

## Chapter 5 The A'oga Fa'a Samoa: A Samoan-immersion centre

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*O le tama ma lana a'oga,  
o le tama ma lona fa'asinomaga.  
(Nurturing positive identity in children.)*

### **Introduction**

The A'oga Fa'a Samoa is a Samoan-language immersion centre located in the grounds of Richmond Road Primary School in Ponsonby, Auckland. The centre began operating in 1984, and in 1990 it became the first licensed and chartered Pacific Island centre in Aotearoa New Zealand (Taouma, Tapusoa, & Podmore, 2013). The centre is staffed by 12 registered teachers. It is licensed for 50 children, and up to 16 of them can be aged under 2 years.

The A'oga Fa'a Samoa has developed a philosophy statement supported by research on language immersion and bilingualism. This statement shows evidence of connections between children's learning of their heritage/home language, their identity and their educational success (Cummins, 2001a, 2001b, 2009; Tuafuti, 2010; Tuafuti & McCaffery, 2005). The philosophy states that the A'oga Fa'a Samoa will:

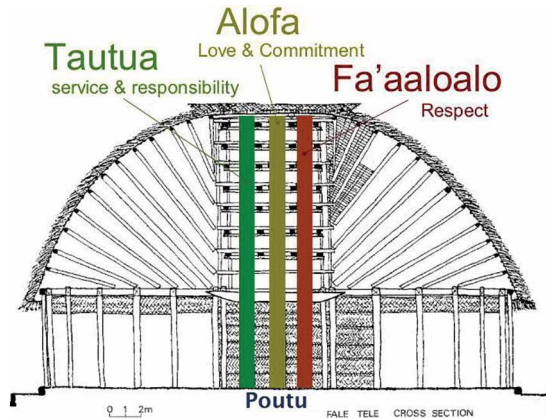
- promote Samoan language and culture, so nurturing the positive identity of the children
- employ trained educators and encourage further training so that quality care and education are provided
- encourage a family atmosphere for parents and children so children feel secure and loved
- emphasise enjoyment of learning through the medium of the Samoan language.

Consistent with the centre's philosophy, teachers use the Samoan language to deliver the curriculum and the holistic learning programme. Teachers speak Samoan only, documentation is in Samoan, and books and teaching resources are written in Samoan. Teachers encourage the children's parents to attend Samoan language classes in the community. English-speaking areas are set up in the centre for visitors, parents and family members who are not fluent Samoan speakers.

### **Overarching values**

Prior to participating in the present project, the A'oga Fa'a Samoa had been selected as an early childhood Centre of Innovation (COI). Pasifika values influenced both the centre of innovation research that took place between 2003 and 2006, and the TLRI research that we carried out between 2013 and 2015. Samu (as cited in Podmore, with Wendt Samu, 2006) contended that the success of Pasifika research is dependent on whether the design and processes are informed by Pasifika values. Accordingly, the values that underpinned the research at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa included: *alofa* (love and commitment), *tautua* (service and responsibility) and *fa'aaloalo* (respect) (Podmore, with Wendt Samu, 2006, p. 38). The values are illustrated in this *poutu* model (Figure 5.1):

Figure 5.1: The *poutu* model, showing the three values that informed our research at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa



Source: Samu (as cited in Podmore, with Wendt Samu, 2006, p. 38).

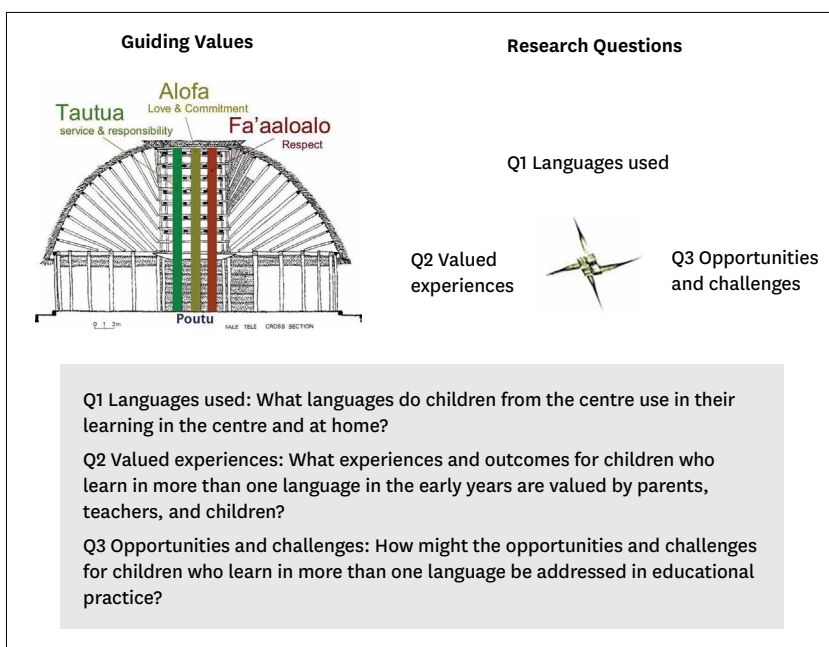
Subsequently these three values became the guiding principles of teaching and learning at the centre. Teachers and children use the physical structure of the *fale* (house) for *lotu* (prayers) and group gatherings within the centre to enhance the core values of the *poutu* model (Figure 5.1).

