through teaching notes but are also free to develop their own approach and further research into this topic. Assessment processes taught in this strand recognise attitudes, dispositions, knowledge, skills, communication, languages, and choices as among the many strengths revealed in narratives about children in early childhood. Examination of ongoing assessment (both formal and informal) reveals complex and evolving interests and competencies, on which emergent curriculum and planned opportunities to enhance and extend children's learning are supported. Assessment therefore relies on the teacher's awareness to notice, to recognise, and to respond. This same language is used in *Kei Tua o te Pae*.

Students are encouraged to explore a series of three papers based on Margaret Carr's keynote addresses to NZCA's national conferences in 2001, 2002 and 2004 (see Carr, 2004) and to identify and examine Carr's three principles of assessment: keeping it complex; keeping it connected; and keeping it credible. Students are taught that narrative assessment uses a storied approach in the documentation of children's learning. This approach contextualises the learning so that the people, places and things of children's learning all contribute to the story and are made visible in the learning. Narratives are told through a variety of media. Narratives empower children with knowledge of how they learn and what they know or can do.

The Literature Review section has already described learning stories as a type of narrative assessment. Students studying with NZCA are taught to analyse the learning stories framework according to criteria of dispositions that contribute to ongoing learning. Dispositions are identified as key attitudes that have been determined to contribute to children's successful participation in the learning process. Embedded within learning stories is evidence of 'the learning that is going on here' identified through the analysis. The short-term review may articulate a summative description of the child's learning at that point and may provide a rationale for "what next?" The question of why we assess is also addressed in the *Why document* (Carr, 2001, pp. 137–57). The Carr reading extends its content to the question of how we assess, which is also addressed by Podmore (2006). Both define and clarify the scope and format of learning stories.

Ministry of Education guidelines, including *Te Whāriki*, *Kei Tua o te Pae*, Pacific Language documents, government regulations and the 2008 Licensing Criteria, support formative assessment as components of planning in early childhood settings. Students examine the assessment aspects of these documents as they work through In-Class Task One. Booklets One and Two of *Kei Tua o te Pae* that explain the theoretical underpinnings of current assessment pedagogy.

#### *Assessment taught in Diploma of Teaching (ECE)*

The notion of assessment from a sociocultural aspect is examined and discussed in the first year of the AKO [Pedagogical Studies 1] strand of the Diploma of Teaching. The sociocultural grip (experiential task as outlined in lecture notes) allows students to voice their own experiences. This exercise is useful as it provides a starting point to initiate dialogue on the change to narrative assessment that has occurred in New Zealand ECE.

Key understandings about the Learning Story framework are provided in lecture guidance notes. Many of the key points such as credit versus deficit can be debated as the exemplars are outlined and discussed or as students share their own stories of infants, toddlers and young children. Lecturers are encouraged to make full use of *Kei Tua o te Pae* (Ministry of Education, 2004) as this resource provides students with opportunities to consider curriculum, assessment and teaching strategies simultaneously. Learning dispositions are explored in tutorial 2. Assessment discussions are explored throughout the three stages of the AKO strands but with a particular emphasis in the first, and include:

- The shift from assessing the individual to the individual-in-context
- Deficit to credit-based approach
- Māori pedagogy
- Learning goals to performance-based goals
- Narrative approaches
- Learning story framework
- Definitions
- Multiple perspectives.

#### *Analysis of teaching assessment material*

The teaching of assessment within the two programmes is slightly different in that in the Diploma of Teaching it appears more comprehensive and is positioned in the first module. The teaching of assessment processes in the National Diploma of Teaching (ECE, Pasifika) programme is focused more in the third year, although learning stories are introduced in the second stage.

One of the reasons for this is that the unit standard where assessment methods are assessed is a level 7 unit standard, and most level 7 unit standards are assessed in the third year. It can be argued that teaching assessment in the third stage gives little time for students in the programme to become familiar with assessment and all that it means. This could potentially disadvantage the National Diploma students, particularly given that the majority of these students are second-language learners of English so unpacking terminology around assessment is even more complex. Furthermore, a Western perspective is the dominant lens through which assessment is examined in both diplomas. NZCA employs Pasifika lecturers to deliver the programme, and this helps mitigate these issues. For example, most 2010 students in year three of the National Diploma programme in Christchurch were Samoan with the exception of one Māori student. The lead lecturer for all the modules also was of Samoan descent and therefore was able to use Pasifika pedagogy

and Samoan language to unpack and break down palagi concepts. The programme, in acknowledging difficulties of second-language learners, requires students to be in class an extra half day to compensate for the learning support integrated throughout tutorial sessions.

When this project began, the diploma programmes were the only qualifications offered. With the launch of the degree programme in 2011, those two programmes are being phased out. Therefore the findings of the present study and development of a Samoan framework for assessing Samoan children (an output for this project) will inform and be useful for inclusion in the degree programme.



## Research Methodology

This was a small scale action research qualitative study. It aimed to gather evidence of the experiences and understandings that the Pasifika graduates and their centres had of assessment and the use of *Kei Tua o te Pae* assessment exemplars as a tool to further their understanding. A qualitative approach using interviewing and focus group methods has the potential to provide a rich source of narrative data and to foreground participants' voices (Denscombe, 2007).

### Conceptual framework

This study was carried out in line with Pasifika research protocols and guidelines (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt Samu & Finau, 2001). The study was informed by the pou tu model as articulated by Samu (2005), and adapted by Podmore, Wendt Samu and Aoga Fa'a Samoa (2006), in their research report for the Ministry of Education. In looking at the three underlying principles of alofa [love and commitment], tautua [service] and fa'aaloalo [respect and dignity] as depicted in the pou tu model, the researcher was cognisant of the appropriate approach when undertaking the research and in her engagement with the participants of this research.

In the pou tu model, alofa is depicted as the central post and is seen as the essential motivating factor behind this research. Love and commitment of the researched community is seen as an important underlying factor. Gathering anecdotal observations from a number of conversations with students and those working in centres, the researcher began to uncover a common resistance and frustration that some Samoan staff had around implementing assessment practices using *Kei Tua o te Pae* as a guide. It was out of a desire to unravel the issues associated with these difficulties and to improve the way NZCA delivers training around assessment processes that inspired this research. Furthermore, from a wider perspective, Pasifika students are still seen as underachieving in the education system despite decades of interventions. Personal commitment to contribute to developing innovative strategies in improving these negative statistics remains at the forefront of this research.

Tautua (service and responsibility) depicted as one of the side posts, is how Samoan alofa is demonstrated. 'E fai vae o le alofa' ('love has legs') is a phrase that I remember my mother telling me time and time again as a young person when I questioned her monetary contributions to her extended family, the church community, and the wider Samoan

community in Christchurch. This saying impressed upon me the concept that love is an action, not a feeling. Thus, tautua is the embodiment of alofa. Many people of Pacific descent are raised with the notion of collective responsibility. This is in opposition to the Western concept of individualism.

Fa'aaloalo, as the other supporting post, is the appropriate approach or method in applying or modelling service to others. There is a Samoan saying that states 'e iloa le tamalii moni i lana tu ma lana savali', – 'a true Samoan or a person from a chiefly lineage can be identified easily by the way they conduct themselves'. This refers to the right and culturally appropriate way of engaging respectfully with others.

The above three principles are the main values that underpinned the research approach. Building on this framework, the study examines how these principles can be unpacked in terms of looking further into a Samoan worldview and applying it as a Samoan lens in which assessment can be viewed for Samoan children in ECE centres.

## **Methods**

The research design employed a mixed method approach. A participatory action research approach, also known as developmental action research (see Cardno, 2003), was used for the following reasons. First, as a Pasifika lecturer in teacher education, the researcher was committed to action that would make a difference for student teachers and for the end-users: ECE centres, Pasifika children and their aiga [extended family]. Second, it was expected that development would occur at three levels: (1) at a personal level when lecturers gain a deeper understanding of their own practice; (2) at a collegial level through case studies of new graduates focused on their teacher education experiences and later as the data were interpreted and shared; and (3) at the organisational level as changes were made to teaching practice and course content in relation to assessment of Pasifika children. NZCA's Samoan lecturers supporting the study were also participants as well as researchers.

## **Research questions**

The research questions guiding this project were:

1. How is assessment taught and learned in New Zealand in NZCA teacher education programmes – the National Diploma of Teaching (ECE, Pasifika) and Diploma of Teaching, ECE?

2. How is assessment practice learned in their tertiary programme implemented by Samoan student teachers and recent graduates in early childhood centres, and supported by liaison and/or associate teachers?
3. How does the teaching of ECE assessment practice accommodate Samoan worldviews, and cultural values and practices?
4. How might the teaching of assessment for learning for Samoan children be improved, and how can teacher education related to assessment be reframed to accommodate Samoan worldviews, and cultural values and practices?

### **Ethical considerations**

Pasifika ethical principles were integral to the project to protect the mana [honour] and koala [knowledge] of the research participants (Vaiotele, 2003, as cited in Fa'afoi, Parkhill & Fletcher, 2006). These principles included: oua'e fiepoto [be respectful, do not flaunt your knowledge], mata'ofa [show a loving face], mateuteu [be well prepared], fatongia [acknowledge that Pacific peoples have other duties], and potu he anga [accountability to the Pasifika community throughout the process] (ibid).

This study was approved by the NZCA Research and Ethics Committee and carried out in accordance with its ethical guidelines. Anonymity of participating students and staff was preserved as no real names are used in any documentation or written research information. Informed consent was obtained from all participants taking part in the audio-taped focus groups and interviews. Informed consent also included reassuring students that access was restricted to any information they supplied to the lead researcher and the research assistant.

In an informal, qualitative setting, where professional discussions merge amidst familiar chatter, it is easy to include sensitive information, which if shared in the wrong context can compromise both the researcher and participant (Luafutu-Simpson, 2006, p. 40). As the Christchurch Samoan community is relatively small, the need to be cautious in disclosing any information when in a community setting was paramount. Moreover, there was a need to acknowledge the trust between the participants and the researcher in terms of teu le va [looking after the spaces between relationships], a highly valued Samoan concept in which the spaces between the relationships are heeded and respected.

