INTERNATIONAL LITERACY ASSOCIATION

Making Space for Young Children's Embodied Cultural Literacies and Heritage Languages with Dual Language Books

Rae K. Si'ilata, Mary M. Jacobs (Meg), Janet S. Gaffney, Martha Aseta, Kyla Hansell

When teachers make space for heritage languages and family cultural practices in early childhood settings, they value these as inseparable from the literacies children enact to communicate and create meaning in their worlds.

Ka uka ma mea, ti uku aki e ulu.

When something is challenging, make a start, because taking small steps forward is better than standing still.

(Niuean proverb)

What happens when teachers make space for the languages and cultural practices of young children within the context of early literacy? In this article, we share the examples of teacher practice from the Pasifika Early Literacy Project (PELP), a Ministry of Education (MoE) professional learning and development (PLD) project in Aotearoa New Zealand (Aotearoa NZ). PELP is offered to teachers and families in early childhood settings (both English medium and Pacific medium) and early years primary school classrooms. PELP serves early childhood centers and schools with large numbers of Pacific children including Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islands Māori, Niuean, Tokelauan, and Fijian ethnicities. The examples in this article provide a window into PELP, highlighting the experiences of three teachers and their work with Pacific children. Below, we provide background information, relevant literature, and examples of teacher practice.

In Indigenous Māori and Pacific contexts, it is appropriate first to introduce ourselves and our roles. Although there are five listed authors, we represent a collective group of 20 facilitators and researchers who collaborate in ongoing co-design and delivery of PELP. Dr. Rae Si'ilata (Māori/Fijian) is an honorary academic at the University of Auckland, a senior lecturer at Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi, and is a Director of Va'atele Education Consulting, which is contracted by MoE to deliver PELP. Dr. Meg Jacobs (American of Irish/German/Swiss descent) is a lecturer at the Auckland University of Technology and a lead researcher with Va'atele Education Consulting. Professor Janet Gaffney (American of Irish/German descent) is a researcher and teacher educator at the University of Auckland and PELP early literacy consultant. Martha Aseta (Samoan) is a researcher with Va'atele Education Consulting, a PhD candidate at the University

Dr. Rae K. Si'ilata (Māori/Fijian) is a former primary teacher, an honorary academic at the University of Auckland, a senior lecturer at Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi, and Director of Va'atele Education Consulting; email rae@vaatele.nz.

Dr. Mary M. Jacobs (American of Irish/German/Swiss descent) is a former elementary teacher, a lecturer at Auckland University of Technology, and lead researcher with Va'atele Education Consulting; email meg.jacobs@aut.ac.nz.

Dr. Janet S. Gaffney (American of Irish/German descent) is a former elementary teacher, a professor at the University of Auckland, Director of Te Puna Reo Pohewa | The Marie Clay Research Centre, and PELP early literacy consultant; email janet.gaffney@auckland.ac.nz.

Martha Aseta (Samoan) is a former primary teacher, a researcher with Va'atele Education Consulting, and a PhD student; email martha@vaatele.nz.

Kyla Hansell (Māori/German Samoan) is a former primary teacher, PELP project coordinator, and a professional learning and development facilitator; email kyla@vaatele.nz

of Auckland. Kyla Hansell (Māori/German Samoan) is the PELP project coordinator and a PLD workshop facilitator. We are all former primary teachers. Kyla and Martha most recently transitioned from teaching to Va'atele Education Consulting.

PELP is anchored in the notion of "heart languages" (Si'ilata, 2017), defined as the heritage languages of children connecting them with their Pacific ways of being. Heart languages are used in intergenerational communication within extended families, though the second or third generation may have experienced language loss due to the impacts of colonization. Aseta's Samoan teenage son recently said to her:

> "It's really good that we live with Mama and Papa [grandparents], because they can give me the gift of our language and when I get older, I'll be able to gift it to my own children. If I don't learn the language, I'll have nothing to gift them" (Lei'o Aseta, personal communication, February 15, 2022).

PAUSE AND PONDER

- What are the languages and cultural heritages of the children in your early childhood setting?
- How might you notice children's strengths outside of your own worldview?
- What is your view of "literacy"? What are your priorities for literacy in early childhood?
- How might families contribute to changing early childhood settings from English-only to multilingual domains?

PELP supports families and teachers to privilege intergenerational knowledges that are communicated in multimodal interactions through words, body movement, and behaviors nested in cultural ways of being. When children are encouraged to use these heart languages in early literacy contexts, they can feel safe to be who they are. Connecting heritage languages with the notion of heart languages has often elicited emotional responses from families during PELP fono (culturally responsive community meetings). Families have shared about the lasting impacts of not being allowed to use their heritage languages at school. Through fono, families saw their languages as valued in education and aligned with aspirations for their children to succeed in a system that has traditionally privileged English. For many parents, being successful in both worlds was not possible when they were children:

> I wish that this program was around when I was in school… We were mocked for speaking Samoan, we were called FOBs [Fresh off the Boat]… Our experiences made us ashamed to be Islanders, and ashamed of our parents and grandparents because they could not speak English. I think that if things were different… If we were encouraged to use our Samoan language, then who knows, I would have reached my full potential… I could have been prime minister! I feel bad that I had to be ashamed of my parents. I love them, and our experience through school caused us to lose our Samoan (Parent, family fono, August 12, 2021).