Acknowledging and valuing these overarching principles, the next diagram maps out the focus and direction of the subsequent research journey. The current project's three research questions mark the pointers on this blended model (Figure 5.2). The researchers blended the *poutu* model with the centre's cultural metaphor of *pe'ape'a* (or propeller; i.e. the flax model / A'oga logo) as a philosophical basis to guide the research. By blending the *poutu* principles and the *pe'ape'a* vision, the researchers aimed to support and empower the teachers and parents during the process of responding, in the language(s) of their choice (English/Samoan), to the questionnaires and the focus group questions.

The blended model also enhances the meanings of *poutu*. First, it refers to the strong, supporting structure of the *fale*. The other *poutu* in the centre—the teachers, who are all women—are the strength and the backbone of the centre. Utumapu (1998) noted the significant contribution of women in Samoan language ECE centres, describing the women as *poutu*, reflecting their strength and the strength of

their families, churches and communities. The Samoan saying “E au le ina’ilau a tama’ita’i” (“The legacy of women is one of total achievement”)<sup>1</sup> is reflected in the teachers’ roles and strengths, not only in the running of the centre but as ongoing knowledge seekers and researchers. The teacher-researchers involved in this project consulted with the whole team at the A’oga, including the children and their parents.

Figure 5.2: An overview of the blended cultural framework for this research: poutu and pe’ape’a



The weaving process of the principles of love, respect and service with the *pe'ape'a* is ongoing. Three pointers of the *pe'ape'a* represented the three research questions guiding this research, and the fourth pointer represented the centre’s future aspirations and dreams. A pathway towards fulfilling such dreams and aspirations is identified in the findings of this research.

### Research participants

The A’oga Fa’a Samoa was one of four ECE centres participating in this research, and as explained fully in Chapter 3, data generation processes used at each of the centres included: a teacher and a parent questionnaire, one teacher focus group and one parent focus group, interviews

with children, observations during arrivals and departures at the centre, videoed observations of learning and teaching interactions, and a video clip of children and teachers during group activities / mat times (e.g. in the *fale* at the A'oga). We now outline some details specific to the A'oga Fa'a Samoa centre's participating teachers, parents and children.

### Teachers

Two teachers in the A'oga Fa'a Samoa were New Zealand born and the rest were all Samoan born. Twelve teachers completed teacher questionnaires in English, and 11 of them also participated in the teacher *fono* / focus group. The researchers conducted the teacher *fono* / focus group in Samoan. Transcribed notes were analysed in Samoan before they were translated into English.

### Parents

Thirty-five parents from diverse backgrounds completed questionnaires in English. Seven of these parents also participated in the parents' focus group, including two couples. Overall, five families were represented in the parents' *fono* / focus group.

To represent the diversity within the centre, teachers selected the focus group parents from different language backgrounds. Several parents spoke languages other than Samoan in the home (e.g. Tongan, Japanese and Māori). They were from ethnically mixed-marriage families and their partners were Samoan. Teachers also chose one parent who had recently arrived from Samoa and was strong in her Samoan language at home, and New Zealand-born Samoan parents who were at different levels of Samoan language abilities and used both English and Samoan at home. Parents who participated in the focus group were:

- a New Zealand-born Tongan mother who spoke mainly Tongan and preferred to speak Tongan in the home—her Samoan husband spoke Samoan with their children (Parent 1)
- a Japanese mother who spoke Japanese with her children—the children understood her Japanese but responded in English; her husband, who also participated in the focus group, was a New Zealand-born Samoan and spoke Samoan and English to their children (Parents 2 and 3)

- a New Zealand-born Samoan parent who spoke primarily English to the children (Parent 4)
- a father who spoke “50 percent English and 50 percent Samoan”—his New Zealand-born Samoan wife also participated, and she, too, spoke English and Samoan with their children (Parents 5 and 6)
- a Samoan-born parent who spoke entirely Samoan with the children (Parent 7).