### **Participants**

The participants in the study can be categorised into three key groups:

- Two recent Samoan student graduates;

- Staff from two Samoan ECE centres (8); and
- A consultative discussion group from the ChCh ECE Pasifika Network (20).

The researcher chose a Samoan sample so that everyone shared the same language and cultural worldview necessary for the effective facilitation of dialogues with the new graduates and their teaching colleagues.

While there are shared cultural views and experiences within Pasifika peoples there are also significant differences. Those invited to the network fono [meeting] came from several Pasifika cultures with the aim that other Pasifika peoples might be able to develop, modify and build on the research for their particular ethnic approach.

The ECE Pasifika Network group fono comprised a group of ECE teachers working in Pasifika centres. The majority of the teachers were Samoan, with twenty participants in total, but the group also contained four Tongan and one palagi teacher. A Ministry of Education Pasifika staff member (who coordinates the meetings) and a Pasifika professional development facilitator were also present.

## **Procedures**

This research project involved case studies in two Samoan centres that included two recent Samoan graduates from NZCA's teacher education programme and the teaching team in the ECE centres where they work.

In light of time constraints and the task of compiling a literature review as well as an analysis of teaching materials from both diploma's, interviews from two recent graduates and group interviews from their centre staff coupled with input from the Pasifika ECE network in Christchurch was considered sufficient to identify any specific challenges. Interviews with two of these Pasifika centres was additionally useful in ascertaining how this small sample of Pasifika centres in Christchurch responded to these challenges. We also wanted to see if and how recent graduates from NZCA working in Pasifika centres assisted in meeting the challenges of understanding and documenting assessment processes recommended by the Ministry of Education.

Both graduates had been part of the staff in their Pasifika ECE centres prior to their training. Lua (Interviewee 2) had been employed at her church's Pasifika ECE centre for the past four years prior to studying and remained there for the duration of her three years of ECE study.

At the time of her interview she had left this preschool and was now employed at another Pasifika preschool. Tasi (interviewee 1) had began at her church preschool in a voluntary capacity for a number of years (3) before she began her training and is now working full time in the same Pasifika ECE centre. The graduates and their centres were selected for no other reason than the convenience to the researcher and the willingness of the graduates and centres approached. In fact the graduate that was first selected as an interviewee had to be reconsidered as the centre that she was working in appeared unable to accommodate the research and kept on changing dates and times. The lead researcher then approached another centre and found it easier to set a time and place for interviews.

Data gathering included a one-to-one interview with the new graduate and recorded focus group interviews with the teaching team. The interviews were conducted in Samoan to empower the participants but were given the option of expressing themselves in English for those that felt more at ease using English. Discussions with the graduates and an interview with each team provided (graduate) learners' perspectives on teacher education coverage of assessment of Samoan children's learning.

In order to validate anecdotal observations and conversations between Pasifika lecturers and other stakeholders, the researcher sought to interview the student graduates and their centre staff to identify and unpack the specific issues in order to identify any gaps and improve teacher education for Pasifika around assessment and the *Kei Tua o te Pae* assessment exemplars.

A recorded consultative conversation around assessment practices and what Pasifika parent expectations for their children might look like was also undertaken with an early childhood education network of 20 participants comprising Pasifika professional development facilitators, Pasifika early childhood teachers, and Pasifika support workers, such as Ministry of Education staff.

The literature helped to inform the methods employed. In particular, Morgan (1993) and Morgan and Krueger (1993) provided guidance on how and when to use focus groups. Positive experiences using focus group discussions amongst Pasifika participants are also reported in Fa'afoi et al. (2006), Nakhid (2003, as cited in Fa'afoi et al., 2006), and the A'oga Fa'a Samoa Centre of Innovation research report (Podmore et al., 2006). Taking a conversational approach, the focus group interviews covered:

- perspectives on the purposes of assessment of young children;
- how the assessment findings are reported back to parents;

- how the topic of assessment is taught to and currently practiced by student teachers and by their liaison teachers in ECE centres;
- the use made of assessment data;
- parental expectations about assessment of young children; and
- proposals for change from a Samoan worldview.

The researcher facilitated the teaching team discussion and another NZCA staff member provided note-taker support to ensure the conversations were recorded as data. They spent one day at the case study centres, talking informally to each NZCA graduate, looking at assessment records and facilitating a discussion with the teaching team about assessment practices within their centre. The team discussion was taped to allow the participants to become absorbed in the stories and to speak freely in Samoan.

The researcher ensured that the views expressed would not be linked to the staff or to their individual centres. However, they were used to extrapolate themes in the stories they told about assessing Pasifika children in ECE settings and to gather suggestions for drafting a framework for assessing Pasifika children's learning.

Pasifika students were supported through the research process and, like their centre colleagues, were given an opportunity to speak in their own language in response to the questions. Further consistency with Pasifika research methods included ensuring that participants received feedback on the findings through the ECE Pasifika meetings held once a month, together with a copy of the executive summary of the report, and working collaboratively with non-Pasifika researchers to enhance cross-cultural understandings and skills. The findings were first shared with the centre teachers who mentored the student teachers and employed them. It is envisioned that this report will also be used to inform third-year papers of NZCA's degree programme and the findings will be disseminated at both Pasifika education forums and research conferences.

### **Data analysis**

First, document analysis of relevant tertiary teaching materials was undertaken. The analysis identified where assessment practices were first introduced to students in both programmes. It examined the corresponding teaching notes of the modules and tutorials in which assessment processes and procedures were being taught and how lecturers were guided in delivering the content. Analysis also involved examination of how the learning of assessment processes and procedures were assessed in both programmes. The lead researcher was

also able to draw from her own experience of learning and delivering assessment tutorials to a predominately Samoan cohort in the National Diploma of (Teaching (ECE Pasifika) in Christchurch. This is discussed further on pages 50-52.

Qualitative data from this study was used to identify themes and key ideas to be further investigated across other centres in phase 2 of this research project. A recorded consultative conversation around assessment practices in early childhood services provided further data for analysis. Transcribed notes from the data-gathering exercises were also collated and analysed.

## **Preliminary Explorations - Conversations with Pasifika colleagues**

While not part of the research methodology, these conversations have been included because the conversations and feedback on the research topic have contributed to the identification of issues around assessment and have informed the research and possible solutions.

A powerpoint data presentation was shared with Pasifika colleagues (both in Auckland and in Christchurch), outlining the research rationale and objectives, and the proposed framework, which would then be adapted and amended in light of their feedback. It was understood that the cultural conceptual frame I wished to utilise and to further develop was a frame that could be used in teacher education and also in Pasifika centres. The feedback and goodwill received was inspiring and warmly appreciated.

It was suggested that I be careful not to set up a Western/Pasifika either/or contrast, but rather consider ways in which each cultural framework informs the other. It was never the intention of this study to put worldviews in opposition to one another, as my own experience tells me that these are not binary, nor contrary to each other.

Another colleague suggested that a clear rationale was needed as to why practitioners might want “to do assessment better” and for that to form the purpose of this study.

A professional development facilitator reflected on her experience with Pasifika centres and what she observed. She wrote:

“One of the common issues for Pasifika centres during these professional development sessions was that the majority of untrained teachers were not fully

committed to indepth professional learning, which resulted in uncertainty, confusion and mixed understandings of assessments. Personal and family commitments and the mentality of being labelled as untrained become a way of opting out.

I agree that teachers' perceptions of doing learning stories are more of another task added to the norms of working with children. So if assessment is carried out as a task, then the inner soul, mind and spirit of the teacher is incomplete in terms of knowing and understanding the holistic view of the child's learning and development. I think training has a big impact on teachers' pedagogical teaching and practice. Some have graduated and are fully trained to teach in both mainstream and Pasifika centres. To be honest, there are still a lot of teachers who are still struggling with how to use assessment tools in order to see positive outcomes for children's learning. Important to note that not all Pasifika centres struggle with assessment and to note too that lots of mainstream settings are still struggling in terms of making the learning visible when documenting children's assessments. Some examples that you have chosen for discussions are very common issues all around the ECE settings particularly around continuity and planning."

Another key idea was about documenting assessment where teachers reveal only part of the assessment in the documentation. The perception was that many Pasifika teachers are skilled at sharing orally with children and their parents but when they decide to document the learning, some of the informal discussions appear to be lost because there was no foregrounding in the discussions. Colleagues raise the point that some of these undocumented 'sharings' are so significant to the learning and yet some of our Pasifika teachers seem unaware of it.

How can teachers show the balance between the undocumented and documented interactions, and that one is in tune with the other? Most of the colleagues who provided feedback agreed that translation of English concepts and ideas around assessment into Samoan is problematic and at the very least inconsistent. People have different perceptions and understandings of assessment depending on their level of understanding and English. Meaning as the saying goes, often gets lost in translation. Feedback received was that translating English words, ideas and concepts needs to be discussed in a nation-wide forum to ensure that Samoan lecturers, professional development facilitators and other relevant people use the same consistent terminologies in relation to assessment.



### *Identifying Samoan-valued characteristics*

A professional development facilitator with many years of experience working with Pasifika centres gave this feedback:

“I have discussed some of these important concepts with many Pasifika centres, emphasising that when observing children, staff need to focus on what they actually see happening when children are involved and engaged in learning experiences. I often used the word uiga [habits], aga [attributes], and amioga [behaviour], and this appeared to be very helpful.”

Feedback on Samoan type ‘dispositions’ ‘attributes’ or ‘behaviours’ encouraged and valued by Samoans was as follows:

“The list of words that you have mentioned is worth discussing in terms of what is appropriate and what and who needs to be changing is crucial. I believe some of these words are appropriate and it depends on the context of how the learning occurs. I think our Pasifika teachers need to articulate these words so that outside people will understand the meaningful and purposeful way of using it from our own culture”.

## Findings

This section presents the findings in respect to the research questions. The data revealed examples of in-depth professional conversations between the student teachers and their colleagues. It was apparent that these participants shared their views easily, probably because they knew each other well and also because of their shared worldviews. This congruence was also readily apparent in the ECE Pasifika Network group fono.

