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Action Research at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa**

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**RESEARCH REPORT ON ACTION RESEARCH
AT THE A'OGA FA'A SAMOA**

**Progress Report for the Ministry of Education
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Introduction

Aims

This project investigates the relationship between learning and language continuity as children and educators at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa (the Pasifika early childhood education centre of innovation) make transitions from the point of entry through to beginning school. A related intention is to document aspects of the identity, strength, and confidence of the children.

Research Questions

The project focuses on two key research questions:

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

The research is designed to address the above research questions, within the context of the A’oga Fa’a Samoa and its community, and for the benefit of its community. The sampling design includes children at two transition points and the staff at the centre. The transition points are (1) the move at around 2 years 6 months from the infants’ and toddlers’ area to the over-2s area and (2) the transition from the A’oga Fa’a Samoa to the primary school on the adjacent site.

An action research project was designed to address the research questions. Collaborative, active involvement of key staff members is a key feature of this action research.

This report summarises progress, focusing on analyses of data (from focus group interviews, teacher diaries, and transition observations) collected as part of the two fully completed spirals of the action research.

Summary Literature Review

Literature retrieved for this project focuses on: the development of the A'oga Amata in New Zealand (Ete, 1993; Taouma, 1992), children's transition from Pacific early childhood centres to school (Podmore, Sauvao, & Mapa, 2001a, 2001b; Sauvao, Mapa, & Podmore, 2000), quality and innovation, participatory action research, and Pacific research methodologies (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu & Finau, 2001; Podmore, Wendt-Samu, & Taouma, 2003).

Excerpts from a brief summary literature review were included as part of two collaborative papers presented by the centre and researcher at the NZARE/AARE conference in Auckland in December 2003 (Podmore, Wendt-Samu, & Taouma, 2003), and in a further paper to an international conference_the European Early Childhood Education Research Association Conference in Malta in September 2004 (Podmore, 2004).

Quality and Innovation

Quality innovations and effective learning and teaching practices are central concerns of contemporary early childhood research and practice (Meade, 2003, October; Pascal, 1993, 2002; Whalley & Whitaker, 2003). The success of both the British "centres of excellence" and the New Zealand early childhood education "centres of innovation" programmes appears dependent, to some extent, on centres' support, leadership, collaborative research, and related continuing professional development. As Whalley and Whitaker (2003, p.6) note with regard to the British centres of excellence: "The rapid expansion and development of Integrated Services for Children and Families has created a huge demand for training and support for those Early Years Practitioners appointed to lead new services".

Pacific Early Childhood Centres

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

children's Pacific languages and cultural heritages. Many of the Pacific early childhood education centres were supported initially by churches and housed in church halls and church buildings (Ete, 1993). During the late 1990s, becoming licensed and chartered was identified as a major challenge for Pacific early childhood centres (Mara, 1998).

When it opened in Auckland in 1984, the A'oga Fa'a Samoa was the first early childhood early childhood centre focused on Samoan-language immersion (Taouma, 1992). During its early years of operation, the centre was located at the Pacific Island Resource Centre in Herne Bay, Auckland. In 1989 the A'oga Fa'a Samoa was relocated on to a site in the grounds of Richmond Road School, where a bilingual Samoan unit operates at primary-school level. In 1990, this same centre became New Zealand's first licensed and chartered Pacific early childhood centre. In 2003, the A'oga Fa'a Samoa was selected as one of the 6 initial early childhood education centres of innovation (Taouma, Wendt-Samu, Podmore, Tapusoa, & Moananu, 2003).

Transitions from Pacific Early Childhood Centres

A few recent studies have investigated children's transition to school from Pacific early childhood education centres (MacDonald, McNaughton, Tamarua Turoa, & Phillips, 1999; Sauvao, Mapa, & Podmore, 2000), and recent related writing has influenced the development of this research (e.g., McNaughton, 1998; Podmore & Sauvao, 2003). Findings on transition tend to emphasise that, when young children move from one educational setting to another, it is important to understand the cultural context of their prior experiences, "given that children's culture-specific experiences, and their development of language and literacy skills, are interconnected" (Podmore & Sauvao, 2003, p. 35).