A Samoan-born father who spoke Samoan and English in the home, and whose wife spoke Māori fluently in the home, was unable to attend the focus group but was interviewed separately.

### **Children**

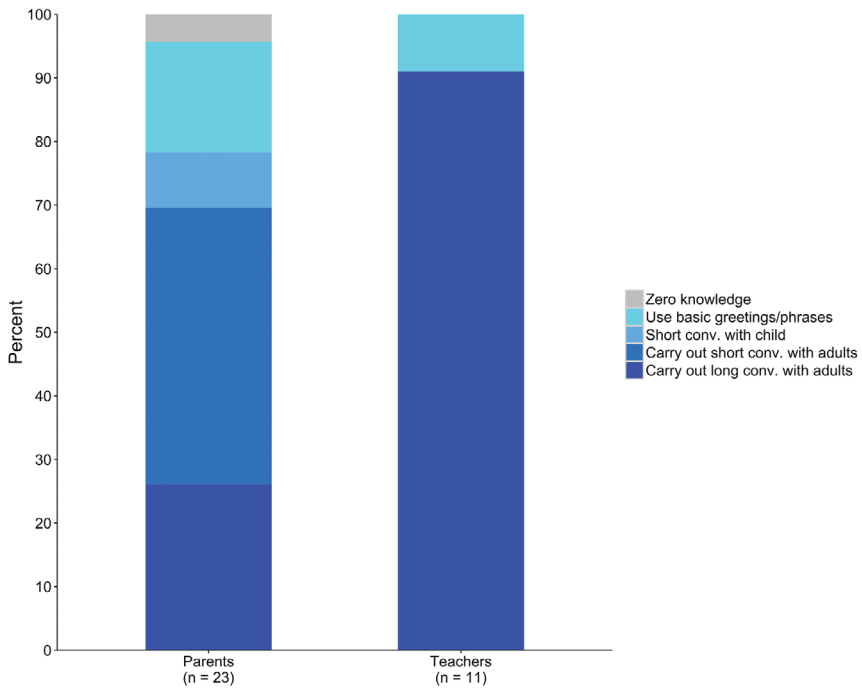
Teacher-researchers conducted short interviews in Samoan with six children. The interviews were transcribed and later translated into English.

### **Findings**

#### **Research question 1: What languages do children from participating ECE centres use in their learning in the centre and at home?**

Questionnaire findings on parents’ and teachers’ reported proficiency in speaking Samoan are summarised in Figure 5.3 below. This indicates that almost all of the teachers were fluent speakers of Samoan and could carry out long conversations with adults, whereas fewer than 30 percent of the parents responded that they could carry out long conversations with adults in Samoan.

Figure 5.3: A'oga Fa'a Samoa parents' and teachers' Samoan language proficiency as a percentage



Questionnaires and video observations confirmed that in the centre teachers spoke Samoan and the children spoke both Samoan and English. Teachers in the focus group noted that when a group of children were speaking English, the teacher would respond entirely in Samoan. In the video clips in the context of mat times the children mainly used the Samoan language to talk, recite and interact. Observations of arrival and departure times showed that, along with Samoan and English, one Japanese, one Tongan and three Māori parents regularly used their heritage/home languages with their own children.

Teachers in the focus group reported that in the home, children used both Samoan and English, and some used other home languages. Focus group parents discussed how they valued using Samoan in the home, stating that they actively encouraged their children to speak Samoan. Several parents explained why they spoke Samoan at home and described their experiences speaking Samoan with their children:

For me I speak 100 percent Samoan at home to my children because they are from Samoa they are trying to pick up their English as well, but it's funny like my little one, when I spoke to him in Samoan, he responds back in English, so I know it's faster to catch up the English ... but I'm still continuing to speaking to them in Samoan at home and everywhere we go ... Samoan is the first language, yes. (Parent 7, focus group)

Many parents' responses to the questionnaires, together with some focus group comments, indicated that they felt challenged to learn more Samoan. For some parents, the child's experience at the A'oga strengthened their own resolve to speak Samoan at home.