The action research study examined the following questions:

1. How is assessment taught and learned in NZCA teacher-education programmes – the National Diploma of Teaching (ECE, Pasifika) and Diploma of Teaching, ECE?
2. How is assessment practice learned in their tertiary programme implemented by Samoan student teachers and recent graduates in early childhood centres, and supported by liaison and/or associate teachers?
3. How does the teaching of ECE assessment practice accommodate Samoan worldviews, and cultural values and practices?
4. How might the teaching of assessment for learning for Samoan children be improved, and how can teacher education related to assessment be reframed to accommodate Samoan worldviews, and cultural values and practices?

The research findings are now presented under the respective research question headings. All names are pseudonyms and any identifying information about individuals or early childhood centres has been disguised to protect identities. In direct quotes from participants, phrases in parentheses were originally spoken in the participant's first language, and have been translated into English.

### **How is assessment taught and learned in NZCA teacher-education programmes - the National Diploma of Teaching (ECE, Pasifika) and Diploma of Teaching, ECE?**

This question is explored and addressed in the Review of Teaching materials earlier on page 22 within the literature review and in a more thorough analysis on pages 50-52 of this report.

## **How is assessment practice learned in their tertiary programme implemented by Samoan student teachers and recent graduates in early childhood centres, and supported by liaison and/or associate teachers?**

This question formed the basis of our conversational interview with graduates and centre staff. Both diploma programmes and the degree programme offered by NZCA are field-based programmes and require enrolling students to be employed or volunteering at an early childhood service for 15–16 hours a week. Thus it was assumed that the participating graduate teachers had some experience and understanding of assessment practices within their centres. Furthermore both participating students had been involved in continuing professional development around the *Kei Tua o te Pae* assessment exemplars in their centres.

### *Graduate teacher interviews*

The two recent graduates who were interviewed as part of this study had been employed at their centres for a number of years prior to studying. Tasi, a New Zealand-born Samoan, was more confident in expressing herself in English but was also able to speak conversational Samoan, and had been employed in her Samoan centre for two years. The other graduate, Lua, was a Samoan-born woman who was a fluent speaker in Samoan. With less confidence in her English speaking, she chose to conduct her interview in the Samoan language. She had also been employed in her centre for five years prior to studying.

Another intention of this research study was to ascertain whether the graduate teachers' knowledge of assessment and the implementation of these assessment practices in their centres prior to their three years of study in NZCA's Pasifika programme had changed, or improved, as a result of their teacher education preparation.

Lua found using *Kei Tua o te Pae* difficult. She recalled that prior to training she had little understanding of *Kei Tua o te Pae* and of assessment in general. It was hard for her to even know the right questions to ask. She had written learning stories before training but said “e fai lava i le pogisa ... e le manino lou malamalama” (it was “done in the dark and with no clear understanding”). She added that before becoming ‘qualified’ she had little understanding around working with children’s parents. She now has had a huge shift in her thinking and understanding about the importance around these relationships and how building these relationships help in children’s learning. This was teased out more fully during the focus group interview with the rest of the staff. The supervisor recounted clear examples

of this particular graduate student role-modelling to parents how to successfully help their children with toileting.

In Lua's individual interview she was asked about her understanding of assessment in English. She translated the term into Samoan as "Iloiloga" and then used another Samoan word, "Sailiiliga", to reinforce the notion of assessment as searching and sorting. Speaking in Samoan, she said it was looking at the child's dispositions as in amio [behaviours] or aga [attitudes, inclinations], listening to the "parents' voice" and sharing with other teachers at staff meetings, talanoa ma fafa'asoaatu [discussing and sharing], then gathering these observations and making decisions on how to build on and develop these areas for children's learning.

Lua was asked if implementing assessment documents (such as learning stories) was easy for her to do. She responded by saying she was much more confident in using learning stories and writing in profile books but for her the issue was the time needed to do this work. She said that they were allocated non-contact time to do this work but stated it was not always easy to do because of what else is required during these time slots.

The other individual interview with Tasi was more straightforward and flowed more easily in English without having to translate and interpret what the interviewee was trying to explain. Tasi had some idea of learning stories before she began her training but did not quite understand all that assessment was about in terms of ECE language. Before her initial teacher education study, Tasi saw assessment very much like an evaluation or measure of a standard. She had been part of the professional development (PD) around *Kei Tua o te Pae* and was writing learning stories and could follow the translated template but with limited understanding. Tasi explains:

"I mean I could write a learning story by following the template but then didn't really have my head around it ... then 'cause we had to do it in Samoan that was hard for me ... I mean I can talk Samoan but my writing and interpreting English thoughts into Samoan is not easy."

After her three-year training, Tasi felt she was a lot more confident in writing learning stories and would do it in English and then get someone else to translate it in Samoan, but more and more she was finding it easier to write in Samoan.

What Tasi did find was that although learning stories were the assessment tool they used in their centre, most staff were resistant and did it out of obligation, and in particular because ERO may have reported this area as one that needed strengthening.

“I mean it was good when [facilitator] did our PD and we were all a lot more motivated then but when the PD stopped we kind of got slack again.”

Like Lua, she found that she had a far better understanding of what assessment was about and that *Kei Tua o te Pae* was one way that ECE centres could model their learning stories. That said, Lua found the booklets lacked real Samoan examples and none of them were written in Samoan. She had a clear understanding that assessment was significant learning of where the child’s development was up to but it was not a popular process and she could not say that she had totally embraced the practice.

“Well I do it as we are all given, like, children we have to write learning stories for and put in their profile books but you know it can be a real hassle ... I get given lots more learning stories to do 'cause some of the others that are not trained don't know how to do it and don't want to ... [there's] not enough time to do them sometimes and [it] stresses me out...” (Tasi)

Tasi also found it hard to maintain enthusiasm when going back to the centre. The centre staff did learning stories “all right” for profile books but many of the staff were quite negative about them. Most staff saw it as a nuisance taking up time and just another palagi (Western) requirement they had to do to get funding and continue to be licensed. Her colleagues in the focus group interview also raised this issue.

### **How does the teaching of ECE assessment practice accommodate Samoan worldviews, and cultural values and practices?**

Lua spoke about the cultural practices and values that are demonstrated and encouraged in her centre. She explained that they said the lotu [prayer] and learned to practice respectful protocols such as saying fa'amolemole [please], fa'afetai [thank you], and tulou [excuse me], with body and head lowered when walking in front of people and how to “nofo lelei ma fa'alogo lelei i le faiaoga” (“sit well and listen well to the teacher”).

Lua’s response to this research question was to assume that as these cultural values and practice were encouraged at the centre, accommodating Samoan worldviews would also be taken into account when assessment was undertaken. When asked specifically how she has included it in her learning stories, Lua talked about an incident she had observed of a child

comforting his sister after she had fallen over outside. She wrote about the little boy's "alofa ma le vaaia lelei o lona tuafafine" ("love and care for his sister").

Tasi did not feel that assessment practices really accommodated Samoan worldviews clearly enough and still saw it as a palagi requirement – but as teachers working in a Samoan centre and speaking Samoan it is there all around and therefore is included in the writing of learning stories.

"I kind of speak about different Samoan things like I have written about white Sunday and how different kids did their tauloto (memory verse), 'cause I go to the same church of course and am their Sunday school teacher ... is that what you mean?"  
(Tasi)

When asked her views for improving assessment practices to accommodate Samoan worldviews, Tasi was unsure but thought that it was a good idea to really look at the cultural values and practices that are important to Samoan people.

#### *Focus group interviews with early childhood centre staff*

The interviews were conducted bilingually as staff were invited to speak the language in which they could express themselves most confidently. People moved in and out of Samoan and English, as did the facilitator. The research assistant was unable to make this meeting due to work commitments.

The interviewer allowed the conversation to flow as much as possible. However, it was necessary to spend time explaining the process in more detail than in the individual interviews because of the participants' hesitancy around the research process, and in particular, to being taped. The interviewer reassured that there were no right or wrong answers and that the research objectives were all about trying to unravel any issues that Samoan centres might have around assessment processes. The participants were advised that the purpose was to identify how assessment practices were being implemented in the centre and if the staff that had recently graduated were able to put into practice some of the assessment learning they acquired during their initial teacher education.

The interview began with some direct questioning. For example, "what is your understanding of assessment?" There was a long silence with nobody volunteering any responses so the participating staff were asked if anyone knew the Samoan word for assessment. The word "iloilologa" [sorting] was offered by one staff member. Others then volunteered more words

such as “tusiga tala mo le aoaoina” [writing stories for learning], “suesuega” [research]. “Evaluation” was offered by one participant as “an explanation” and a discussion around translating palagi words and concepts ensued.

To solicit more detail, another question was posed: “So what do you think the purpose of assessing children and reporting it is all about?” This question resulted in answers ranging from: “to monitor children’s development” to “e iloa ai le level o le tamatiti” (“so we can know the level of where the child’s development is at”). Asked to provide an example for further clarification, this participant described (in Samoan) how they had observed two children of the same age (30 months) at the centre. She explained that one was able to speak well whereas the other child found it difficult to “string two or three words together and was hard to understand”. In response to how she gathered more information about the child of concern, the staff member explained that she talked with the child’s parents and other staff and spent time with the child, reading books and singing songs, as a way to observe the child’s responses. Another staff member further elaborated that as a team they were able to discuss this child and their observations of him over time. All agreed that he needed special attention so the centre rang the Ministry of Education/Special Education, which assessed the child in more depth and allocated a teacher aide.

The staff at this centre considered that while they had no allotted time to do learning stories they included them along with parent voices and staff observations as a means to assess children and build on their interests.

As the focus group interview progressed, the staff felt more confident to share their difficulties. A senior staff member shared openly some of her frustration with the whole area of assessment and the use of *Kei Tua o te Pae*. In a mixture of Samoan and English she commented:

“Well, for me it’s always been difficult ... we are still learning how to put it together step by step and getting continuity with the child’s learning ... [It’s] hard for me to understand learning dispositions, they’re learning the same thing ... I hardly write learning stories but I encourage the staff to write them ’cause when ERO visit they always ask us about our assessment and tell us ‘if no learning story, no planning’ but ... what’s the use for us ... when they go to school they will forget about us and we do the same thing for the next children coming ... what about some new dispositions?”

This participant went on to say that for her the preschool was established for the sole purpose of maintaining the Samoan language.