Sauvao, Mapa, and Podmore's (2000) study of transition to school from Pacific Islands early childhood centres focused on children's experiences, including language and culture-specific experiences that support the development of language and literacy skills, as they moved from Pacific Islands early childhood centres into English-language primary schools. Five research questions on children's transition from Pacific early childhood centres to schools were investigated: "(1) What are the similarities and differences between the contexts of home, school, and early childhood settings? (2) What are the aspirations, expectations, and views of parents, teachers,

and children of these contexts? (3) How well do children make the transition between the contexts? (4) How can the information collected in (the) study assist teachers and parents to facilitate transition across the three contexts? How do schools continue to assist and support the home languages and cultures of Pacific Islands children starting primary school? (5) What is the language policy of the school (as stated in the charter)?” (Podmore, Sauvao, & Mapa, 2001a, p. 75).

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

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

Following on from that work, the present research at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa addresses in further depth the issue of continuity of Samoan language and cultural experiences as children move from a Samoan-language immersion centre to a bi-lingual unit in a primary school.

Collaborative, Participatory Action Research

Findings of literature reviews show important interconnections between quality early childhood education and reflective teacher practice (Podmore & Meade, with

Kerslake Hendricks, 2000), and between effective professional development, “enhanced pedagogy”, and children’s learning (Mitchell & Cubey, 2003). Further, there is clear evidence of support for the appropriateness of action research to evaluate and document innovations and practices in early childhood education (Smith, Grima, Gaffney, Powell, Masse, & Barnett, 2000, p. 124).

It is appropriate in view of the above findings that educators and research associates at all of the initial six centres of innovation are using action research approaches to evaluate their practice. As Cardno (2003, p. 7) points out, *classroom action research* is typically qualitative, interpretive, and practical, and “involves teachers holding discussions (often with academics acting as facilitators and advocates of “teacher knowledge” rather than theory).

The present project team proposes that early childhood education “classroom action research” may also incorporate the values of *participatory action research*. *Participatory action research* tends to be strongly associated with liberation and emancipation (Atweh, Kemmis, & Weeks, 1998; McTaggart, 1991; Stringer, 1999). Stringer (1999, pp. 9-10), for example, views action research as a process of inquiry that is “democratic” in that it promotes participation of all people; “equitable” in its valuing of people; “liberating” and “life enhancing” by its facilitating people to express their full potential.

McTaggart (1989, 1991) describes “16 tenets of participatory action research”, which accentuate the collaborative, participatory, self-critical, and cyclical aspects of action research. Some additional key points are evident in Borgia and Schuler’s (1996), “five Cs” of action research applicable in early childhood contexts: commitment, collaboration, concern, consideration, and change.

Aspects of McTaggart’s tenets and of the “five C’s” have been evident during the process of the action research at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa. This is explained further in the following discussion of the action research processes implemented at the centre, and the findings to date.

Action Research Processes

Action Research Cycles

At the A'oga Fa'a Samoa, the Samoan-language immersion centre of innovation, action research approaches are similar to those used recently in New Zealand studies, to implement an action research spiral approach (Cardno, 2003; Carr, May, & Podmore, 2002). The spiral approach includes observing, planning, acting and reflecting (following a model derived from Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, and with reference to Cardno, 2003, and Wadsworth, 1991).

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

Ethics, Participatory Approaches, and Pacific Methodologies

The research is carried out in accordance with the Ethical Guidelines of the New Zealand Association for Research in Education (1999). Specific attention is being paid to general principles, cultural appropriateness, consent, confidentiality, and responsive feedback. Procedures have been developed and appraised for cultural appropriateness, with regard for Pacific methodologies.

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

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

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

Centre educators have observed the group of children for whom they are the "primary caregiver" (that is, the group of children with whom they make the transition) and have prepared learning stories (Carr, 2001). In addition, as a central part of the action research, key educators have tracked small groups of children as they make these transitions:

- the move at around 2 years 6 months from the infants' and toddlers' area to the over-2s area;
- transition from the Samoan-language early childhood centre to the primary school on the adjacent site.

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

Action Research Tools

Focus Group Interviews

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

The advisory group serves as a focus group, and in-depth focus group interviews were organised for the key informants. The group includes a facilitator, 3 teachers (including 1 from the primary school on site), 2 researchers, 1 representative from centre management, 2 parents, the centre manager, and a centre support person. Topics discussed in the focus groups have included (1) aspects of language learning and (2) successful experiences of children’s transition. A copy of the key questions for the focus groups is presented as Appendix A.