For myself I speak in Samoan most of the time to my kids even though it[s] probably not fluent but ... ever since they were young, when we came to A'oga the rule was you speak at home ... so I've been speaking Samoan to them ever since they were young, so but now that [older child] is in first year at school his English is actually getting really good, so they are starting to respond back in English, and I'm still trying to work out a way to make them speak back to me in Samoan, because I know they can. (Parent 3, focus group)

Some focus group parents explained that their children sometimes corrected the way they used Samoan at home. This was the experience of one couple who spoke primarily English at home. They actively encouraged their children to speak Samoan, particularly to their older relatives.

We try to speak Samoan as best we can as often as we can, but one of the challenges I have [is] if I can't get it right in my head then I don't want to say it because I don't want to speak to him and speak incorrectly ... Anyway he corrects me often, which is terrible, it's interesting, but English is a big thing in the home, so for us, both of us, ... we speak Samoan as much as we can and certainly when we have my father in town or the relatives, I absolutely encourage them to speak Samoan and a lot of them want to, particularly ... my father's generation that they want to speak to the kids, they want to converse with them. It's exciting to get them to speak Samoan. (Parent 4, focus group)

These parents felt challenged to learn more Samoan: "It's really up to us to learn better and faster ... We need to improve our education ourselves" (Parent 4, focus group).



Observations and child interviews provided further insights about languages spoken at the A'oga or at home. Teachers and children had some sustained conversations about languages spoken. This is a brief excerpt:

*Teacher:* Ae a pe a e alu i le fale, e tautala oe fa'asamoa? (Do you speak Samoan at home?)

*Child:* Ioe. (Yes.)

*Teacher:* Ia ai? (To whom?)

*Child:* I le tama ma le tina o a'u. (To my dad and mum.)

*Teacher:* E tautala fa'asamoa outou? (Oh, do you speak in Samoan?)

*Child:* Ioe. (Yes.)

*Teacher:* Ae a ia lou Nana? (What about your Nana?)

*Child:* E tautala palagi. (She speaks English.)

*Teacher:* A talanoa la oe i lou Nana e fa'apalagi pe fa'asamoa? (So what language do you use when talking to her?)

*Child:* E fa'asamoa. (Samoan.)

*Teacher:* E malamalama lou Nana, oi ae a tali mai e fa'apalagi? (Oh, so your Nana understands Samoan but replies in English?)

*Child:* Ioe. (Yes.)

The example of the teacher–child interview above showed that the child spoke Samoan in the home but his grandmother used English. It was evident that the language children learned through participation at the A'oga was transferrable to the context of the *aiga* and/or extended fanau.

**Research question 2: What experiences and outcomes for children who learn in more than one language in the early years are valued by parents, teachers and children?**

The analyses of the focus group interviews and the questionnaire data showed considerable consistency of experiences and outcomes valued by teachers and parents. Teachers valued the Samoan language and described how parents valued their heritage/home languages. Teachers

also valued partnerships with and support from parents, especially the parents' encouragement for their children to continue using Samoan in the home.

Focus group parents' comments on children's experiences and the learning outcomes they valued were sorted into key themes. Further scrutiny across all the data showed that these key themes were also supported by the questionnaire responses, video observations and child interview data.

### ***1. Holistic development, including spirituality and identity***

Findings within this theme were consistent with the *holistic development* principle of *Te Whariki*, the New Zealand early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996). Parents' comments endorsed the centre practices that reflected the principle of holistic development.

Several children who were interviewed indicated strong Samoan identity, and they also enjoyed learning through Samoan. A brief example was:

*Teacher:* E fiafia oe e tautala fa'asamoa? (Do you like speaking Samoan?)

*Child:* Ioe. (Yes.)

*Teacher:* Aisea? (Why?)

*Child:* E fiafia e alu i le a'oga, e fiafia e ta'alo i le A'oga fa'asamoa.  
(I like going to A'oga and I like playing there).

The above excerpt of teacher-child dialogue shows a child affirming his enjoyment of speaking Samoan and participating in the Samoan-language immersion programme. It is also an example of how a teacher's use of appropriate questions and prompts ("Why?") challenged the child's thinking and extended his length of utterance in Samoan from an initial one-word response to a complete sentence. At this centre, valued holistic learning included learning through the Samoan language and identifying positively with the language and culture.