PELP is a project designed for, and led by Pacific peoples. PELP supports teachers to make space for the histories, languages, cultures, and ways of being of Pacific children and families.

Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand

Pacific peoples began migrating from the Pacific into an English-dominant NZ environment in the 1940s. In particular, island nations that were part of NZ's Pacific colonial administration, such as Western Samoa, Niue, Tokelau, and the Cook Islands comprised a significant number of those who migrated. Children of earlier migrants and communities from NZ-administered Pacific nations tended to experience greater degrees of language loss. As a consequence, many NZ-born Pacific children now speak Pacific varieties of English, and possess varying degrees of receptive or productive competence in their Pacific languages. Each Pacific group has unique social structures, histories, values and identities, alongside linguistic and cultural similarities.

Since the 1970s, the Pacific population has continued to grow, including an increasing proportion of Pacific peoples with multiple heritages or identities. The nine largest Pacific ethnic groups include Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islands Māori, Niuean, Tokelauan, Fijian, Tuvaluan, I-Kiribati, and Rotuman. As nations of the Constitutional Realm of New Zealand, the Cook Islands, Niue, and Tokelau have more members living in Aotearoa NZ than in their home nations (Ministry of Pacific Peoples, 2020). Although the term *Pasifika* has been used by MoE since 2008, the use of the term *Pacific* was enacted through education policy in 2018. These overarching labels, while somewhat problematic for individual Pacific nations, also recognize the multiple identities of mixed heritage Pacific peoples. We use these labels interchangeably.

Project Background

> *Tautuanā ne'i vale tu'ulima le tofi.*
>
> *Behold your inheritance and responsibilities, lest they be lost.*
>
> *Language is a gift from God; pass it on to future generations.*
>
> (Samoan proverb)

In 2014, PELP was implemented with teachers of children in their first 2 years of schooling. In 2020, MoE invited the project to expand into early childhood settings. Facilitators, researchers, and Pacific Early Childhood Education (ECE) experts worked together to redesign PELP for this sector. This co-design process was an authentic Pacific way of working that occurred in partnership with those for whom the design was intended. PELP includes three teacher workshops, teacher visits by PLD facilitators, and two family fono. PLD and fono facilitators are Pacific community members, speakers of their languages, and teachers. Fono facilitators invite family members to contribute their knowledge and stories in co-constructed conversations. All Pacific families and their children are invited to participate; however, attendance can range from eight people in smaller ECE centers to more than 200 people in larger primary schools.

Initially, PELP was piloted using only Samoan/English dual-language books. Dual-language books are now published in five Pacific languages: Cook Islands Māori, Niuean, Samoan, Tokelauan, and Tongan. These books act as catalysts to support teachers in enacting key ideas in their teaching practice, as described in Table 1.

The multilingual ethos of PELP normalizes the sharing of multiple languages in English-dominant spaces. Teachers use digital PELP resources (see "More to Explore") and share dual-language texts aloud. They invite children to share their heritage languages and stories, increasing multilingual interactions and metalinguistic awareness (Bialystok, 1992; May et al., 2004; Peal & Lambert, 1962). Teacher actions that normalize multilingual interactions raise children's expectations for linguistic inclusion and belonging.

Children in early childhood settings are provided with dual-language books that resonate with their own experiences. Families are encouraged to use their heritage languages and/or English to make connections between their own stories and the stories in the books. Table 1 outlines the big ideas that are shared with teachers at the beginning of their PLD journey. The big ideas focus on connecting with children's experiences and literacies, and creating in multimodal ways.

Teachers use the dual-language books flexibly for multiple purposes. For example, they may use a Samoan text with Samoan children, or they may use the same text in a mixed language group where children can compare their

Table 1
PELP PLD Workshop Big Ideas and Outcomes

PLD Workshop Big Ideas	PLD Teacher Learning Outcomes	Family Fono/Meeting Big Ideas
PLD Workshop 1 Building funds of knowledge connection and development through reciprocal partnerships between home and center/school: Connecting dual-language books with child and family experiences and stories	Workshop 1 Teachers will support Pasifika children and families to make connections between their own funds of knowledge/stories and the schemata/stories of the Pasifika dual-language books	Fono/Meeting 1 Importance of families being confident in their own beliefs, abilities, language/s, cultures, stories, and experiences as foundational to their children's literacy learning Importance of families using their Pasifika language/s in the home—both for meaningful talanoa (co-constructed conversations) and for engaging with texts and for storying
PLD Workshop 2 Co-creating exciting and innovative centers/classrooms that foster emerging literacy acts in ways that help us notice, recognize, interpret, and respond to children's multimodal literacies and experiences	Workshop 2 Teachers will create opportunities for Pasifika children to utilize their linguistic and cultural resources at their center/school as they explore the dual-language books together	Fono/Meeting 2 Importance of developing deep thinking through oral interactions, experiences, and texts Importance of families enacting and utilizing their culturally embedded language and literacy practices with their children to create their own "lived experience" texts
PLD Workshop 3 Making connections between oracy, literacy, and family language and cultural practices by interacting with and around books to support deep thinking	Workshop 3 Teachers will support Pasifika children and families to enact their culturally embedded literacy practices as they make connections between oracy and literacy using the Pasifika dual-language books as catalysts/invitations to create	

languages. Teachers make decisions about which books to share, depending on who they are reading with. Teachers also support children to create their own dual-language texts when there are no published heritage language books available. The co-design ethos of the project encourages teachers to generate new thinking around using dual-language books in their settings. For example, one teacher invited older siblings to create audio-recordings of the dual-language books, which children listened to and read along with each day (see Take Action! 3).