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

The voices of parents of the participating children (that is, the groups of children making transitions) will be included more extensively now that the team have reflected on the processes and findings of the first two spirals of the action research. Parents of participating children were invited to a focus group meeting held on 11 August 2004. Another parent focus group meeting is planned for 11 October 2004.

Critical Incidents Study

A critical incidents study with the focus group participants, carried out by Dr Airini, is summarized in the results section of this report under the heading: “*Critical incidents research summary: What helps effective transition in Early Childhood Education: Perceptions of good practice in Samoan ECE*”.

Observations

All teachers have observed individual children, and small groups of children, as they make transitions (together with their “A’oga Fa’a Samoa primary caregiver”) within or from the early childhood centre. Centre teachers who have a key role in the COI research have systematically coded their observations of both children’s and teachers’ interactions across the strands of *Te Wh_riki* (Ministry of Education, 1996).

The intention is to record and reflect on examples of practices which teachers found to be facilitating transition, and/or encouraging children’s Samoan language learning and development. During the research spirals, other staff members also continued their regular practice of writing learning stories about children, and these are a further rich source of data.

Diary Records

Alongside their observations, teachers who have a key role in the COI research have made diary records across the five strands of *Te Wh_riki*, the early childhood curriculum: belonging, well-being, communication, exploration, and contribution. The intention was to reflect, both on children’s experiences of transition, and on teachers’ practices, holistically across the strands of *Te Wh_riki*. Details of the diary headings are presented as Appendix B. The information recorded includes useful examples of teachers fostering children’s sense of belonging, together with their well-being and exploration in the new space, and of teachers encouraging communication in Samoan. There are also examples, during transition, of contribution (children’s looking after others arriving).

Interviews with Children

Teachers who have a key role in the COI research team have also made audio records of children talking about their transitions. A set of suggested questions was compiled for educators to ask the children (in the Samoan language). The questions at transition

points, for example, are “*What are you looking forward to (doing) at school?*”, “*What do you like about school?*” or (before and after the child moves across to the over 2s area within the centre “*What do like best at....(the centre)?*” (see Appendix C).

These interviews were prepared prior to the first cycle of the action research, and trialled with some of the children during that cycle. However, it became apparent at that stage that the range of data collection tasks was probably too diverse and demanding of staff time. This led to the collective decision that teachers would concentrate on observations and their reflective diary records for the second spiral of the action research (i.e., the spiral which tracked the group of toddlers and of young children who made transitions during the first term of 2004).

After reflection and further planning, it was decided in that the next cycle (September-December 2004) will concentrate on interviewing the children making transitions at that time, as well as incorporating their parents’ voices by inviting parental participation at focus group meetings in August and November 2004.

Parent Survey re Language Acquisition

In addition to the action research tools developed for the project and summarised above, two staff members separately initiated a survey of families. The focus of this survey (together with the observations and teachers’ diary reflections on children’s communication) is consistent with the proposition in a recent review of for Pasifika early childhood education research, that a key priority is to “describe (and evaluate) the languages experiences of Pasifika young children” (Meade, Puhipuhi, & Foster-Cohen, 2003, p. 40).

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

Findings To Date: Language Continuity and Transition

Findings from the Focus Group

We structured the focus group topics and questions to provide background information about research question 1 (“*What helps learning and language continuity as children make transitions within and from the A’oga Fa’a Samoa?*”). Meetings of the focus group opened with prayer and concluded with thanks to participants and a prayer.

At the first meeting of the focus group, convened to progress the project and collect preliminary data, (on 2 September 2003), the discussion centred on these questions:

1. How do we assist Samoan language communication in the centre?

Probe: Links to Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996)

2. What strategies or practices do we use to facilitate children’s transition:

From the infants’ and toddlers’ area to the over-2s area?

From the over 2s area to the primary school?

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

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

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

Assisting Samoan language communication in the centre

During the group discussion about how the centre assists Samoan language communication, teachers identified two areas where English is to be spoken on the site, and they referred to the new room constructed for this purpose. Teachers also commented on the importance of having broader community language support for the

children, and suggested that it is important for children (in their homes) to understand the meaning of more complex concepts through the stronger language.