“Why keep on saying learning stories and English hard words. All we want to pursue is to talk in Samoan and talk about the culture, the heritage (child’s roots) and what is happening in Samoa so there should be a curriculum around the Samoan world for the preschool to focus on and for the child, for five years not assessing how he is developing ... that should be done in primary school ... We want to assess in the Samoan way which is we can observe, discuss among our Samoan teachers and write in our own philosophy, fa’asamoa ... (how we teach children) and the Ministry of Education to employ Samoan people who understand what we are trying to do and talk about here in our preschools because if children get a good grounding in Samoan language and culture, then when they get to primary it will not be forgotten. ... When ERO come they want it (all the information) in English so we struggle – as teachers we struggle.”

Another participant reflected on her experiences:

“I just started writing learning stories but it has been a real challenge because I’m the sort of person, someone who likes to know – you know be clear about what I am doing before I do anything so it’s taken me a whole year to write a learning story ... because there are so many things that children do and I am not sure what it is I should be writing so I kinda write little notes to myself and if I see that there is a pattern happening or it is something the child is interested in, then I start thinking maybe there is a learning story here.”

Another participant agreed and said it was similar for her. As they shared, they also agreed that as they have tentatively begun writing their learning stories the process has become clearer and clearer and they have also learnt how to recognise learning taking place for the child as they take part in activities or in their play.

In exploring what could be done to improve assessment in Samoan preschools, the senior staff member advocated that perhaps the Ministry of Education “give it over to Samoans to define it for themselves” and develop their own research into this area. She saw that this research project was maybe a first step towards Samoans beginning to define it for themselves, not only assessment but their own curriculum, fa’asamoa. Furthermore she suggested that these issues and perspectives to be taken to a National body such as Samoan Aoga Amata Society in Aotearoa (SAASIA) where they can progress the topics further.



The second focus group interview with staff in another Samoan ECE centre provided a very different perspective. These participants spoke of fewer difficulties in implementing assessment and using learning stories as a way to capture children's learning. However they reported complementing the learning stories with other ways of sharing assessment information with parents. The centre staff recalled the early days of engaging with *Kei Tua o te Pae*. The senior teacher, in particular, found it very challenging especially when trying to teach and implement the guidelines with unqualified staff. She explained:

“It was very painful for me and even harder as we had more unqualified staff and all the PD was in English and I had to then do it all again in Samoan. It just meant more work for me to find ways to deliver it to the staff. When [staff member] came as another PD facilitator for *Kei Tua o te Pae*, I felt I had time to breathe because she could deliver it all in the Samoan language and I said to her I just wanted the staff to do a lot of examples and practice writing them or they will not try it in the centre ... Once they started they got better at it and as they improved the stories had more depth and lots of beautiful descriptions – very creative and you know how we write ... yes, poetic ...”

An identified barrier was the limited time available for writing learning stories but the senior teacher explained that they allocate non-contact time to staff so they have space to write some to put up on the wall and to add to profile books. She said:

“Samoan parents are often rushing in and out of centres and spare little time to talk to teachers and look around but teachers try very hard to grab them and share with them what their child has done during the day ... so most of our assessment is oral so the more we talk to them the more they share with us with what's going on in the home ... We tell them of their child's routines in the centre so they can reinforce this learning at home.”

The senior teacher described excellent practice by their graduate teacher, Lua, in the under-two area with toilet training of toddlers. She hailed her success in this including the parents' “amazement at how she can get their child to do this at the centre”. Lua informs parents how she supports the children in their toileting routines and encourages parents to do the same at home. This skill alone was perceived to attract parents to talk to teachers. There were further reports of how Lua discussed learning dispositions with one parent and then encouraged the same disposition of perseverance in parents.

Staff discussed the importance of profile books as a way of capturing parent voices and the need to encourage parents to take their child's profile books home for adding their own observations and comments on their child's activities (as written about in the profile books). They acknowledged the risk of parents forgetting to bring them back for a long period of time, but nevertheless perceived the benefits to outweigh the risks.

Another example of this centre's assessment and documentation is when the child leaves to enrol at primary school. The senior teacher acknowledged responsibility for providing a summary of the child's development to take home as a record of the child's learning at the centre.

"I always begin it with photos of when they first begun preschool and so they have a visual and written record of their child's time with us. The parents love this and often are moved to tears. It's also emotional for us teachers as well, as we remember and reflect on the child's time with us."

Another staff member talked about assessment being like "a pine faamau [a badge of honour or acknowledgement] of the importance in ECE as it demonstrates the significance of what a child does and learns here". This centre also ran parent evenings as another way of sharing assessment with parents.

The researcher asked the senior teacher if she had observed Lua as a new graduate engaging with assessment processes and how useful she had been in implementing learning stories. The senior teacher talked for some time about how she considered Lua to be a real strength and an asset to the centre because of her strong grasp of the language and Samoan concepts. She praised the very strong relationships Lua had built with parents. Her learning stories were reported to be presented very creatively to the point where she challenged her jokingly about the effort she went to in her work. Lua responded about the importance of presenting the learning story in attractive ways to ensure it can "draw the eye of the reader". This was something the senior teacher had witnessed with some parents and she had learnt from this herself. She spoke of Lua's deep and meaningful writing skills in her learning stories and was very impressed and happy with her progress.

**How might the teaching of assessment for learning for Samoan children be improved, and how can teacher education related to assessment be reframed to accommodate Samoan worldviews, and cultural values and practices?**

While indirectly touched on in the previous conversational interviews, it was planned that the consultative group fono would respond to this question.

*Consultative group interview*

This was a more difficult group process to manage than envisioned, as it was a larger number of people to consider and prepare for than the centres' focus group interviews. A meal together before the discussion was considered appropriate due to participants coming straight from work and they were expected to be tired and hungry.

The group focus was also conducted in English, as the group comprised people of different ethnicities. The fono opened with an outline of how, why and when this project began, including the objectives around exploring the development of a more authentically safe Samoan framework to tease out the dispositions for learning in a New Zealand environment and to add dispositions that would support Samoan children's identity as a Samoan in Samoan environments.

A powerpoint presentation outlined the research journey and then focused on the building of a fale tele [big meeting house] as an analogy for looking at Samoan child development with the pou tu [the three central main posts] symbolising the three values that underpin our fa'asamoa [Samoan way].

After presenting the Pou Tu model, it was then put to the group to make any contributions or comments around other potential dispositions that people would like to encourage in Samoan children.

Responses were not as forthcoming as expected so the researcher expanded on the concepts and issues. When suggestions did come forward they were sometimes too broad to be labelled dispositions, such as self-esteem and language. Translating these initial suggestions into Samoan was also problematic as people interpreted the English word differently and according to their understanding. Therefore, if their interpretation of the English word was not quite accurate then the translation into Samoan would also be incorrect. It was agreed that a consistency in the translation of the English word or concept across the nation was important and it was suggested that this was another topic for

discussion at a later time and perhaps an issue that needed to be raised at the SAASIA fono.

Respect was suggested as a disposition as this was a very important characteristic that most agreed they wanted to encourage in children. Discussion ensued around respect and one participant stated:

“Respect is learnt when you role model it and treat everyone including young children with respect. If you expect a child to say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’, you as a teacher need to role model it rather than instruct children without using manners yourself ... how does one measure respect, how are we assessing or encouraging respect in children?”

All agreed on the importance of respect but rather than have it as a disposition there was a consensus that this word should be considered to be a value (as demonstrated in the Pou Tu model). When the concept was further teased out, a number of dispositions were considered to fall out of this value.

Another participant noted that the way palagi interpret a word is very different from how Pasifika people might interpret a word. She gave an example of the word ‘trust’. This viewpoint was reinforced by other participants when they spoke about interpretations of words and ascribing different meanings and approaches in teaching these concepts.

Although many of the participants appeared interested in the Pou Tu model by the way they nodded with agreement at the researcher’s explanations, the consultative meeting was not as successful as envisaged. It was difficult to get indepth responses from the participants who attended this fono. In hindsight, they should have been broken up into smaller groups to brainstorm the research question in more detail with a tape recorder assigned to each discussion group. However, despite the unmet expectations the voices of these participants elicited data that could be used in the development of the learning tool and their contributions inform the Samoan assessment framework.

### **Limitations of the study and further research**

This is a small-scale research study, and cannot be generalised to other early childhood settings. Nor can the findings be generalised to other teacher education programmes or to teacher education generally. However, a future study is planned that links projects undertaken in two distinct stages: first this Christchurch project, and later an Auckland

project. Each will have different research designs but connected research questions. The results from the Christchurch research will be shared with Auckland teacher educators of Pasifika students and will inform the second phase of the study. Data from Christchurch will be used to identify themes and key ideas to be further investigated across other centres in the Auckland phase of the research.

## Discussion and Conclusions

### **‘O le upega e fili i le po, ’ae talatala i le ao.’**

The net that became entangled in the night will be disentangled in the light of day.

*For a certain kind of night fishing the Samoans use a particular net called tapo. After the catch, the net is carried ashore and hung up. The following morning it is properly put in order.*

## Introduction

Taking the analogy of fishing for improved educational outcomes for Pasifika children, the above metaphor highlights the way in which this research has sought to untangle the metaphorical ‘net of assessment’ in the ‘sea’ of early childhood dominant discourses. By examining the way assessment is taught and implemented via teaching material and official documents, together with feedback from Pasifika educators in Pasifika ECE centres and in tertiary institutions, a morning light of understanding can identify knots that need unravelling and holes that need to be repaired. ‘Entanglement’ in worldviews that have little relevance to lived experiences of Pasifika students and their families make it all the more difficult to engage Pasifika and therefore improve the educational outcomes of the Pasifika students whom we as educators ‘fish’ for. This research proposes that the ‘morning’ has arrived.

As migrant peoples, Pasifika communities have had to engage with the education system in new ways. If we look at the education system that was imposed on island nations in days of colonisation, it was both teacher-directed and authoritarian in approach and in structure. Unfortunately, remnants of this colonial approach exist in Pasifika homelands and migrant families to New Zealand used to this approach now have to adapt again to a more participatory system where families are required to engage in partnership with schools. All this adaptation often is within a dominant discourse or Western worldview. This can be confusing to make sense of, particularly when Pasifika people are used to authoritarian structures. The need to find ways to ‘untangle’ or ‘unravel’ understanding around these issues is one of the aims of this research project.