Facilitators' Enactment of Pacific Cultural Ways of Knowing and Being

Mahu'inga e koloa he'ene mole.

We only treasure something once it is lost.

As we look back in time to our once vibrant language, we know we need to act.

(Tongan proverb)

Within PELP, Pacific cultural ways of being are privileged. Facilitators' enactment of two Pacific relational practices (*teu le va* and *talanoa*) are described below.

Teu Le Va and Talanoa

The Samoan cultural practice of *teu le va* literally means to "tidy the space" and refers to keeping the relational space safe. Nurturing the *va* is central to Pacific cultures where relationships are the foundation of what it means to be human (Airini et al., 2010; Anae, 2019). This focus on reciprocal relationships strengthens opportunities for knowledge sharing through *talanoa* (co-constructed conversation). Talanoa can be a practical way to enact teu le va. Talanoa occurs when there is a supportive and inclusive relationship that enables a natural flow of talk, where talk (*tala*) is open and unrestrained (*noa*) (Si'ilata, 2017). Talanoa is more than a simple conversation; it personifies trust, rapport, respect, reciprocity, belonging, and inclusion. Talanoa can occur between two or more people, often in socially familiar ways, where time is flexible, and the knowledge shared is valued. Talanoa is embedded in PELP design and implementation, encouraging families and teachers to feel supported in their interactions with facilitators and researchers (Halapua, 2007; Vaioleti, 2006).

Storying

Talanoa provides space and genuine opportunities for people "to story." Storying happens when individuals feel empowered and confident to share their personal experiences. Stories dwell within stories as multilayered expressions of life experience that resonate with others. Storying embodies the essence of talanoa and can be profoundly intimate and poignant. Talanoa has no set question-and-answer structure but, rather, is negotiated through the natural ebb and flow of conversation. It requires active listening, reflection, and spoken connection between participants. Each person's contribution is important to collective understandings, highlighting the facilitators' essential role in prompting talanoa during fono. Facilitators initiate the process of talanoa through storying, by sharing their narratives to connect with families. In this way, facilitators set the foundation and tone in which families' stories are shared and entrusted.

Family Fono

Family fono, held in ECE centers and schools, explore the challenges families face when endeavoring to maintain or revitalize their languages. Talanoa provides a safe and respectful environment to confront barriers to revitalizing family languages and to understand valued family cultural practices. For the reconceptualization of literacy to occur, centers and teachers need to value Pacific family cultural practices within early childhood settings (Leaupepe et al., 2017). The cultural practices of teu le va and talanoa are privileged in PELP pedagogical and methodological approaches, promoting culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012) and culturally revitalizing models of practice. Enacting Pacific (and other) cultural practices is taking action to revitalize and sustain the linguistic and cultural treasures of Pacific communities (see Take Action! 5 and 6).

Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Literacy as Pasifika Early Literacies

Ko toku tokiga e mau ai toku hikohikomaga.

My culture and language strengthen my learning environment.

(Tokelauan proverb)

When literacy is narrowly conceptualized in ECE to ensure children are "ready for school," family languages and cultural ways of knowing are marginalized (Gaffney et al., 2021). PELP defines literacy broadly, congruent with "multiliteracies" (New London Group, 1996), encompassing communication across multiple modes, and expanding traditional print definitions of literacy (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). We agree with Simonsen et al. (2009) who argued that "we need to take a broad view of literacies as modes of communication, conceptualisation, and meaning making" (p. viii). Children may also draw on more than one heritage or family

language, including various registers of English to enact literacies in their worlds (Souto-Manning & Yoon, 2018). A narrow focus on children's English language competence (García & Otheguy, 2017) restricts children's literacies and teachers' recognition of them.

PELP reconceptualizes literacy with early childhood teachers and families with the aim of amplifying literacies through a Pacific-specific lens. PELP supports teachers to normalize and privilege community languages and cultural practices within the valued knowledge of educational settings (González et al., 2005; Si'ilata, 2014). Pacific cultural practices are expressed as embodied literacies or ways of knowing and being, shared through physical movement to communicate and create meaning. Pacific children embody the values of their families and communities (e.g., how to position themselves when close to elders). Early childhood settings have a critical role to name these embodied ways of being as early literacies. Some Pacific cultural practices (e.g., dance) are more visible in center/school events, but the deeper aspects of culture often associated with values and beliefs may go unrecognized (Aseta et al., 2019).

For Pacific peoples, being literate with cultural practices and values is inseparable from Pacific languages and cultural identities (Si'ilata, 2017). Embodied Pacific cultural practices (e.g., performance, oratory, weaving, traditional food, and caregiving practices) support significant connections with people, places, and things. Treasured cultural adornments and objects also play a significant role in communicating and creating embodied Pacific cultural practices. Rameka et al. (2017) described how multiple uses of pareu (wraps/lavalava) in the caregiving practices and play of Cook Islands Māori children affirmed their cultural practices and identities. In PELP, exploring the identities, stories, and histories reflected in cultural objects, such as pareu, may contribute to a deeper understanding of cultural practices, including associated values and beliefs.