The discussion of transition centred on how strategies must have a holistic focus – which is important for bi-lingual education (and is also consistent with the principles of Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum – Ministry of Education, 1996). There were comments about the need to educate parents about transitional points in the children’s education. It was noted that this early childhood COI’s system of grouping children around one teacher works in very interesting ways. This was evident, for example, in a pilot action research project on children’s friendships. In relation to the transition and grouping processes at the centre, the focus group members also emphasised a number of points including: the importance of contextualising learning and of the continuity provided by one teacher moving with a group of children; the importance to learning of group routines; the need for parents “to understand what transitions mean”; and the importance of nurturing children’s individuality and their respect for others.

The focus group has reconvened for continued in-depth discussions. (This is in keeping with Bloor, et al.’s 2001 text on focus groups in social research which specifies that, in certain study designs, reconvening a group may be useful to follow up on information).

Expectations of children and the centre

Parents stated that their expectations for children at the centre included: safety; being loved; learning and having knowledge of *fa’asamoa*; well-being; being responded to and having their feelings nurtured; comfort; and feelings of familiarity “culturally”. Participants highlighted the importance of respect for the children especially those aged under 2 years. It was noted that the centre should “raise the child” rather than just “look after the child”, and that within centre, it is crucial to have an understanding of Samoan learning ethics, and the ability to use Samoan language actively to convey ideas.

Aspirations for Children

Group members collectively listed their aspirations for children moving on from the centre to school. Parents and early childhood teachers' aspirations for children in transition included: having strong sense of self ("who they are, and where they come from"); experiencing language continuity; developing general literacy in other subjects grounded in Samoan learning ethics; and developing the ability to open their minds up to other forms of language and learning. It was noted that mainstream schools should develop strong bi-lingual programmes to support the children moving on from Pasifika early childhood centres.

In regard to parents' aspirations and expectations, the project team anticipate incorporating comments from a wider group of parents after the proposed November 2004 focus group meeting with parents.

Facilitating Children's Transition

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

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

Critical incidents research summary:
What helps effective transition in Early Childhood Education:
Perceptions of good practice in Samoan ECE¹.

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

Data collection method

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

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

Research participants

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

¹ This research was developed by Airini with the assistance of the wise advice and guidance of the Centre of Innovation Project Focus Group members of the A'oga Fa'a Samoa.

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

Participation was subject to the following criteria:

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

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

Results of the Critical Incidents Analyses

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

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

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

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

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

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

- The teacher had understanding of the child and had begun to develop a relationship prior to the arrival of the child;
- The teacher is able to observe the strengths and needs of children about to transition into primary school;
- The teacher was able to use early knowledge of the newly arrived child to shape interventions to support the child's transition;
- Children had established an early rapport with the new entrants' teacher; and
- Children are enabled establish relationships with peers in the new entrants' class.

Examples

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

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

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

Category 2. Positive teacher characteristics

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

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

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

Example

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

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

BB: Mmm [nodding in agreement].

The incident reported indicates important outcomes from positive teaching characteristics. Rapport, care, a sense of safety, and encouragement to join in feature as positive characteristics. Expertise in Samoan culture is cited as a further positive

teacher characteristic for children involved in transition from the A’oga Fa’a Samoa. The teacher’s ‘mothering’ attributes were noted as significant positive teaching characteristics.

Category 3. Establishment of a “buddy” system

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

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

- The child is more confident
- The child quickly feels at home in the new learning environment
- The child learns common rules and practices, e.g. storage of personal bag; &
- The child’s transition occurs more rapidly.

Example

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

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

Interviewer: And what was the outcome?

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

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

The incident reported indicates positive outcomes from using a ‘buddy’ system for children involved in transition between learning environments. Increased confidence,

and more rapid transition feature as outcomes. The importance of peer group relationships is seen as significant in helping a child through a transition phase.

Category 4. Educators are involved in regular observations of children

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

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

Example

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

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

I realized when he dropped the phone when he heard my voice that the bond isn't there yet between him and me his new teacher. But then like I said, I know what he likes. He likes playing in the sandpit and give him a

ball and he likes kicking it around so that's how I grow the bond – I give him a ball and kick it to him.

A: So you set aside time for observation?

