

**Filimānaia: A Samoan critique of  
standardised reading assessment in  
New Zealand primary schools**

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## **Folasaga-Abstract**

In 2010, I was seconded from my classroom teaching position to work as a facilitator in the implementation of the newly-established National Standards. In this role, I ran in-depth Literacy and Assessment workshops in schools. I found that despite the national effort to close the gap between achievers and non-achievers, schools are still faced with the issue of most Samoan students not doing well as they should be, especially in the area of literacy. Assessment procedures from which such data is derived are widely researched in New Zealand and abroad. In spite of the numerous studies conducted on literacy assessment, none has ever been done to critically analyse the linguistic nature of these literacy assessment tools; yet these tools and their implementation may well contribute to the phenomenon of underachievement among Samoan students in New Zealand. Thus the aim of this inquiry was to open up the practice of standardised reading tests to examination. This thesis examines unacknowledged issues in the design of the standardised reading tests by which students are assessed in multicultural contexts.

A Samoan critical approach was adopted specifically for this research: 'Tofā'a'anolasi', which draws on Foucault's analytical tool box to counter-read tests texts and practices, including the way achievement data is managed and applied. Tofā'a'anolasi is based on my interpretation of Foucault's ideas about power, knowledge and language in society, and how these ideas are useful in educational research undertaken from a Samoan perspective. This research framework is used to examine assumptions within and about assessment practice, particularly as it pertains to Samoan students in New Zealand. This thesis shows how the normalising hegemonic nature of assessment has profoundly disadvantaged Samoan students.

This study includes critical discourse analysis of selected standardised reading testing tools in New Zealand primary schools. For this work, two reading test papers routinely used throughout New Zealand to assess the reading knowledge and skills of Year 7 and 8 students were analysed and critiqued. I also gathered stories from teachers as assessment administrators and Samoan students as assessment takers. Through focus group conversations, these assessment participants shared their own understandings and critiques of assessments. Moreover, I communicated with three key informants, who are also experts in the area of New Zealand primary school literacy assessments about the

two standardised tests examined in thesis. Their stories are included in this research thesis.

The analysis of the findings reveals serious mismatches between the language, culture, knowledge, experience and interests most of the Samoan students bring into the testing context, and those expected to succeed in the standardised tests. These discrepancies cause students confusion and dismay. The analysis also reveals the predominantly male oriented nature of tests contents and administration. In this thesis, I argue that the male orientation of tests affects some Samoan students in two ways. First, the assumption of male superiority (and female inferiority) is in direct contrast with the Samoan culture of 'feagaiga', or the sacred covenant and deep respect Samoan brothers hold for their sisters. Second, the male and female themed nature of tests contents rely on a male/female binary within tests which tends to exclude third gender, for instance, the Samoan fa'afafine. In this thesis, the three emerging themes of linguistic bias, cultural bias and gender bias are presented with examples from the tests examined.

The review of the literature reveals that standardised assessment is a governmental practice; its processes are constructed within historical and cultural notions of what is normal and what is not. This categorisation bolsters the unquestioned power of assessment to regulate its subjects as governable individuals. The power of assessment causes particular behaviours, such as teachers teaching the content knowledge to suit the purposes of the state for the students to learn. The contribution of this study lies in highlighting issues that are taken for granted in the design and practice of standardised reading tests in New Zealand primary schools. These issues include sometimes the inescapable biases in the standardised reading test papers, in terms of how their language, content and presentations of gender and ethnicity work against a marginalised student population such as Samoans living in New Zealand.

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## **Lisi o Fa'apu'upu'uga o Upu-List of Abbreviations**

AUSAD	Analysis and Use of Student Achievement Data
ARBs	Assessment Resource Banks
asTTle	Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning
BOT	Board of Trustees
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
ERO	Education Review Office
ESL	English as a Second Language
MOE	Ministry of Education
NCEA	National Certificate of Educational Achievement
NEG	National Education Guidelines
NEMP	National Education Monitoring Project
NZAA	New Zealand Assessment Academy
NZCER	New Zealand Council for Educational Research
NZQA	New Zealand Qualification Authority
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAT	Progress Achievement Test
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPTA	Post Primary Teachers' Association
SSC	State Services Commission
STAR	Supplementary Test of Achievement in Reading
TIMMS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

## **Ta'utinoga-Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Alfie', is written on a light blue rectangular background.