Many Pacific children participate alongside their families in spiritual and religious practices at places of worship and at home, shaping literacies (Aseta et al., 2019). Dickie (2010) asserted that Samoan church literacy practices that supported comprehension could be utilized by teachers to build on children's home literacy strengths. Si'ilata, (2014) illustrated how the literacies of Pacific children (vocabulary learning through song, meaningful memorization, and recitation) were made visible by a discussion of familiar Biblical stories (see pp. 146–149). However, a critique (Leaupepe et al., 2017) of the recent revision of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), the official early childhood curriculum of Aotearoa NZ, noted a lack of reference to spirituality, despite its significance in the everyday lives of many Pacific peoples.

Reconceptualizing literacies in Pacific (and other) cultures also demands a critical examination of phonics-driven linear approaches to early literacy teaching and learning in many education jurisdictions (Jacobs et al., 2021). *Te Whāriki's* sociocultural foundation aligns with a multiliteracies lens, emphasizing cultural signs, symbols, and practices to privilege children's preferred communicative modes when making sense of their worlds (Simonsen et al., 2009). PELP's approach centers Pacific identities, languages, and cultures, using dual-language texts as catalysts to support connections between home and ECE.

Dual-language texts affirm emergent bilingual identities and support biliteracy (Cummins, 2007). More research is needed to understand how dual-language books can be used to privilege the linguistic and cultural resources of young children in early literacy experiences. Naqvi et al. (2013) documented how children in a Canadian kindergarten demonstrated complex sociolinguistic and metalinguistic competencies when sharing dual-language texts with their teacher. In a more recent study, Zaidi et al. (2022) explored Storybook Canada's 40 multilingual digital dual-language books for engaging children in reading French at different levels of text complexity and to enhance home–school connections.

Rowe and Fain (2013) documented the Family Backpack Project, an early literacy project with a "funds of knowledge" approach that connected to families' existing literacy practices and supported young children's reading in home languages and English. Similarly, in PELP, the dual-language books provide opportunities for children and families to engage in intergenerational storytelling, encouraging Pacific language revitalization, and validation of lived experiences and histories.

Au's (1980) seminal research in the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) analyzed teachers' small-group reading pedagogy that aligned with "talk-story," a linguistic practice in Indigenous Hawaiian culture. The features of "talk-story" were familiar to the children, encouraging their verbal contributions, often in Hawaiian Creole English, leading to improved academic achievement. Au's (1980) work aligns with PELP's aim to legitimize Pacific literacies in early childhood settings and schools. The next section highlights PELP's system impact on learning and teaching with young children.

Project Impact

We have systematically collected child, teacher, and school data since 2014. The number of teachers in each year's cohort has ranged from 24 in the pilot year to 59 in 2020, corresponding with increases in the annual number of

participating Pasifika children from 114 to 353. These numbers represent *only* the Pasifika children for whom we have pre-post data. For example in 2014, of the 153 children, we had data for 114. In 2018, we had data for 353 of the 503 participants.

In light of project impact on children's reading progress and teacher uptake of culturally sustaining pedagogies, MoE has expanded the project over the last 8 years across languages, year levels, and ECE. The team has worked within a continuous improvement design-based approach, trialing "best-fit" measures for purposes and contexts (e.g., Running Records of Oral Reading, Concepts about Print, and Records of Oral and Written Vocabulary in Pacific and English languages). Running Record data for participating Pasifika children have consistently been used in primary schools as a standardized measure across cohorts. More than 86% of children who participated in PELP increased book levels. The pre-post book-level gains reflect the impact of PELP PLD. However, this improvement is not solely attributable to PELP alone, which is embedded in everyday learning and teaching.

The quantitative results reflect a small slice of the impact. Teaching observations in centers and classes, conversations with families and teachers, and session and program evaluations shape our continual redesign. ECE teachers use *Learning Stories* (Carr & Lee, 2012) to document children's learning experiences and working theories. The expansion of PELP from primary to ECE in 2020 has deepened the theoretical base and enhanced pedagogical connections between ECE and schooling. PELP has affirmed the work of teachers in Pacific language nests in ECE and bilingual units in primary schools. PELP is identified in the 2020–2030 Ministry of Education Action Plan for Pacific Education (2020) as an initiative that is working to support literacy learning, thus impacting policy. In the following section, we highlight three examples from PELP that illustrate openings for reconceptualizing literacy alongside teachers, families, and children.