Using an action research approach, the purpose of this study was to improve initial teacher education practice in tertiary education and practitioner knowledge in early childhood settings in regard to the assessment of young Samoan children’s learning and development. The narratives obtained from the case study centres and the fono recorded conversation

provide a rich source of information on how to assess Samoan children's learning from a Samoan worldview, rather than being disempowered by the influence of Western worldviews. This speaks to the outcome proposed for this project, that is, to develop an authentic cultural framework that might be used in assessing Samoan children not only in dispositions of learning that will help them throughout the compulsory sector but dispositions that will make them walk confidently as a Samoan in Aotearoa New Zealand. Developing this frame will be another tool that will be of use to teacher education as we continue to seek ways that make learning relevant, informative and alive to students of all ethnicities.

This next section now reconsiders the findings in response to the research questions.

### **How is assessment taught and learned in NZCA teacher education programmes?**

As stated earlier in the report, the teaching of assessment within the two programmes differs slightly, in that assessment is taught in the first year of the Diploma of Teaching. The teaching of assessment processes in the National Diploma of Teaching (ECE, Pasifika) programme is taught primarily in the third year although learning stories are introduced and used in the second year.

One of the reasons for studying assessment in the third year of the National Diploma (ECE, Pasifika) is that the unit standard in which assessment methods are assessed, is level 7, and all level 7 unit standards are assessed in the third year.

It can be argued that teaching assessment in the third year of the National Diploma (ECE, Pasifika) gives little time for students in the programme to become more familiar with assessment and all that it means. This potentially disadvantages the students, particularly given that the majority of these students are second language learners of English so unpacking terminology around assessment is even more complex. Furthermore, a Western perspective is the dominant lens through which assessment is examined in both diplomas, as written up in guidance notes for the lecturer.

Whilst there is room to explore a sociocultural discourse, other worldviews – such as Pasifika – need specific articulation. A simple definition of worldview is: “the way a people characteristically look outward upon the universe” (Redfield, 1953, as cited in Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009). In writing about working with Pasifika in mental health environments, Mila-Schaaf and Hudson (2009, pp. 11–12) state:

If we are to understand the beliefs, ideas and values that inform the behaviour and experiences of Pacific peoples that are relevant to mental health – then we have to understand the corresponding Pacific indigenous knowledge system from which these beliefs, ideas and values are derived from.

The same can equally be applied to education. Research agrees with *Te Whāriki* regarding the importance of a secure identity in a child's learning and development. Aboud and Doyle (cited in Bernal & Knight, 1993) argue that the importance of a child's ethnic identity needs to be reflected and appreciated in the school environment in order for them to “attain equal opportunity through to equal achievement” (p.47). Gorinski and Fraser (2006, p. 9) reinforce this point in their report to the Ministry of Education, when they warn of continued underachievement by minority students, unless the education system acknowledges the multi-ethnic composition of the student population.

Families from a culture other than that from which the underpinning values and understandings of an education originate may be disadvantaged within the system. As Harker and McConnochie (1985) note

Because the curriculum and teaching methods are not drawn from the ‘general culture’ but from the dominant culture, education cannot offer equality of access or opportunity ... social and ethnic differences will mean that only those from the dominant culture will have the ‘cultural capital’ necessary to benefit from the system ... minority students, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, remain potentially disadvantaged. (p. 50)

A successful approach that NZCA have used to mitigate this is the employment of Pasifika lecturers to deliver the programme. Whilst they are delivering a predominately Western perspective on assessment, their lived experiences as Pasifika people help to contextualise the topic. This is seen as a key to the successful retention of Pasifika students within our programmes. For example, most students in year three of the National Diploma (ECE, Pasifika) programme in Christchurch were Samoan, with the exception of one Māori student. The lead lecturer for all the modules was also of Samoan descent and therefore was able to use Pasifika pedagogy, and draw from lived experiences and Samoan language to unpack and break down palagi concepts. Furthermore, in acknowledging difficulties of second language learners, the National Diploma programme has an extra half day of class time per week to ensure delivery of full content, and to ensure intense learning support is embedded throughout tutorial sessions.



Findings of the present study and the development of a framework using a Samoan worldview to assist in the assessing of Samoan children, will inform and be included in papers that teach assessment processes within the new degree programme. This will further build on ways that teaching programmes at NZCA accommodate other authentic perspectives and diverse approaches to assessment practices that Pasifika students may relate to with more rigour and thus contribute to more robust assessment processes within Pasifika centres.

### **Samoan student teachers and recent graduates' assessment practices**

The interactive research process in the two centres and at the fono enhanced the lead researcher's understanding of assessing for better learning from a Samoan worldview. Most elements of Pasifika Talanoa (Fa'afoi et al., 2006) prevailed in facilitated teaching team discussions. For example, research language such as focus group interviews, qualitative, ecological, oral interactive) were readily understood through open-ended questions about the "what", "how", and "why" of assessment practices for young children (Kofoed, 2009) and there was a perception that this would help to shape improvement in teacher education for future students in NZCA programmes and for Pasifika ECE teachers.

Interviews with the two graduates highlighted growth in their understanding of learning stories. This was particularly true for Lua who stated that before her training she had no real understanding of learning stories and the value it had in assessing and improving on a child's learning. Since her training her confidence in writing learning stories had grown immeasurably. Her team leader in the group interview verified this. She also commented that Lua's ability to write deep and meaningful learning stories in ways that attracted parents' attention was great to see. She noted Lua's particular strength in engaging and building strong relationships with parents. In her individual interview, Lua showed particular insight into her shift in thinking around the importance of this relationship during her training. This fits in well with the hierarchy of purposes for reporting to parents framework developed by Kofoed (2009) and adopted in this research study. Findings from the present study support Kofoed's assertion that at the highest level the purpose should be to foster a learning partnership between home and centre, and that lower-level purposes for reporting include providing information about progress over time and about broad competencies.

### **Colonial influence on teaching and learning**

It is important to note that in NZCA teaching materials and documents (such as *Te Whāriki*), there is a strong emphasis on working with parents, and the fact that ECE educators work in

partnership with parents. Parents are a key influence on children's learning and this brings the whole notion of sociocultural theory to the fore.

Lua (being raised and schooled in Samoa) would have had little experience of parents being involved or consulted in such an embracing way. To understand Lua's pre-training archetypal position more fully, one has to look at the colonial education system as it was imposed on Pasifika nations. Puamau (2005, p. 24) contends:

Education systems in the Pacific region are manifestations of their colonial histories ... teaching and learning methods, administration and management models, and organisational cultures of schooling in the Pacific continue in hegemonic forms, usually closely resembling those of their former colonial 'masters.'

This has implications for lecturers of Pasifika students and Pasifika educators in Pasifika centres schooled in the Pasifika home nations, as there is often a need to deconstruct colonial hegemonic messages that view Western knowledge as more superior and to reconstruct teaching and learning knowledge and skills building on students own cultural knowledge and values first before introducing new ideas and concepts. Puamau (2005, p. 37) concurs: "Drawing on its cultural roots, Pacific education should grow strong and healthy while permitting the grafting of foreign or external elements without changing its identity".

Now, from a post-training vantage point, Lua values the knowledge that her training provided, not only in how to implement assessment processes, but to more clearly understand the value and importance of working closely with parents in assessment matters. She described the difference in her understanding (after her initial teacher education training) as a huge change and shift in her thinking.

### **Leadership influence**

Drawing from Lua's capacity to write meaningful learning stories, her team leader (who also had a good grasp on the learning story approach and understood the importance of assessment) was able to report her appreciation of Lua's skills and knowledge in this area. This is reflected in the interviews where Lua's team leader spoke about the difficulty she had in training her own mostly unqualified staff on implementing learning stories using *Kei Tua o te Pae* exemplars. Working with a qualified graduate teacher with a good understanding in implementing assessment processes, she has been refreshed and impressed with Lua's enthusiasm and approach. Due to her own understanding of assessment processes and their role in children's learning and development, she was able think about other ways of

implementing assessment and reporting or sharing children's progress with parents in a variety of ways and responded positively to Lua's ideas of attracting parent interest.

In contrast, for Tasi, the second case study graduate participant, implementing assessment practices such as learning stories were not so much difficult as "a hassle" due to limited time available to write them and the added responsibility for these often falling on her shoulders because unqualified staff did not know or want to know how to undertake assessment practices. Tasi also differed from Lua in that she had a team leader who still struggled with learning stories and the perceived palagi approach, ideas and language.

This team leader's resistance to perceived palagi concepts and ideas is not unusual in conversations with other Pasifika educators. It seems to arise from a limited understanding around assessment practices, which in turn, results in a level of frustration that makes it more difficult to see any value in assessment practices that are from a very Western perspective and in English. As she begins to honestly reflect on her difficulty in understanding *Kei Tua o te Pae*, she argues for a need to focus on what she considers is the primary objective of Samoan preschools. This team leader advocates for Samoan centres to:

"assess in the Samoan way which is we can observe, discuss among our Samoan teachers and write in our own philosophy, fa'asamoa ... (how we teach children) and (the Ministry of Education to employ Samoan people who understand what we are trying to do and talk about here in our preschools because if children get a good grounding in Samoan language and culture then when they get to primary it will not be forgotten) ... When ERO come they want it (all the information) in English so we struggle – as teachers we struggle."

The Education Review Office (2010, p. 12) states that:

Effective leadership is vital in high quality early childhood education. The role of well-qualified and experienced leaders in leading learning rather than just focusing on managing the day-to-day operation of the service is crucial to improving quality.

Clearly centre leaders influence how the team approaches and engages with assessment practices. However, it remains difficult to engage in meaningful ways with a tool or concept that is seen to be outside people's worldviews and hence their comfort zone.

When first identifying the difficulties in meaningful engagement with *Kei Tua o te Pae*, it was identified that key concepts, key words and their meanings often got 'lost in translation'. As with Tasi's team leader, other participants in the ECE network consultation fono also

identified that confusion often arose with 'hard words' that came with the learning of assessment processes. Words such as 'continuity', 'dispositions', and 'narratives' (i.e., specialised jargon) are more difficult to translate as there is no one word that correlates or gives the true meaning of these words and the context in which they are used. This raises complexities that bridging two languages often brings.