When asked about their experience of the cultural practices at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa, several parents spoke about what they valued, including experiences of prayers (*lotu*):

Like saying a prayer before you leave. Yeah, so we make sure we sing the *lotu* before we eat and when we have dinner or breakfast or

whoever is on the dinner table, we get him to do it, but we all sing it with him ... What we found was that, some of his cousins don't know the song, and he gets quite proud, because he knows it and he can sing it. They haven't learnt it ... we get him to sing that at home, which he's learnt from here. (Parent 6, focus group)

At home, my husband always has to say the *lotu* before we eat, so he does it in his own way but as soon as he's finished, my son [aged 2 years] always wants to sing that song, for him to eat ... so always every day he wants, even though we did the *lotu*, after that he wants to sing that song. (Parent 7, focus group)

They also valued their children's experiences of celebrations, Christmas carols and plays. The following text demonstrates and explains the *lotu* (prayer) and group activities in the *fale*.

*Lotu:*

O taeao uma e amata ai le a'oga i le lotu, e usu le pese ma fai le tatalo e ta'ita'i e tamaiti, ona fai loa lea o le tauvalaauga. O i, e tuu ai le avanoa i le tamaititi e tu ai i luga, ta'u lona igoa, igoa o ona matua, o ona tausaga ma le a'oga e alu iai.

*Group activity in the fale:*

Every morning children come together for our morning *lotu* in our *fale*. They sing a hymn and say a prayer led by children. Each child is then greeted by name and given the opportunity to stand up and say his/her name, his/her parents' names, their age, and the centre they attend.

O lo'u igoa o \_\_\_\_\_ (My name is \_\_\_\_\_)

O lo'u tama o \_\_\_\_\_ (My dad is \_\_\_\_\_)

O lo'u tina o \_\_\_\_\_ (My mum is \_\_\_\_\_)

E \_\_\_\_\_ o'u tausaga (I'm \_\_\_\_\_ years old)

Oute alu i le A'oga Fa'a Samoa, i Richmond Road Primary School.

(I go to A'oga Fa'a Samoa at Richmond Road Primary School.)

Teachers explained that *lotu* practices enhanced *Te Whāriki's* principle of holistic development. In this centre, holistic learning and development were inclusive of Samoan (heritage/home) language learning, identity development and spirituality.

Parents also valued their children's Samoan identity development, as evidenced in their comments about language, food, and dress code or costumes. For example, one couple spoke of food and cultural costumes:

Ever since he's worn his ie faikaga [boys' or men's Samoan outfit for special occasions], when we go to church, he always wants to wear ie faikaga ... He loves his ie faikaga. He sort of associates that with something special, so every Sunday when we go to church, he has to ... and that's one thing that my parents are proud ... that you know our little boy always wants to wear ie faikaga.

Another thing is the food that we eat ... that you guys introduce them to, is all part of the learning response, so I think that is one cultural thing and the dress ... the ie faikaga. And he knows that it's special occasions that he wears ... so after church, we get home and [he] takes it off and puts it away not like his other clothes, just chucks [them] everywhere he doesn't really care, there's no significance about it, whereas the ie faikaga, there's ... it's important to him.

What's even worse, when I don't want to wear ie faikaga, he makes me wear ie faikaga like ... I'll come dressed in the pants and shirt, 'Dad ... ie faikaga, ie faikaga'. Yeah, so I guess that's really good, something that he's picked up from the A'oga. (Parents 5 and 6, focus group)

The couple considered that there were connections between their child's valuing specific cultural practices, such as dress and food, and his strong self-esteem.

Parents also described how their children who had attended the A'oga had learned to respect their elders. The elders actively acknowledged the children and their efforts to use Samoan in the home, as one parent commented:

Just recently I've noticed, the older son, he knows the difference between Tongan and Samoan. Before we eat, he'll look around and where he's at, he'll say the prayer according to the culture. If we are at [the father's] Samoan family, he'll say it in Samoan. Nana really appreciates it because she doesn't speak English and I just think that [him] being the oldest, I'm kinda proud that he's got that aspect of his Samoan culture. (Parent 1, focus group)

The theme of holistic learning and development was similarly evident across the questionnaires completed by the wider group of parents. Learning experiences and outcomes that parents valued and shared were aligned with their focus on academic learning and success. In other words, parents valued not only the Samoan language, cultural practices, spirituality, respect, identity and wellbeing, but they also wished for and valued academic success for their children.