Making Space for Pasifika Early Literacies in PELP

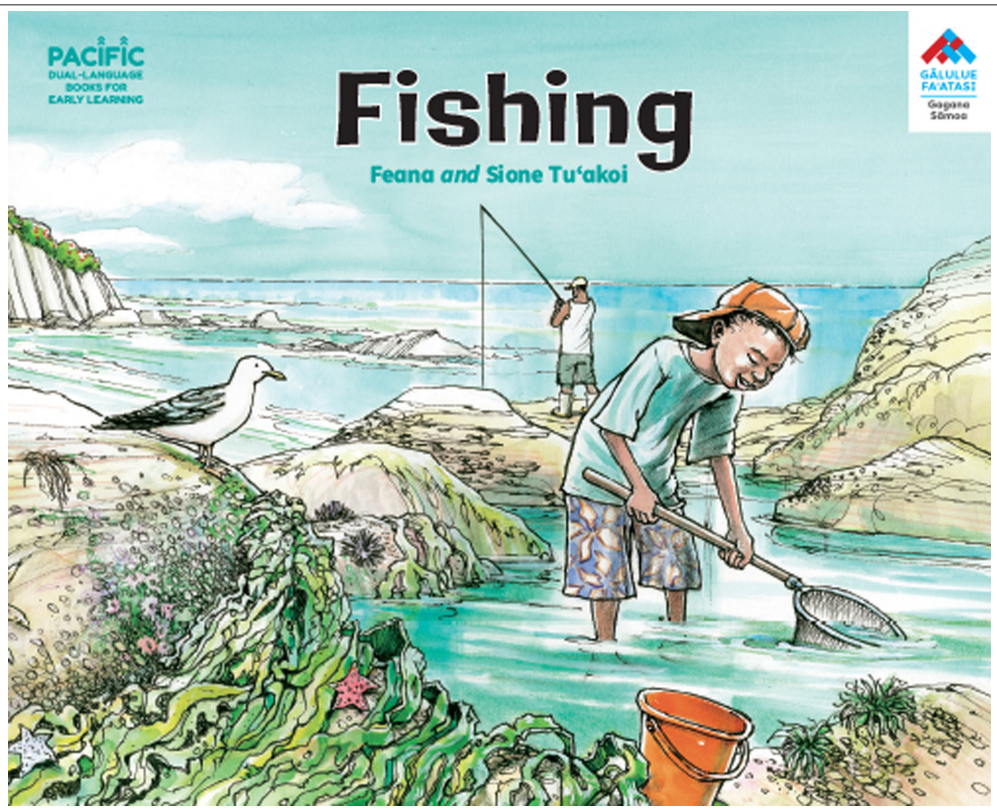
Kia āriki au i tōku tupuranga, ka ora uatu rai tōku reo.

As I embrace my heritage, my language lives on.

(Cook Islands Māori proverb)

Figure 1
Samoan Dual Language Book: ʻO le Fāgotaga

Figure 2
English Dual Language Book: Fishing



Example 1

Siva as embodied literacy in the PLD space.

In one of the teacher workshops, an ECE facilitator who was also an early childhood teacher, drew on her knowledge of Samoan siva (dance) to story a dual-language text, after reading aloud the book, *O le Fāgotaga/ Fishing* (Tu'akoi & Tu'akoi, 2020) in Samoan and English (Figures 1 and 2).

The facilitator created Samoan siva/dance moves with teachers that illustrated the sequence of events during a day of fishing. She called out the story event that was being communicated through teachers' embodied siva actions. The facilitator moved fluidly between Samoan and English and incorporated humor to emphasize the cultural nuances of siva as a way of storying familiar Samoan fishing practices (e.g., putting on your sunhat, walking along the sand, rolling out the mat, casting out and hauling in the fishing net).

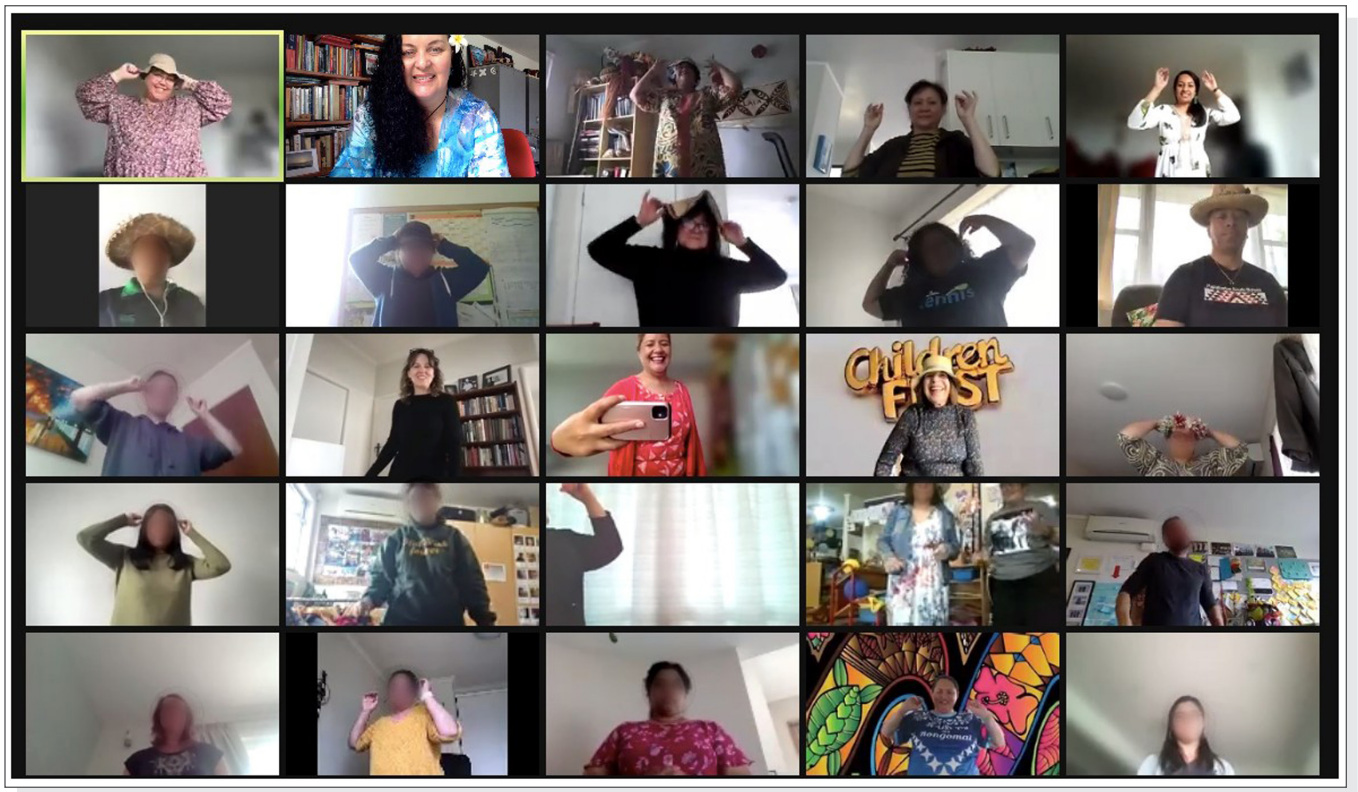
Figure 3 illustrates teachers engaged in Siva Samoa (Samoan dance) while completing the action of putting on their sunhat.