### **Accommodating Samoan worldviews in ECE assessment**

Again interviews highlighted differences in the approaches and levels of understanding, and frustration around assessment and its implementation in Samoan centres.

In one of the Samoan centres, assessment appears to be a normal part of their preschool processes and in fact they have learnt to implement it in a way that suits them. They are able to adapt it to their cultural worldview and have often highlighted this difference to palagi students on placement there from time to time. They appeared to have no trouble in articulating their assessment processes to ERO and the progress they have made in developing deeper and more meaningful learning stories that contribute to a child's learning. They do not feel the need to adhere to *Kei Tua o te Pae* as is written but adapt it for their own use.

As Lesley Rameka (2009) advises, Māori assessment does not have to parallel current early childhood assessment practices. She considers it is "all right to be different – in fact that difference was crucial in order for it to make sense to Māori" (ibid, p. 34). In other words, rather than the focus being "finding the right way to do assessment, it should be about finding our right way to do assessment" (ibid, p. 34). Rameka's Kaupapa Māori assessment concept can be adapted to the Samoan culture, where assessment should be about being Samoan in the early childhood assessment context and about "embedding these understandings within practice" (ibid, p. 36).

It is clear that one of the centres interviewed in this research project struggles with what it perceives as an assessment process that has little relevance in their own goal of prioritising the learning and teaching Samoan language and culture to Samoan young children. In their group interview, it was strongly advocated that if Samoan children are well grounded in their language and culture at the preschool level then the child will not forget it so easily when they are at primary school. However when the question was raised as to why they did not write their learning stories in Samoan the response was that some of their staff, being New Zealand-born cannot write learning stories in Samoan and may not be able to maintain the

level of the language needed to keep the centre as a fully immersed Samoan language centre. Furthermore, as has been noted, there is resentment and resistance in the perceived notion of having to implement and follow palagi concepts and processes such as exemplars in *Kei Tua o te Pae*, and *Te Whāriki* guidelines and some argue that this distracts them from their main philosophical objectives and forces them to operate from a worldview different to theirs.

This project unfortunately is limited in its capacity to fully explore these arguments. Future research is needed to explore these particular issues. Findings indicate that staff are questioning how assessment practices implemented in their centres can be adapted to meet their philosophical objectives and be done in such a way that they can make sense of it.

The last research question aims to facilitate better understanding of an assessment process that considers and incorporates the *fa'asamoa* [Samoan way] of viewing. This approach encourages a Samoan child to become strong in their culture and language and also in the development of their learning capabilities as a competent learner as they progress through the compulsory education sector. This is explored in the next section.

### **Improving the teaching of assessment for Samoan children**

Results of this study have highlighted the importance of culturally appropriate and culturally responsive assessment practices in early childhood. Similar to Rameka's (2009) study on kaupapa Māori assessment, the Samoan early childhood centres in this study viewed ECE assessment practices to be imposed on them and detached from their realities and culture. The study challenges assumptions around current assessment practices and therefore has implications for teaching practice and for teacher education in general. Most importantly, the study provides insights into the requirements of authentic assessment for young Samoan learners attending early childhood services in Aotearoa New Zealand.

One of the issues discussed in the ECE fono consultation is the notion that translation of key concepts and/or explanations are inconsistent and flawed with interpretations coming from different levels of competency and understanding. For instance, Carr (2001, p. 21) describes learning dispositions as "situated learning strategies plus motivation – participation repertoires from which a learner recognises, selects, edits, responds to, resists, searches for and constructs learning opportunities". This explanation in itself can be considered ambiguous, complex and difficult to decipher for the average centre educator, let alone those of another culture and language. It is also open to different interpretation or misinterpretation

unless the language is unpacked into more a more palatable form. Moreover, when confronted with academic language such as this, Pasifika people with English as a second language may often attribute it to their own learning inadequacies and hegemonic messages from the past. This may result in resistance and a reason to disengage with assessment processes.

As intimated in discussions with another Pasifika researcher, assessment needs to be clearly defined and explained in an appropriate way before exploring how it is then to be practised in Pasifika centres. It also needs to be understood and seen to be of benefit to Pasifika children.

The challenge is how to use our cultural values to convey the importance of assessment as a learning tool for not just the learner but for the educator as well. Before we do this we have to firstly name the values and then identify the attributes and dispositions that will orient the learner to develop those values within. The desired outcome is that the child will be strong and secure in their identity and with the skills and learning acquired in that process, will further develop other learning dispositions to become competent learners in all contexts.

### **Building the fale tele**

As a piece of artistic work exhibiting clearly the skill of the Samoan as a designer and builder the Samoan house is perhaps his outstanding example. Neatly designed, cleverly executed and admirably suited to the climate in which he lives it will be an unfortunate day for the Samoan when he adopts the European method of protecting himself from the elements. (Tuvale, 1918, p. 1)

This quotation symbolically resonates with the outputs of this research in designing a cultural frame in which assessment can be implemented in a way that is appropriately suited to the context in which a Samoan child is raised. Examining the construction of the fale tele [meeting house] allows us to visualise the development of the Samoan child and the things Samoans value and aspire to weave into the hearts and minds of their tamaiti [children].

Before the building of a fale tele can begin, there a few tasks that need to be completed. First, a tulaga fale [a place to stand] needs to be identified. It is therefore assumed much discussion and consultation with family and the village needs to take place. This may need time and space as consensus is always the way that most decisions are arrived at within fa'asamoa. This can be likened to the amount of time spent discussing this research project

with a range of people including students, teachers at Pasifika centres, Pasifika parents, Pasifika academics from other tertiary institutions, Pasifika staff at the Ministry of Education, Pasifika PD facilitators, Pasifika staff at NZCA, other colleagues at NZCA, friends, and family members. As a Pasifika researcher leading this research project, collaborative conversations are indicative of the collective voice embedded in our philosophical outlook.

Another task that must be completed before construction begins is the preparation of the site by the family. This may include the need to build up the site with lava, coral, sand or stone as the case may be to ensure the pou tu [three posts] can be positioned and erected with confidence (Tuvale, 1918). This can be likened to the role that a family plays in preparing a good foundation is in place for their child to grow to its potential. In this context and environment lava, coral, stone or sand are the building materials useful in this part of the process. For Samoan families here in Aotearoa, it is significant for teachers and parents to remember the materials they use in building a foundation should be appropriate for the context or environment in which their child will develop and grow in.

## **The Pou Tu model**

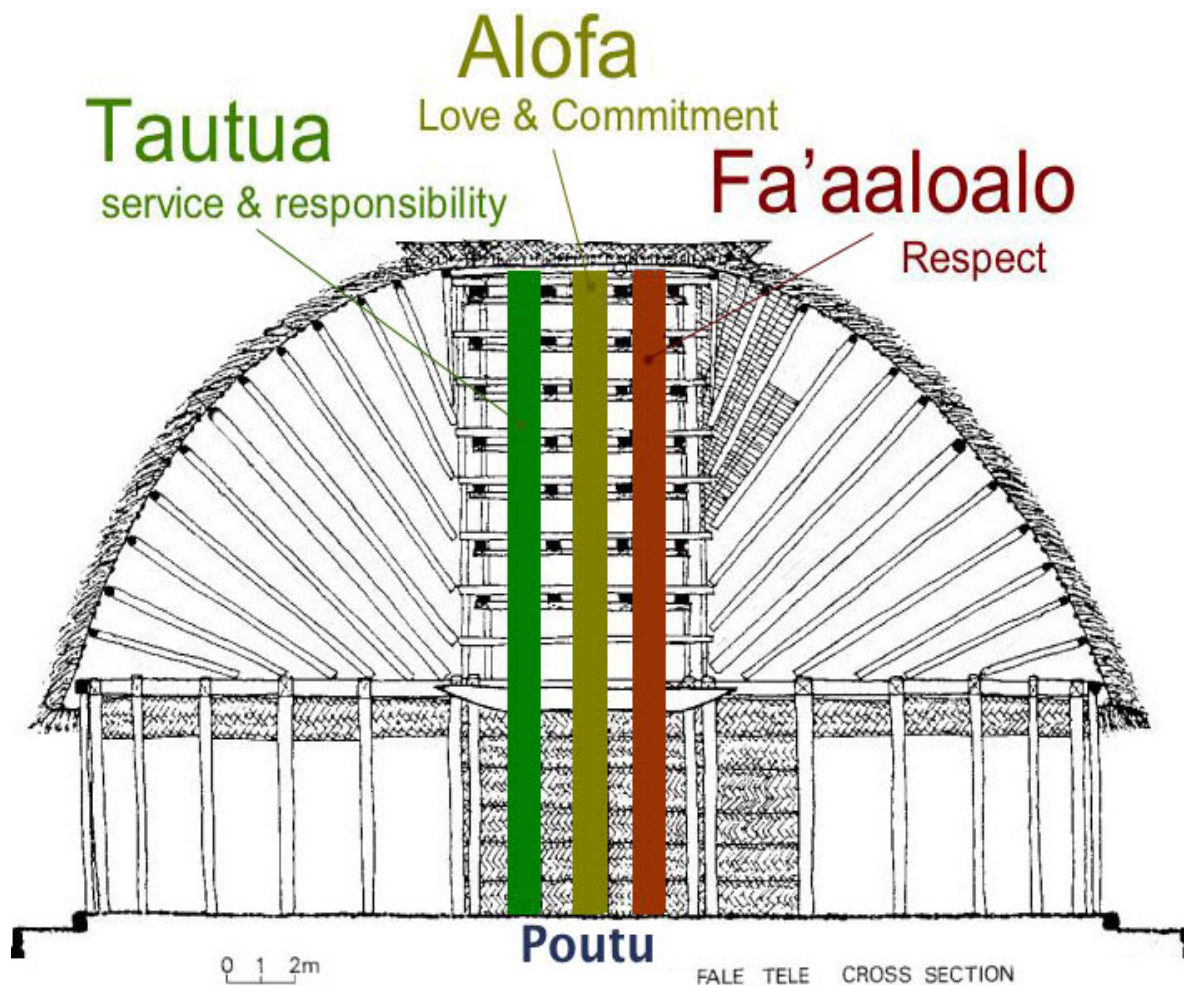


Figure 1:

(Adapted from Wendt Samu 2005, based on UNESCO The Samoan Fale 1992 pg. 46-47 as cited in Podmore,V; with T. Wendt Samu and the A’oga Fa’a Samoa 2006 pg 49)

Many Pasifika models are now being utilised to express and present Pasifika perspectives. The Pou Tu is one model that suits our purposes. It provides a guiding ‘map’ for our research journey, as it did for Podmore’s (2006) research. This study also intends to highlight how the building of the fale tele provides a way to look through a Samoan lens and explore a way of assessing our Samoan children in a more authentic and appropriate frame.