## ***2. Valuing the power of the Samoan language***

Discussions with parents highlighted Cummins's (2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2009) suggestions about ways teachers could support parents to overcome emotional experiences caused by the power of the dominant language within the context of minority groups such as Samoans in Aotearoa New Zealand. Parents commented on how their experiences of the colonisation of language (i.e. historical pressure to use English only) had reminded them to recognise and reactivate what they had lost. Parents continued to value the Samoan language, and to encourage their own children to speak Samoan in the home, as this parent noted:

I've been brought up without the language. I had to teach myself, and I so know the importance of them actually replying in Samoan, because I know that if they don't reply in Samoan, they will be pretty much be like how I was—you understand it, but you can't speak it—so I'm still working out a way to motivate them to be able to respond in Samoan. (Parent 3, focus group)

Another parent shared her story:

When we first came from Samoa, I was 4 years old and my little brother was 2 years old. Our parents did not allow us to speak Samoan at home. It's because we ... they wanted us to learn English, they didn't feel it was important for us to know Samoan back then. It wasn't until my teenage years that I ... decided to get back into my Samoan, but it was new for my mum and dad ... [I] started encouraging [them] to speak Samoan to my son because they've been so used to us speaking English. Even though they could speak Samoan, we just have to remind them, 'Oh mum speak Samoan to [child's name] please,' because they speak English and now started getting used to it. Yeah, that's sort of what I've noticed ever since

[child] has been coming to A'oga. We've encouraged our family and friends to speak Samoan. (Parent 5, focus group)

Valuing the non-coercive power of the Samoan language was important, and is consistent with Cummins's (2000) suggestion that the heritage/home language needs to be used positively. Some parents described a tendency to resort to their most familiar language to express anger or "to growl" at their children. One parent commented on this trend, explaining that the more familiar language was Samoan:

I sometimes have to remind myself to speak Samoan ... I guess I always find myself resorting back to English, but I notice that when I get angry or when he's not listening, then I go into Samoan and then he responds. (Parent 5, focus group)

For other parents, the more familiar language was not Samoan, as this parent explained:

When I get confused or when you get angry, when you get emotional ... you tend to resort back to your mother tongue, so I always resort back to English. But luckily I don't get upset that much. I notice that my wife [Parent 2], when she gets angry she starts speaking in Japanese to them and they seem to understand. (Parent 3, focus group)

Valuing a child's heritage/home language and its power implies a need to use the heritage/home language primarily in a positive way. Parents valued the way that, at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa the teachers used the Samoan language positively and constructively to enhance children's learning.

Observations illustrated repeatedly how children spoke in Samoan and valued using the language. Some children also modelled their teachers' use of Samoan and their teaching strategies. In the following excerpt from a video of two girls (Child 1 and Child 2), one child used Samoan to role-play being a teacher. They are joined by a teacher towards the end of this excerpt. Child 1 is pointing to the image of a volcano erupting in a book and says:

*Child 1:* Mauga ... le mauga mu i fafo. (Volcano ... the volcanic eruption out there.)

*Child 2:* I luga. (Up there.) [*smiles*]

- Child 1:* And i fafo. (And outside.)
- Child 2:* [*pause*] Leai (no), this one just do it to the dinosaur ... put in ...
- [*Child 1 reaches over and tries to help turn over to the next page*]
- Child 2:* [*As if she just remembers that she is the teacher and not Child 1.*] What happens here? [*while tapping on a particular image on the page*]
- Child 1:* Leai se mauga mu. (No volcanic eruption.)
- Child 2:* Leai se mauga mu i luga. (No volcanic eruption up there.) What happens here?
- Child 1:* Ua ai le tainasoa i le laau. (The dinosaur is eating the tree.)
- Child 2:* [*Pause*] Manaia (good) [*as she slowly turns to the next page*].
- Child 1:* Ua tagi le tinasoa. (The dinosaur is crying.)
- Teacher:* Aisea ua tagi ai le tainasoa? (Why did the dinosaur cry ... why?)

This excerpt illustrates how the older child used questions and praise, and the children corrected each other by restating the answers using the correct words in Samoan. The teacher who later joined the girls similarly used questions. The teacher noted that these teaching strategies of questioning, restatement and expansion, praise, and role modelling were consistent with an additive approach to bilingualism and with Baker's (2011) work on effective, facilitative pedagogical practices with bilingual and multilingual learners.