The re-enactment of the story through siva highlighted the safe relational space or practice of "teu le va" (Anae, 2019) between the facilitator and teachers. Providing a safe space for teachers to experience storying through siva encouraged them to think about ways to connect with and affirm the embodied literacies of children and families. The Pacific teachers who were familiar with siva were positioned as knowledge holders and themselves recognized that siva is a legitimate and valued literacy. The facilitator invited Pacific teachers to share their own form of cultural dance to retell the story. Teachers shared in ways that illustrated the nuanced differences across Pacific cultural groups.

Several teachers noted the power of participating in Samoan siva during the workshop to support their reconceptualizing of dance as an embodied literacy:

> We have been using our traditional hymns and ballads such as imene reo metua and the ute [chant] which our tamariki have heard or seen using gestures or bodies to express themselves (Cook Islands Māori Teacher, Workshop 2, Zoom chat function, November 5, 2021).

Figure 3
Siva Samoa as Embodied Literacy in an Online Workshop



> A big takeaway for me from today's session was the idea of "embodied literacies." While cultural songs, dances, art, etc., are things we regularly celebrate in our school, I've never thought about how it can be linked to literacy in this way (Teacher, Workshop 2 feedback, November 5, 2021).

> We are using embodied literacies in all areas of our ECE curriculum using our Reo Kūki ʻAirani; dancing, singing, metaphors, peʻe [chants] movements, oratory, etc. (Cook Islands Māori Teacher, Workshop 3 feedback, November 26, 2021).

The teacher responses illustrate an opening for defining "literacy" as embodied cultural knowledge. Aseta et al. (2019) wrote, "pese (song) and siva (dance) are indispensable to Samoans (and Pasifika peoples in general) as a means of sharing our narratives and identities, and as symbolic expressions of our languages and cultures" (p. 32). Although teachers had valued dance, drama, and singing as cultural representations, naming them as "embodied literacies" to support learning was a pedagogical shift. Naming Pasifika early literacies moved teachers beyond viewing these simply as activities for engaging children, to seeing the meaningful cultural communication embedded in them (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). This finding suggests that teachers can better understand children's embodied literacies by first seeing their cultural songs and dances as important educational resources. Teachers can find out what are significant songs or dances to children and families in their early childhood setting (see Take Action! 1).

Example 2

Planting talo and power-sharing.

The dual-language book, *Tono's Talo Garden* (Toeono, 2015) served as a catalyst for one teacher to create an opening for children to draw on their family knowledges of planting talo (Pacific root vegetable). In a re-enactment of the story, one child assumed the role of language teacher as children carefully placed talo plants in the dirt (Figures 4 and 5).

As the children participated in digging holes, planting, and preparing the ground for each talo plant, they narrated each step in Tongan and English.

> ʻOku tofi talo ʻae fāʻe ʻa Leni.
>
> If you do not know what that means, here, I will tell you: Whaea Leni is cutting the talo.
>
> ʻOku keli ʻe Sela ʻae luo.
>
> If you do not know what that means, here, I will tell you again: I am digging a hole.

Figure 4
Tongan Dual Language Book, Ko e Ngaoue Talo ‘a Tono’