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

The incident reported indicates positive outcomes from teacher being involved in regular observations of children involved in transition between learning environments. Increased understanding of the child's development, and appropriate ways forward featured as reported outcomes. The importance of observations leading to interventions to support effective bonding between teacher and children were noted as an important factor in helping a child through a transition phase.

Discussion of Critical Incidents Results

Research limitations

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

Steps forward in advancing understandings of transition in ECE

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

Steps forward include:

- The categories suggest the need to gather more information about culturally relevant teaching practices that can help children in

A'oga Fa'a Samoa through transition phases. This may lead to the promotion of culture specific training and professional support strategies that assist the development of culturally relevant, multi-dimensional approaches to transition. This may expand or amend the established mainstream approaches to transition.

- The categories can be used as a 'map' (Williams, 1999) for improving relationship management during transition phases. Taken as a professional development tool, this map could encourage best practice aimed at meeting or exceeding internal and external requirements (Williams, 1993); and
- The professional development of the staff working in transition points with the A'oga Fa'a Samoa children can be shaped to integrate and explore the categories identified in this study. In addition the effectiveness of the categories could be examined through the establishment of further research in the categories and models of transition management.

This research indicates areas for further investigation that may expand available knowledge on what helps children in transition in ECE. For the first time the accounts of teacher and parent observations of child experiences in transition in an immersion Samoan ECE setting have been described. Until now the research has been generic² and accordingly the theories associated with transition have been based on the adoption of Western approaches. The findings of this research provide some tentative signals that educators involved in an A'oga Fa'a Samoa employ unique competencies in transition, as well as recognised mainstream competencies. ECE educators may benefit from expanded knowledge about what helps transition in ECE, particularly where the transition phase supports greater alignment between ECE and Samoan peoples, their aspirations and their needs.

While the abandonment of mainstream practices is not advocated in this study, consideration of positive factors identified by those involved in transition in A'oga Fa'a Samoa could be explored further and where appropriate promoted through

² With just a few exceptions, for example the work on transition by Sauvao (e.g., Sauvao et al., 2000).

professional education programmes, information gathering and profiling of Pasifika models of ECE. This is important for Pasifika peoples as much as others. As Anae (2001) has suggested with regards to Samoan identity in New Zealand it is “precisely *because of* [experiences such as] formal education, changing personal networks, upward mobility” (Anae, 2001, p. 117) that a strong Samoan identity has been maintained by “New Zealand-borns”. These strong perspectives and practices are integral to New Zealand’s present and future. Through this study the A’oga Fa’a Samoa perspectives of transition are valued as part of the body of knowledge for ECE. This should continue.

Observations and Teacher Diaries

Samples in the action the research spirals 2003-2004

From September-December 2003, teachers observed 6 individual children as they made the transition from the infants’ and toddlers’ area to the over 2s area. Another group of 5 children was observed as they made the transition from the A’oga to the primary school on the adjacent site.

In January-June 2004, further groups of children were observed. These included a group of 5 young children who moved (with their teacher/“A’oga Fa’a Samoa primary caregiver”) from the infants’ and toddlers’ area across to over 2s area, and 4 more children who made the transition to school. One teacher observing was familiar with the research procedures and, alongside the research associate, she helped to mentor another teacher who was observing and making diary entries (using the action research tools) for the first time. To date 4 different teachers have tracked groups of children and maintained observations and diary records.

Examples of the coded observations and teachers’ related reflections are explained below.

Transition to the Over-2s Area

Innovative Practices

An account of the transition processes for the children at enrolment, and when they are aged over 2 years 6 months, is presented below.

Transition processes for infants and toddlers: The Primary Caregiver

A *Primary Caregiver* approach (influenced by attachment theory) was developed at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa. A primary/lead caregiver works with a group of children from their enrolment at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa. This approach has been established to build strong relationships between child, family, and teacher.

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

When children move from the building of under two and a half year-old children to the building for older children the staff member moves with them.

This is the area where the research has been documented through observation diary recordings, individual portfolios, and parent feed back.

This transition is timed to coincide with primary school holidays, when not so many children attend, and the quieter atmosphere provides a calmer environment for transition.

Belonging and Learning during Transition with the Teacher

Observations illustrate that the innovative practice having the teacher (their A’oga Fa’a Samoa “primary caregiver”) making the transition with the children, facilitates appropriate interpretation of the children’s actions. There is evidence of the effectiveness of this practice in the following observational excerpt and diary entries.