### **3. Metalinguistic awareness**

During focus group discussions, parents and teachers commented on their young bilingual children's receptivity to other languages, which indicated their metalinguistic awareness. The benefits of bilingualism include heightened awareness of languages, or metalinguistic awareness (Baker, 2011). As in the following example, parents described how their children became aware of, recognised and accepted diverse languages and identities:

Well, I think it's more about this generation and their access to media ... I find that [our son] compared to some of his *palagi* friends and relatives picks up counting [in Spanish] very quickly and greetings in Spanish very, very quickly and he doesn't recite them, and I think it's a factor of him, which is to be open to learning more languages just by learning two languages [Samoan and English]. Anyway, the way he is developing, means that he is able to absorb the languages as well, so we're not formally trying to teach them stuff, it's just because it's available he can learn faster than other kids do. (Parent 4, focus group)

A Tongan mother also explained:

When they're learning another language like Samoan, for my kids especially Tongan as well, they get a sense of [identity], they find out who they are and at the same time they realise that there's other people that have a different culture from themselves ... They can see that not everyone is Samoan or Tongan, but when they learn more than just English you think beyond just the English. My son, for example, comes home and says, 'Hey Mum, B ... is Samoan and Japanese ... and he would say someone else is Samoan and Niuean. So it's more social skills, just accepting others. It's let's acknowledge other people and appreciate that ... they appreciate their Samoan speaking more than one language. (Parent 1, focus group)

Parents valued Samoan language and cultural practices at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa. For example, one parent described an incident when he was crossing the road with his young child:

I remembered the song "Va'ai le taumatau, va'ai le agavale" then [the child] sang along too, and asked, 'What does *natinati loa* mean? a' *natinati loa*?' And I said ... 'Look left, right'. We've done that a few times when we've gone for a walk and when he gets into that song. (Parent 5, focus group)

In this way a road safety song was put into practice. Metalinguistic awareness was apparent in children's transferring of the Samoan language and concepts from the centre to their home and/or community.

#### **4. Transferring of languages**

One highly valued outcome of children's learning was transferring and/or applying Samoan language use from the A'oga Fa'a Samoa immersion



setting (and from the bilingual Samoan class at school) to the community and/or extended *fanau* contexts. Less fluent speakers of Samoan described how their own heritage/home language became enriched in tandem with their children's learning, thereby reversing a generational trend of language loss. For example, one parent, talking about reading bedside stories to their child, explained:

It's good for me because I am learning how to pronounce the words, based on the story, because I take on the character—Aunty Mele and Uncle Jerome—and people like that. It's great, they enjoy it. That story time is so important for them. (Parent 4, focus group)

**Research question 3: How might the opportunities and challenges for children who learn in more than one language be addressed in educational practice?**

Parents' views about educational aspirations, and their priorities for their children, suggested both opportunities and challenges for educational practice. Overall, parents' main hopes for their young children were to be:

- well-grounded in their Samoan language, culture, and values
- respectful
- bilingual in Samoan and English, or multilingual
- healthy

and at the same time:

- to achieve academically.

For example, comments made by 23 parents who completed questionnaires included:

The most important thing that I believe is to understand and communicate with others in both English and Samoan (Parent 01, questionnaire)

Knowledge of Samoan culture and language, understand their own heritage and be proud of it, be able to communicate effectively with other family members in Samoa. (Parent 03, questionnaire)

How to communicate in the languages spoken and written and an appreciation for cultural diversity and to respect it. (Parent 04, questionnaire)

Understanding their culture, who they are as individuals and how their talents, skills, and voice can contribute to a positive and safe community [in] which they live, respect for others, environment and themselves. To understand they are loved, and supported to then feel encouraged to strive for what they believe. To know who they are and where they've come from is important. (Parent 05, questionnaire)

Understand and speak Samoan. To learn aspects of fa'a Samoa e.g. respect, love. To work hard. Be respectful, be true to oneself. To always give something 100 percent and never give up. Education and hard work is the key to success. (Parent 14, questionnaire)

Learning their culture and language so they can be proud of where they come from. (Parent 18, questionnaire)

Creativity. Self-driven. Problem solvers. Resilience. It's important they have a strong sense of self, who they are, where they come from. (Parent 22, questionnaire)

Parents' views and experiences, expressed both in the questionnaires and in focus group responses, clearly endorsed the immersion policies and practices of the A'oga Fa'a Samoa. Parents' aspirations for their children offered challenges to children, teachers and educational systems. A key challenge was to enact and support holistic learning in the heritage/home language, and academic achievement, guided by cultural values.

- Teachers identified the overarching key opportunities and challenges for educational practice arising from this research as:
- providing additional Samoan language support for children and their families
- keeping children's learning and assessment records entirely in Samoan, the heritage/home language
- empowering parents by involving them in the programme
- celebrating identities—"being Samoan [and other cultural and ethnic identities]".