Tuvale (1918) states the main supporting posts of the fale are erected first and usually consists of three posts – the pou tu. This structure is of great significance as it carries the bulk of the weight of the vaulted roof.

Raising the *poutu* is like the laying of a cornerstone of a significant European-style building, for example a church or cathedral. This is such a key part of the *fale* construction that a feast is held to mark the event. (Wendt Samu & Pitama, 2007, pp. 26–27)



The pou tu in this research is used as a metaphor to symbolise the values that underpin fa'asamoa.

There have been recent debates and discussions that attempt to define fa'asamoa but for the purposes of this project, Tui Atua's description is preferred. He describes fa'asamoa as:

a body of custom and usage. It is a mental attitude to God, to fellow men and his surroundings. It is a distinctive lifestyle. It is not the physical make-up, the mood or passion of one man. It is a collection of spiritual and cultural values that motivates people ... It is the heritage of people. (Cited in Field, 1984, p. 20, and Siauane, 2006, p. 20).

Looking at the three main posts as a metaphor, and as shown in Figure 1 & 2, the middle post symbolises Alofa (love and commitment). This can be explained as the motivating factor behind all we do. In this instance, the alofa we hold for our children or students needs to be at the centre of our practice. A love and commitment to learning is also essential as we need teachers who are teachable, and thinkers who are constantly alert to those 'teachable moments'. We need to learn to reflect on how we can improve strategies, methods, and approaches to get effective learning outcomes. If we do not have a genuine love and commitment for children and for teaching and learning then we need to consider why we are in this profession.

Goldstein (1997) concurs with these explicitly articulated notions of love within teaching, stating:

teacherly love arises when a belief in the value of love in education and a deliberate decision to love students combine with a passion for teaching: and it grows as a result of the intimacy that occurs in the life of a loving classroom. (p. 152)

For Samoans, alofa is not seen as a vague notion that is mushy, subjective and entirely personal, but, as the word bracketed with it in the pou tu – commitment – implies, is more about an attitude of action, encapsulating compassion and care. It would seem with the increasing professionalism of early childhood that the word love, though implied in *Te Whāriki*, is no longer explicitly named but reframed to be more acceptable in academic and policy discourse (Hughes, 2010). For most Pasifika cultures, including Māori, alofa, ofa, aroha, aloha – love – is seen as an essential value that underpins and directs actions, and explicitly articulating this important value is not considered problematic.

True alofa to children and students is hence actioned in the Tautua, the second post and symbolises the service and responsibilities we carry as teachers and members of a teaching team. In serving them well as teachers, we are also role-modelling excellence that we aspire to see in them. In imbedding the cultural values in the teaching and learning of Samoan children we can expect that they will in turn serve their Samoan community.

The third post is viewed as Fa'aaloalo (respect and dignity). It depicts the way we carry out our service and demonstrates Pasifika pedagogy of care in relationships. Silipa (2008, p. 12) explains further:

Fa'aaloalo can mean respect, reverence, courtesy and politeness, and is the core of tū ma aga fa'atamāli'i (the traditional characterisation of nobility) which is deemed to be the accepted behaviour pattern ... Furthermore fa'aaloalo requires a person to respect the space between others and him/her.

The way teachers carry out service has a huge influence in how children and families respond and engage with them. For Samoans this is crucial as good and proper relationships form the basis of social and collective cohesion. Taking care of the spaces in between (teu le va) holds special significance because when spaces in between are not acknowledged or considered, relationships break down as does collective cohesion. The three are intertwined, symbolising the fatu manava [heart breath] or core values that lay at the heart of fa'asamoa (Agafili Tuitolova'a, 2008).

This study builds on the Pou Tu model further by examining other aspects of the building of a Fale Tele, utilising these aspects as metaphorical symbols in making sense of the ways we can assess Samoan children's learning by aligning it to what is valued learning from a Samoan perspective. As the model unfolds the valued learning is not that different from what Carr argues as powerful learning as commented on in the literature review in this report (pg. 14). From these three core values symbolised as the Pou Tu, Samoan dispositions can be extracted. Dispositions are often hard to define, given the many interpretations ascribed to them. Attributes in whole or part, have been variously called dispositions (Katz, 1993; Perkins et al., 1993), orientations (Dweck, 1999), habits of mind (Costa, 2000), and participation repertoires (Carr, 2001; Comber, 2000). Most definitions have particularly highlighted the importance of 'inclinations', though the concept has proved "hard to pin down" (Perkins et al., 1993, p. 18) with the degree of clarity (Claxton & Carr, 2004). Rather than trying to interpret or translate these learning dispositions in a way that can be understood from a Samoan perspective, it appears to be far more productive to simply identify the learning that is valued by Samoan families and communities and the aspirations

that they have for their children. These can then be included in the assessing of Samoan children. Furthermore, when identifying these specific attributes, behaviour or inclinations, it is easy to see that many of them resonate and indeed parallel learning dispositions identified by Carr.

### Fausiga o le Fale Tele (Building the Fale Tele model)

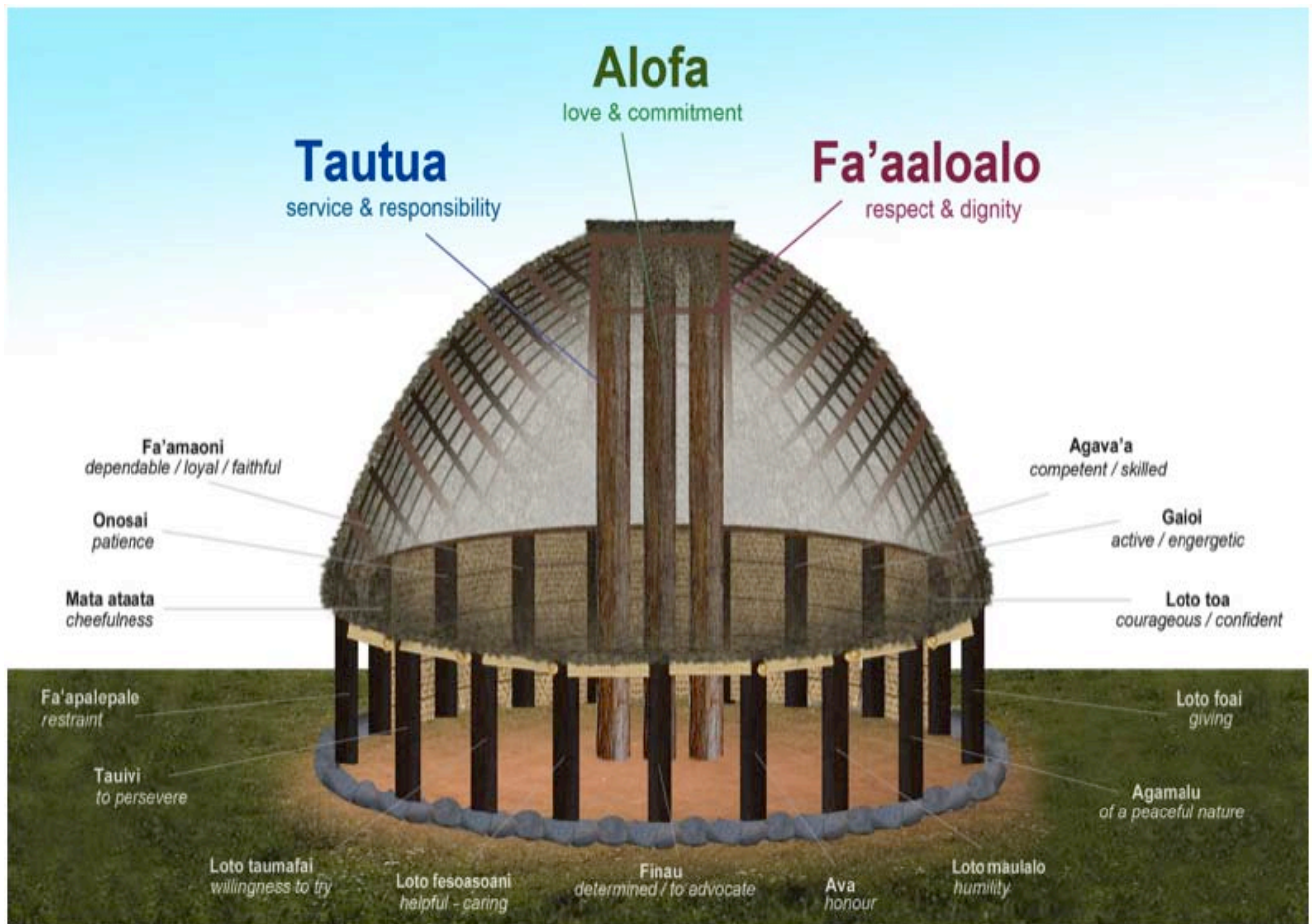


Figure 2: Fale Tele

Samoan culture places emphasis on family and interdependence between individuals. Socio-centric in nature, Samoans consider the good of the collective before the needs of the individual, and a strong sense of duty and responsibility is acculturated from a young age (Grattan, 1985; Lui, 2004; Luafutu-Simpson, 2006). When we begin to unpack the values of alofa, tautua and fa'aaloalo, attributes encouraged in traditionally raised Samoan children emerge and can be identified as:

- fa'amaoni [dependable / loyal /faithful]
- onosai [patience]
- mata ataata [cheerfulness]

- fa'apalepale [restraint]
- tauivi [to persevere]
- loto taumafai [willingness to try]
- loto fesoasoani [helpful – caring]
- finau [determined/to advocate]
- ava [honour]
- loto maulalo [humility]
- agamalu [of a peaceful nature]
- loto foai [giving]
- loto toa [courageous/confident]
- mataatata [cheerful]
- gaioi [active, energetic]
- agava'a [competent, skilled]
- faamalosi [empowerment]

This is not an exhaustive list and can be added to as teachers see fit. Attributes and behaviours such as listed are valued by Samoans as many of these contribute to the wellbeing of the collective whole. Many of these attributes align with some of the dispositions identified by Carr (2004) as important to encourage in children's learning, however, what this study proposes is that dispositions for Samoan children need to be appended to something that is valued and meaningful for Samoans.