Example: *Belonging* (22.9.2003)

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

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

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

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

Regarding the teacher’s interactions, she noted:

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

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

Understanding where to sleep in the new environment was also important, as evident in observations from both groups of young children who were tracked during their transition to the over-2s area.

Example: *Belonging* (19.1.2004)

Tiare, aged 2 years 2 months

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

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

“What bed do you want to go to?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Example (10.3.2004)

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

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

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

Recorded observations also illustrate how the children’s use of the Samoan language was extended within the centre as they moved across to the over-2s area.

Example: Communication (3.10.2003)

These observations were recorded and then coded as examples of communication:

Teacher: “Fa’afetai L... mole supo”. (Thank you L... for the soup).

Child looks at the potato and says, “Talo”

Teacher: “Leai, e le se talo, ole pateta”. (No, it’s not a talo, it’s a potato).

Child: “Ole pateta”. (It’s a potato)

Teacher: “Ole a lau mea ai na e ai?” (What are you eating?)

Child: “Ole supo ma le kaloti, ma le moa male kapisi male pateta”. (It’s soup and carrots and chicken and cabbage and potato)

Teacher: “Teine lelei, ____”. (Good girl, ____ child’s name).

The staff member then recorded in her diary that the child (as observed in the above excerpt) “*knew what she was eating in Samoan, except the potato which she mistook for talo.*”

The staff member also made these reflections on the role of the teacher in children’s Samoan language development:

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

After the children in the 2004 January transition group moved to the over 2s area, the observations and teacher diaries included numerous examples of imaginative play, usually in small groups. These examples of exploration also illustrate the young children’s increased understanding of appropriate practices within the centre:

Example (25/2/04) (Child 19)

Morning tea time. *The child (19) does not sit down so he is asked by the teacher to sit in front of her...*

He is given some toast. He says “Fa’afetai”. (Thank you) The next minute he is ‘shooting’ someone with his toast. When the teacher reminds him that we don’t have guns in A’oga. he suddenly changes and says, “No va’alele” pretending it (the toast shape) is an aeroplane (not a gun).

Reflection

The teacher reflects that the child “*wanted to sit by himself in front of the teacher. The observation – shows how quick he is in changing from something not acceptable to something that is acceptable in A’oga. The shape of his toast after a few bites reminded him of a gun because it actually looked like a gun.*”

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

Example (3/2/04)

(Children: 20, 18 and 19)

All three children are playing together in the sandpit – they walk behind each other on the edge of the sandpit. ___ (child 19) picks up a spade and pretends it is a guitar; he sings. ____ (Child 18) joins in the singing. ____ (Child 20) starts digging. After a while the other two join in until 18 sees a box then he walks over and jumps in. The other two follow. After a while child 20 walks over to the babies' side and 18 and 19 walk over to the rocket. They climb up inside and put their heads through the hole, growling, pretending to be lions. The teacher “growls” at them through the other hole and they both scream and move to the other hole. The teacher “growls” from the other side and they laugh and move back. When the teacher looks in, they are both sitting back looking through both holes to see which one she will growl from.

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

It seems to me that 19, 18 and 20 are very comfortable playing together. The change to the new environment (the over-2s area) they are in now has not affected their relationship as friends. They're still together. (I guess what I'm saying is that transition in a group with the teacher is less stressful for the children according to the observations so far).

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

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

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

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

Transition to School

Innovative Approaches to Transition to School

There is a close connection between the A'oga and the school, located on the same block of land. A staff member from the centre accompanies the children to the school classroom to observe their transition experiences. Details of the transition-to-school process are summarised below.

Transition Process for Children into the Bi-Lingual Samoan classroom of \ Richmond Road Primary School

The A'oga Fa'a Samoa is situated on the site of the primary school and is regarded as a part of the "*school family*" - a part of the community of learners attached to the school.

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

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

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

These innovative practices are enhancing understanding and interpretation of the actions of children who make the transition.

Communication and Language Continuity

Below is a conversation with a child soon after making the transition to the school classroom.

Faia'oga (F = teacher) – “O a mai le a'oga?” (*How's school?*)

Child: “Manaia” (*Nice*).