During the process of the research at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa, the teacher-researchers worked alongside three university researchers to identify, analyse and reflect on the key themes arising from the data. Although challenging, this research process provided teachers with an

opportunity to examine their practices further, with reference to relevant research literature on bilingualism.

Teacher-researchers contributed to discussions with the researchers about using the heritage/home language in a positive way with young children to extend their learning. Teachers noted that the results of the research encouraged them to continue and extend their Samoan-language immersion practices, and that an ongoing challenge for the centre was to encourage children to transition to the bilingual Samoan class in the primary school to maintain and extend their Samoan language competence.

Teachers’ reflections at the conclusion of the research included this one: “I think something we got from the research is the power of language, how we need to teach the children [entirely] in Samoan, and that scolding [using the heritage/home language] is not needed”. Teachers cited this Samoan proverb:

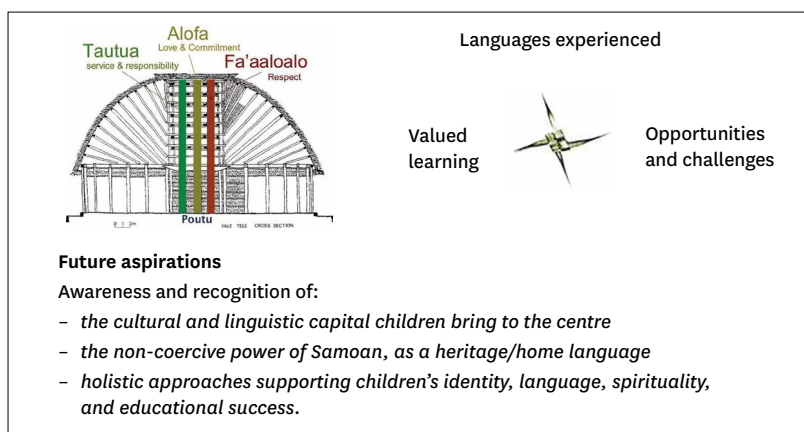
*E logo i tino matagi lelei.*

*(It is sweeter for one’s ears to hear pleasant words than bad ones.)*

## Conclusions

The research findings at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa exemplified an additive approach to bilingualism in action within a language-immersion setting. The influence of the theoretical idea of funds of knowledge was evident. The values that underpinned the research at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa, together with the emergent key themes, suggest opportunities, challenges and key issues for teachers and parents in educational practice. These values, and some key issues and aspirations, are depicted in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4: Blended model depicting values, and some key issues and aspirations for young children learning at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa



Taking the values of *alofa* (love and commitment), *tautua* (service and responsibility) and *fa'aaloalo* (respect) further, teachers reflected on implications from the research findings. In the same way that the *poutu* (posts) at the centre of a *fale* (house) are unmoved, fixed features, the values of *alofa* (love and commitment), *tautua* (service and responsibility) and *fa'aaloalo* (respect) remain constant. Teachers considered that these values will continue to guide the teaching, learning and research at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa.

In contrast, the *pe'ape'a* (propeller) rotates. It moves by wind, guided by where the wind comes from—by the direction and strength of the wind. Teachers interpreted the symbolism of the *pe'ape'a* as meaning that ongoing learning evolves, as in this study, with new knowledge and new directions for children and teachers.

The new findings from this study showed how acceptance of the cultural and linguistic capital that children bring to the centre, recognition of the non-coercive power of the heritage/home language, and holistic approaches support children's learning. For teachers who work in language and cultural immersion settings, this type of values-oriented model may potentially provide a pathway towards supporting young children who learn in more than one language, in partnership with their families.

In summary, this chapter explored young children's experiences of languages within the A'oga Fa'a Samoa and in their homes. The findings showed how parents appreciated that, within the centre, teachers spoke entirely in Samoan and supported the children to learn through Samoan. The chapter reported parents', teachers' and children's perspectives on learning experiences and outcomes that they valued. Key findings supported the importance of recognising the non-coercive power of the heritage/home language, and of holistic approaches to teaching to support children's developing identities and their learning through Samoan.

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### **Endnotes**

- 1 This bracketed translation is by Vaimasenuu Zita Martel. Eneleata Tapusoa's further explanation of the background "story" is: There was a house built in one of the villages in Savai'i. The only part that was completed was the part that was done by women. Hence the saying, "E au le ina'ilau a tama'ita'i" referring to the resilience of women and how they will not give up until something is done.