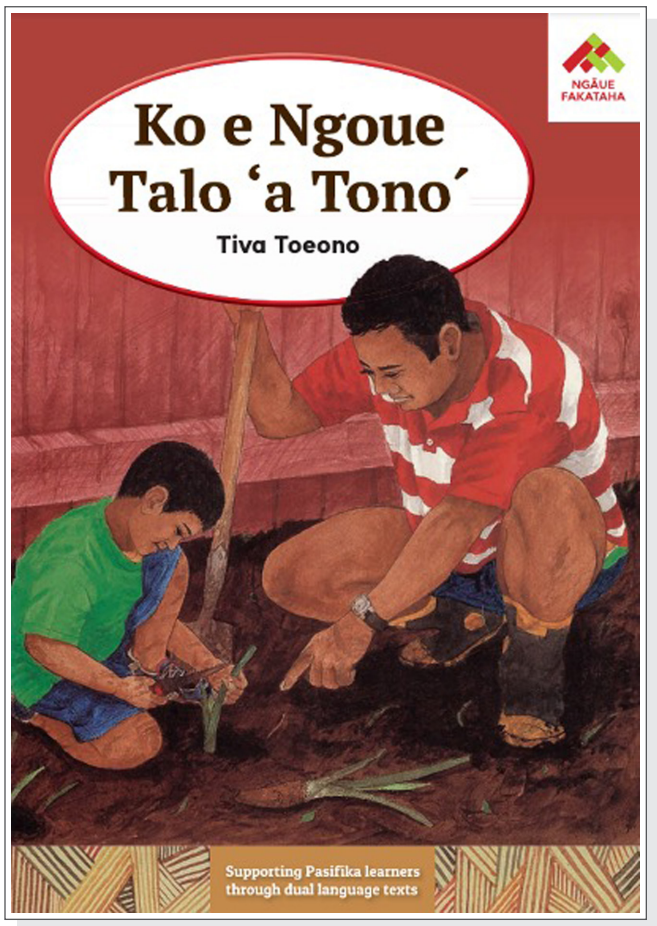
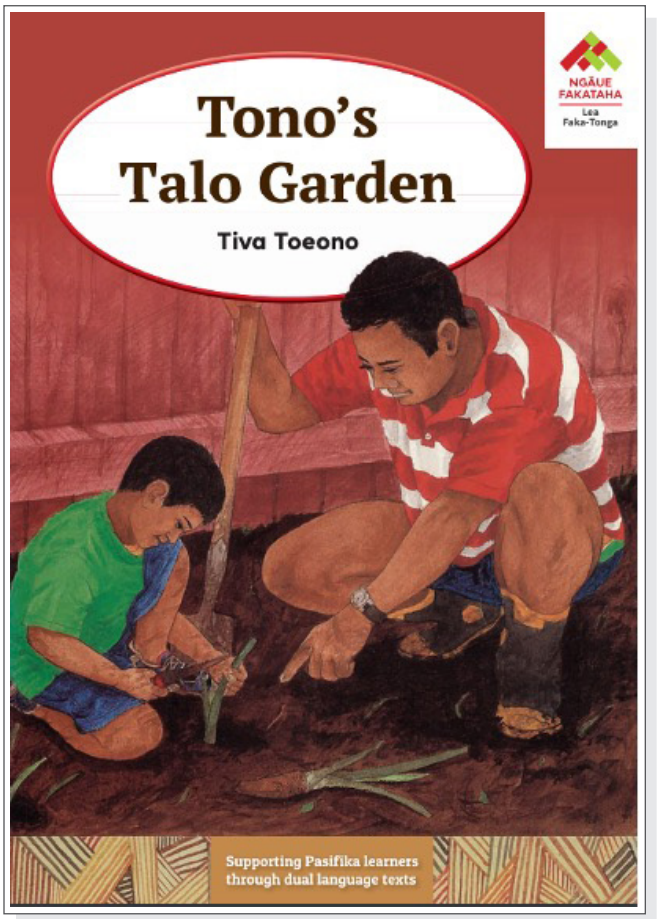


Figure 5
English Dual Language Book, Tono’s Talo Garden



‘Oku tuku hifo ‘e ‘Eseta ‘ae fu‘u talo kihe luo.

If you do not know what that means, here, I will tell you: Eseta is putting the talo inside the hole.

‘Oku tanu ‘e ‘Oueni ‘ae fu‘u talo.

If you do not know what that means, here, I will tell you: Owen is patting the dirt down.

The teacher video-recorded as the children planted the talo and told the story through words and actions. After each Tongan phrase, the child repeated in English to the camera, “If you don’t know what that means, here, I will tell you!” This simple repeated statement highlights the power-sharing between the child and their English-speaking teacher, and the safe relational space that enabled this to happen. The child felt safe to assume the role of teacher without jeopardizing the child/teacher relationship.

The teacher’s invitation to plant the talo and record the process in Tongan and English, created an opening for children to draw on family funds of knowledge to retell the story (Naqvi et al., 2013). The video was shared with the children’s families, showing how the teacher intentionally privileged Tongan language and traditional cultural practices. Children read the book along with the video and some families connected with the story by exploring their own gardens. This finding suggests that teachers can amplify children’s languages, and culturally located literacies through the co-creation of audio, visual, and printed texts (see Take Action! 4 and 7).