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

Child – “O (School Teach 1's name)”

F – “Ete fiafia ile a'oga?” (*Are you happy at/with school?*)

Child: – “Ioe”. (*yes*)

F – “Aisea?” (*Why?*)

Child: – “Because I do my homework”.

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

Child: – “Ole art and do some names”.

F – “E te iloa fa'aSamoa?” (*Can you speak Samoan?*)

Child – “Ioe”. (*yes*)

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

Child: “E fiafia e fai le galuega, e fiafia au i la'u faia'oga o ___ (School teach 1) E fai le lotu, e tautala Palagi ai ile a'oga”. (*I'm happy to work. I like my teacher, I say prayers and I speak English at school*).

The above excerpt from an interview with a child shows how the process of transition contributes to children's communication in Samoan, as they talk with the A'oga teacher about their move from the Samoan-immersion environment of the A'oga to the bi-lingual classroom at the school.

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

Example: Communication (3.2.2004)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Furthermore in another excerpt, recorded during mat time in the new entrant classroom 4 months after the small group of children (in the second spiral) made the transition to school, there is evidence both of communication in Samoan, and of belonging in terms of cultural identity:

Example: Communication (9.6.2004)

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

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

He shares his news with (the A’oga Fa’a Samoa teacher who is observing) in Samoan, “Sa alu a’u ile lakapi; sa o na ia ma lona tama o Andrew. Ole lakapi ile Kalapu _____ Club”

She replies: ‘Lelei tele le tautala Fa’a Samoa a oe. Good boy (child’s name), you speak Samoan’.

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

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

Survey of Parents: A Synopsis of Key Points

Parents clearly value their children’s being able to experience Samoan language and culture at the centre. From their responses to the parental survey questions (Appendix D), it appears that Samoan is spoken regularly in about half of the homes (17 of 36 replies), and that the Samoan language is very important to most parents (32 of the 36 families replied that Samoan language is really important to them, or a high priority).

Parents’ vision for their child/ren also shows a strong focus on language. When asked “What is your vision for your child in A’oga?” 26 of the 35 parents responding to this question replied that “to speak Samoan” was their main vision, and another 5 families said “Samoan language as well as social skills”.

In response to the question, “Has the A’oga increased your child’s Samoan language vocabulary and understanding?”, 34 of the families replied “yes” and the remaining 2 families wrote that it was too early to know (as young babies).

Finally, it is clear from the information provided in response to the February 2004 survey that parents are very satisfied with the teaching staff at the A’oga. All 36 responding families replied “yes” to the question “Are you satisfied with the teaching staff at the A’oga?”, and many added very favourable comments about the staff.

Summary, Reflections and Actions, Concluding Comments

Summary of Preliminary Trends and Themes

- For children moving from the infants' and toddlers' area to the over-2s' area of the centre, knowing where shoes and bags belong, clothes are hung, and about sleeping places and patterns is important.

Preliminary evidence: Teachers' observations of two separate groups of young children during transition, and related teacher diary records.

- Having the A'oga Fa'a Samoa "primary/lead caregiver" move with "her" group of children during their transitions contributes to the children's sense of belonging and their security.

Preliminary evidence: Observations of groups of children during transition, related teacher diary records.

- Innovative transition practices (e.g., "spending time in the new entrants' bi-lingual class in the primary school"), and language immersion practices, may support children's competence and confidence to express themselves in Samoan, and their identity.

Preliminary evidence: Critical incidents analyses (category 1), observations of groups of children during transition, related teacher diary records, (preliminary) child interview.

- Teachers' observations and reflections support innovative practices and language continuity.

Preliminary evidence: Critical incidents analyses (category 4), teachers' observations of groups of children during transition, and related teacher diary records.

Teacher reflections

This report includes data from the first spirals of the action research: focus group findings, critical incidents analyses, and examples of observations and diary records in which staff members have analysed their observations and reflections within the curriculum framework of Te Wh_riki and across its strands. The intention is to document teaching and learning processes during transitions, and to enhance practice further through reflection and action.

Findings of the research highlight the importance of staff members reflecting on the processes of their communication with infants and with young children about to move to school.

During the first month of the second spiral of the action research, after the “reflection and action” stage of the cycle, the research associate asked a staff member (Teacher 01, 20/2/03) about her reflections on the process and the data. This staff member, who has a key role in the research, explained that:

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

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

“Yes, Language and communication. And learning to do things for themselves, and be confident learners”.