We can view these attributes as the other supporting posts that are erected around the perimeter of the fale tele (see figure 2). The vaulted roof of the fale tele is attached to the three central posts. The vaulted roof is built in sections and the whole sits on and hangs as a dome from the interior posts. The outer posts are added later and are used as much to steady the roof and hold it down as to hold it up. These outer poles have an important role in lending support to the central poles (Tuvale, 1918; Grattan, 1985). These posts provide divisions for the hanging of pola [woven blinds] that give protection from rain, shade from the sun, and privacy when required. It also adds to the aesthetic beauty and symmetry of the fale (Grattan, 1985). We can make parallels with attributes contributing and strengthening the core values and the behaviours we want to encourage in our Samoan children.

The roof is symbolic of the cultural and spiritual dimension that a Samoan child is born into. Furthermore, the braiding of the afa [sennit] into a three-strand plait is significant in that it is used to bind the posts and beams together. Afa is made from the husk of certain varieties of coconuts with long fibres. The fibres are dried and made into sennit by plaiting, a task

usually done by elderly men, and performed at their leisure. Sitting cross-legged, the elderly men roll these dried fibre strands by hand against their bare thigh until heavier strands are formed. These long thin strands are then woven together into long three-ply plaits in lengths. Making enough lengths of afa for an entire house can take months of work (Grattan, 1985). The making of the afa parallels the role that the elderly have in the binding of cultural and spiritual elements into a child's life. The blinds, mats and roof thatch woven by the women provide shelter, floor coverings, shade and privacy, significant elements in the role of the nurturer and the care that women play in a child's life.

The inside space of the fale tele is also of significance, shaped as it is with dialogue in mind. Speakers can be seen from all points, denoting transparency in debate and discussions. The space is structured with special designated places or posts where certain matai [chiefs] sit (Grattan, 1985). In this view, Samoan life is multidimensional and all space inside, outside, upwards and downwards of the fale is considered sacred. An orator may often be heard saying as part of his speech when a fale tele is used for a special meeting, 'ua paia fafo, ua paia fale, ua paia luga, ua paia lalo' ("Outside is sacred, inside is sacred, above is sacred and below is sacred"), thus acknowledging all parts of the house as valued. Just as when we work with children we need to value all parts of a child's holistic being (Ministry of Education, 1996a).

The building of the fale tele can be seen as a conceptual framework in which we can view Samoan children and reflect on our own teaching and learning. Are we as Samoan educators reflecting the values we wish to see in Samoan children? What is our motive behind our service to Samoan children and their families? How do you think they see our service? Is it a service that demonstrates love and commitment? Do we model respectful engagement with our children and their parents? Is it important to us as Samoan educators to teach Samoan children the values of our culture? Why? These are questions that we as educators need to reflect on and consider.

When assessing Samoan children using the fale tele model, we can identify specific dispositions, attributes or characteristics, as named on the surrounding pou or posts that support the three central posts (Pou Tu). Hence the three main cultural values are demonstrated in specific ways. As Samoan educators we should not only look for (noticing, recognising and responding), those dispositions that are building blocks for learning but also the attributes and characteristics that contribute to Samoan children's confidence in their own identity, enabling them to participate effectively in their own cultural world as well as in the world of the palagi.

If we look at a completed fale tele – the aesthetic symmetry is a work of art and full of rich meaning. It is also, sadly, a dying art. Economically efficient materials and resources are substituting traditional materials and craftsmanship. This is also mirrored in our traditional early childhood experiences. A collective response in caring for a child was a village response. In the past, it took the work of a village to raise a fale tele, as it did to raise a child. We now live in cities where fences divide. The role of grandparents has changed as the monetary system we live in dictates the space and time available to contribute to the development of our grandchildren. As Tui Atua Tamasese Tupua Efi (2003) articulates:

How can you explain the importance of rituals to passing cultural knowledge, values, language, hopes and dreams from one generation to the next? How can you explain to future generations the meaningful role of the elderly in our society and that our culture is premised on gaining quality or meaningful time between the young and old ... In finding balance and in sharing life and love we have to breathe life into our collective responsibilities.(p. 12)

There in lies the challenge for us as educators. Pasifika ECE centres are vital to the ongoing development of identity, language and culture. Where else can Samoan children hear the fagogo [fairytales], legends, songs, poetry and stories of Samoa? For many of our young children who do not have access to a grandparent or even a parent with the time or the knowledge to pass on all that Tui Atua speaks of, Pasifika ECE centres and Pasifika teachers are the modern day surrogates and remain pivotal to maintaining and regenerating culture and language. Assessment of these significant components in a child's life is important and should be embedded within the centres curriculum and day to day activities and therefore it is only logical that a culturally appropriate frame is used to do this.

Fale are now built with hammer and nails and more often than not a corrugated iron roof is now the economic preference. Mats woven from the pandanus plant are being replaced with cheaper and more accessible plastic mats from Taiwan. This is the result of what some may say is progress. It is inevitable that culture does change and, like the changing materials, we also need to change with the times and adapt to the new landscape for Samoan children and their families living in Aotearoa New Zealand. We need to embrace aspects of learning and teaching that will benefit Samoan children. Values can remain, just as the structure and shape of the fale tele remain, but different approaches and methods are needed to be embraced for Samoan children to reach their full potential.

One final note. When malaga [visitors] arrive in a village they are formally welcomed by matai of the village in a fale tele and a kava ceremony takes place. Once this is completed and reciprocal gifts are exchanged, the visitors are accepted into the village. This process can be used as an analogy to the acquiring of new knowledge from outside a Samoan worldview.

As with the welcoming of visitors, perhaps new knowledge is embraced more readily by Samoans if it is on their own terms. Acknowledging and building on their own traditions and belief systems makes it more relevant and acceptable to the Samoan learner, whatever their age. The argument here is if assessment tools and exemplars such as *Kei Tua o Te Pae* are not introduced to Pasifika communities in a culturally appropriate way but are imposed as mandatory compliance practices then we should not be surprised if engagement with this 'new knowledge' is not always warmly received or accepted.

Having a cultural framework such as the construction of the Samoan fale tele allows Samoan educators to consider and encourage the learning that is valuable from a Samoan view. The same cultural framework should also be flexible enough to accommodate new learning, just as the fale tele in contemporary times have accommodated Western materials. This is an indication of our Pasifika communities need to be cognisant of the new and changing landscape our children are growing up in. Tui Atua (2003, p. 12) states:

We constantly need to search for meaning, nuance and metaphor to find substance and establish context in our dialogue with our ancestors, with ourselves and with other cultures. In this process we need to recognise that change and pluralism are part of life. A living culture cannot be sustained by ritual or measure that is divorced from the modern contemporary context.

## **Conclusion**

For assessment to be authentic, it needs to be characterised by shared values and expectations that start from the worldview and culture of the child. One of the outcomes of this study was to enhance the educational performance of initial teacher education providers, to improve student teachers' formative assessment practices, to make Pasifika early childhood education more intentional in its learning focus and graduating teachers better able to extend Pasifika children's learning and development. This outcome is well aligned to the government's priorities for tertiary education, which include assisting Pasifika people to achieve at higher levels and to improve the educational performance of tertiary providers.

A government priority is to improve the participation of Pasifika children in quality ECE services. Knowledge and understanding of appropriate assessment methods are fundamental to quality service provision. Findings of this study affirm through the analysis of teaching materials that Pasifika tertiary learners at NZCA do get taught how to value, implement and document assessment. As one of the Pasifika graduates has inferred, her level of understanding around the value of assessment has improved immeasurably. This has also been the case of the other Pasifika graduate interviewed. However the point of difference for these two graduates has been the way in which their 'new knowledge and understanding of assessment' has been received and responded to by other Pasifika staff and leaders in their centres. This study argues that if we learn to embrace other world views such as in this case a Samoan frame, the learning will be enhanced and all the more relevant for our diverse communities.

#### *Recommendation 1*

This report proposes that policies around contracting and developing professional practice for Pasifika centres in terms of new assessment tools or new ECE recommendations for licensed centres, consider the importance of culturally appropriate pedagogy and the cultural competence of trainers in the delivery. To get quality outcomes quality resources in all areas must be a given.

#### *Recommendation 2*

That the Fale Tele model developed through this research be presented and discussed at staff hui so that lecturers at NZCA are better able to engage and deliver to students throughout NZCA's degree programme. Additionally it is proposed that this research and its model be disseminated to Pasifika lecturers in other institutions for their consideration and use.

#### *Recommendation 3*

That there be some effective leadership training with Pasifika centre leaders as well as at management and governance levels around assessment. A culturally appropriate model such as the Fale Tele model is needed to challenge and engage leaders' thinking around the value of assessment and the various ways of applied practice. If Pasifika centre supervisors, management and governance boards can clearly understand the significance and value of assessment, they will also see how new knowledge can be utilised within a Pasifika frame for the benefit of Pasifika children. They should then be able to effectively support staff and the implementation of quality practice in the centres.



Samoan ECE centres struggling with complicated 'Palagi' concepts and technical ECE 'speak', should be better able to relate and practice authentic assessment of Samoan children if their hearts are engaged as much as their minds. Drawing from and building on their own understanding and cultural knowledge of child development is a more empowering place to negotiate new ways of learning in new contexts.

Improving student teachers' formative assessment practices will influence practice in the centres where they work. Development of an authentic Samoan assessment framework for use by early childhood teacher educators and teachers has significance for the early childhood sector because it has the potential to achieve the best possible educational outcomes for Pasifika children, and in particular young Samoan children, the eventual beneficiaries of this research.

Ia Manuia.

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