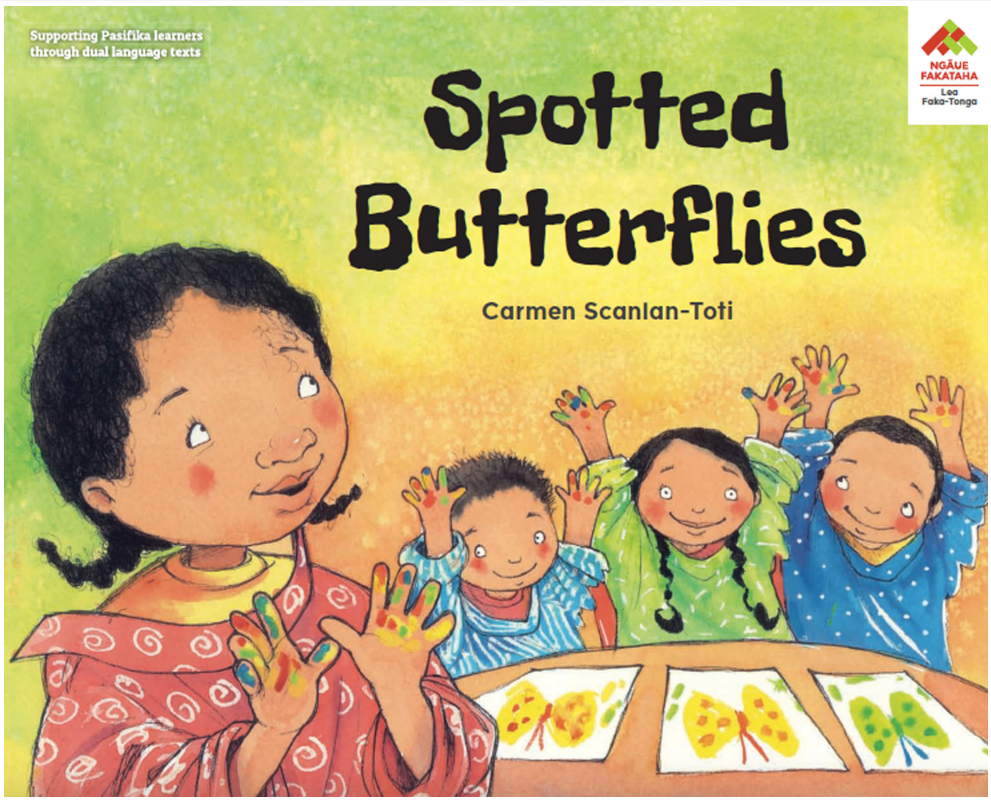
Example 3

Responding to spirituality in Pacific children’s early literacies.

In Aotearoa NZ, children’s learning in ECE is primarily documented through stories that are written by the

Figure 6
Tongan Dual Language Book, Pepe Lanu-Pulepule

Figure 7
English Dual Language Book, Spotted Butterflies



teacher, often inclusive of child and family voice (Carr & Lee, 2012). This final example is an excerpt from a Tongan child's "learning story." The learning story begins with the teacher's recognition of what the child brings to the early childhood center from home:

> You come from a family with spoken Tongan language at home. Your mum shares that it is important to keep using the language as you can then communicate with your nana who stays with you (Learning story, November 23, 2020).

The teacher's "learning story" anchored the child's learning experiences in the Tongan language, and in the spiritual and cultural literacies of her multigenerational family home:

> The book, *Pepe Lanu-pulepule* (Scanlan-Toti, 2017) [Figures 6 and 7] was given to your mum to continue with your learning at home. We talked about speaking Tongan language at home… you said what sounded like a prayer in Tongan, ending with "in the power of God" and later added… "in Jesus Christ, Amen". I look forward to you sharing your stories and prayer with children and teachers at the center. Totoatu – awesome! (Learning story, November 23, 2020).

Leaupepe et al. (2017) described the essence of the Pasifika child as "the spiritual self which links him/her to the 'papa-pito o te enua' to the foundation (core) of the land, ancestors, family, communities, and across distances to the homeland" (p. 35). The teacher's narrative demonstrated an opening for recognizing the family's spiritual beliefs. The child is seen as a carrier of knowledge and the Tongan stories and prayers of home are positioned as valued cultural capital in this center, affirming the child's Tongan identity within the collective (Teisina, 2021).

Though the explicit recognition of spiritual practices in ECE curriculum may be restricted, this does not limit the teacher's thoughtful response to the knowledges children carry from home and places of worship. The learning story creates space for the child's spiritual self (Leaupepe et al., 2017). This finding suggests that when teachers listen closely to what is important to children, this can open up space to form relationships with families and affirm their cultural expertise (see Take Action! 2 and 4).

Space Making

> *Ko tōku reo, tōku ohooho, ko tōku reo, tōku māpihi maurea.*
>
> *My language is my awakening, my language is the window to my soul.*
>
> (Whakataukī – Māori proverb)

Language, culture, and embodied literacies are intertwined. When we reconceptualize literacies, families are the source of young children's languages, knowledges, ways of being, and identities. Linguistic and cultural literacies are sustained by families, communities, and teachers. In PELP, teachers have been given space to pause and notice children's cultural literacies, to listen to family aspirations, to think creatively about new pedagogical practices, and to engage in critical examination of system priorities. Systemic privileging of monocultural English-only print literacy has restricted teachers from opening up linguistic and cultural spaces for children. Each of the PLD workshops and family fono supported teachers and families to reconceptualize cultural practices as valued literacies. Teachers in any learning context can choose to make space for the languages, cultures, and embodied literacies of all children as they share power with families.

TAKE ACTION!

1. Expand your thinking from "literacy" to "literacies as embodied cultural practices." What cultural songs or dances do children know? What stories are told through song and dance?
2. Ask families what days are significant to them. Invite families to share cultural practices (e.g., songs, dances, arts practice, games) or spiritual practices (e.g., prayers, proverbs, customs, protocols, caregiving).
3. Find books or invite families to share stories in home languages to make children's languages and cultures audible and visible within your setting.
4. Encourage children to express themselves in their languages. Learn correct pronunciation of children and family names, greetings, and phrases. Position children and families as teachers.
5. Who are the language experts in your early childhood community? Employ community language speakers as teachers. Foster meaningful partnerships with families and community members.
6. Discuss the benefits of language revitalization and bilingualism with families. Invite families to attend a gathering to share their stories and aspirations.
7. Invite families to create dual-language stories with their children that connect with significant people and places in their lives.

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Conflict of Interest

We have no known conflicts of interest to disclose.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this publication are the authors' views and do not necessarily reflect the views of the New Zealand Ministry of Education.

Ethics Statement

This research has ethics approval from The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee: Reference #20743. We have permission to reproduce material from other sources.

Data Availability Statement

Data are available on request.

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