Reflections after the second spiral

During the following spiral (January to June 2004 transition groups) further intensive observations and diary records were generated, coded, and reflected upon. These data

provide further evidence of processes whereby children develop a sense of belonging in the new place, of how children contribute to the inclusion of those who are making transitions, and of how early childhood teachers who accompany groups of children during transitions extend the children's communication in Samoan. Following the "transition children" for a longer period during this spiral (6 months from January to June 2004, compared with 3 months from late September to December 2003 in the first spiral) was useful for documenting individual children's enhanced sense of belonging and well-being after initially settling in the new space.

Reflecting on this second spiral, there appear to be some themes emerging that are similar to the first spiral. For children moving from the infants' and toddlers' area to the over 2s' area of the centre, knowing where shoes and bags belong, clothes are hung, and about sleeping places and patterns was again important. Moreover, having a familiar staff member from the A'oga Fa'a Samoa accompany the children during their transitions contributes to children's competence and confidence to express themselves in Samoan, and to their sense of security and identity.³

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

"Sometimes we (the teachers) could have said something more, to extend children's thinking and learning." "We need to say more than 'That's nice'. We need to extend them".

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

"We need to do more mentoring so that there are more responsive and reciprocal interactions".

³ The research team are also able to signal that further evidence will be available, for the March 2005 research report, showing how groups of young children experience attachment to the "primary caregiver", and the importance to the children of this innovative transition process. For example, observations collected since September 2004 at the beginning of the second cycle of action research (but not yet translated), are showing how the group of children moving to the over-2s' area communicated their concern to one another, and to adults present, when their primary caregiver was absent (on sick leave) for a couple of days.

These suggestions, based on the teacher's reflections on her observations, are consistent with Farquhar's (2003) synthesis of research evidence that shows quality ECE teaching occurs when: pedagogy "scaffolds," "co-constructs", and includes "metacognitive strategies." (pp. 30-36).

The project team have agreed that a subsequent cycle (or a mini cycle) will concentrate on using the extensive observational and diary data already generated to include a wider group (of all staff) in reflection and action, in order to extend children's understanding (one example was of scientific concepts), their thinking, and their exploration. The planned action was that research associate and key staff members in the research team would facilitate further discussion of the observations, teacher-child interactions, and children's learning at an evening staff meeting, which was held on 11 October 2004.

These collaborative decisions provide an example of how Borgia and Schuler's (1996) "five Cs" of action research (commitment, collaboration, concern, consideration, and change) are proving applicable to the research and reflection currently in progress at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa. Furthermore, the teacher's suggestion, that there needs to be more mentoring and more discussion among the staff, is leading to increased teacher talk about children's learning, learning talk which we anticipate will to be both "analytic" and "challenging" (Annan, Lai, & Robinson, 2002).

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Appendix A

Focus Group Interview Questions

<p>Early Childhood Centres of Innovation (COI) Action Research at the A'oga Fa'asamoa</p>
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QUESTIONS/TOPICS FOR FOCUS GROUPS

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

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

Probes: focus on "critical incidents" (Airini & Brooker, 1999)

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

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

Appendix B

Teachers' Diary Headings

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

What Children Did to show

Belonging

a sense of belonging in the new space
(settling)

What Teachers Did to foster

Belonging

a sense of belonging in the new space

Wellbeing

Independence
(mealtimes)

Wellbeing

independence

Exploration

(physical – e.g. playground)

Exploration

(thinking/ideas)

Communication

Samoan language development

Communication

Samoan language development

Contribution

(looking after others arriving/aiga philosophy)

Contribution

Appendix C

Child Interview Questions

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

Video/Audio Records of Children talking about Transitions

Steps in the process:

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

Questions to ask (in the Samoan language)

Transition to school

Interview points and questions

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

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

For children in the first weeks at school:

What do you like best about school?

For children after 3 months at school:

What do you like best about school?

Transition to the over 2 years 6 months area

Before moving across:

What do like best at A'oga?

Two weeks after moving across:

What do like best at A'oga?

About 3 months after moving across:

What do like best at A'oga?

Appendix D

Parent Questionnaire

(Taouma, 1992)

Language Acquisition Survey: - March 2004.

Questions.

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