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*Ia saga vi'ia le Atua e ona fa'amanuiaga uma. Amene.*

This Ph.D. is dedicated to the loving memories of my late parents, my father Galuvao Vaipou Tavila who taught me humility, and my mother Sose, who taught the value of hard work. Thank you for giving me what you yourselves never got - a chance to attend school.



## **Matā'upu Muamua: o le tautua**

May the perspectives of the fishermen and the insights into the winds and currents lead the fa'afaletui to a new morning (Tui Atua, cited in Tamasese, 2008).

It is said in the Samoan Culture that there are three perspectives. The perspective of the person at the top of the mountain, the perspective of the person at the top of the tree, and the perspective of the person in the canoe who is close to the school of fish. In any big problem the three perspectives are equally necessary. While the person fishing in the canoe may not have the long view of the person on the mountain or the person at the top of the tree, they are closer to the school of fish (Tamasese, 2008). This cultural wisdom is expressed in the quote (above) by Samoa's Head of State, Afioga Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese 'Efi.

This research, about the current situation of standardised reading tests in New Zealand primary schools, represents the integration of all of the three perspectives: the mountain-top views of the assessment experts; the tree-top views of the assessment administrators; and the close-up view of the assessment takers.

### **Introduction**

Samoan society is organized by family, and each family has its own matai titles. There are two categories of matai titles, chiefs and orators. Matai titles have origins. They derive from happenings such as marriages, fishing, games, war, the environment, and service. For some matai titles, these events result in the founding of tulaga maota (names of residence), igoa ipu ('ava title), igoa taupou (daughter's names) and igoa manaia (son's names), ietoga (fine mat) and fa'alupega (honorifics). Filimānaia is a chiefly title in Sato'alepai, a village in the Matāutu district in Savai'i, Samoa.

The story goes that Sato'alepai was known to have its own breed of fish called the atule. Samoa, a tautai (wise fisherman) of the village was methodical at fishing. He and Maiava, a high chief in the village made fishing the atule their everyday job. At some stage during the fishing trips, Samoa would call out to Maiava to fa'ataumatau (line up) his canoe to that of his, so they could share a smoke and something to eat and drink. During this time, Samoa would fili (choose) the mānaia (best) fish from his catch and gently drop them into Maiava's canoe.

Samoa's prolonged commitment in making sure Maiava was well cared for during the fishing trip did not go unnoticed. One day during another fishing trip, the high chief acknowledged Samoa's sincerity. In recognition of his kindness, he was granted 'Filimānaia' as his chiefly title. Filimānaia as a gift ('igagatō) derived from Samoa's act of choosing (fili) the best (mānaia) fish for Maiava. As Filimānaia's 'ava title, he was granted the name 'Fa'ataumatau', in recognition of how the two men levelled their canoes against each other for their meal and smoking breaks. For Filimānaia's residence he was granted the name 'Sīliga' or excellence in acknowledgement of the tremendous tautua (service) Samoa carried out for Maiava.

I have adopted the title 'Filimānaia' as a metaphor for the underlying assertion of this thesis. That is, all students, including Samoans, deserve the best service, in terms of the best assessment practices, that choose assessment tools and management of assessment data, and adopt an equal footing of all students' prior experiences and linguistic profiles. I have also used the various aspects of the Filimānaia title to organise the thesis chapters, as explained below.

Matā'upu Muamua (Chapter One) is Tautua, or service, with respect and sincerity. This chapter aims to introduce the thesis, and endorses the author's commitment to serve the Samoan students and their parents through this project. Matā'upu Lona Lua (Chapter Two) is Igagatō. In this chapter are theoretical frameworks that have been available like 'gifts' from the existing works of fore scholars to support the interpretations and understandings of this research thesis.

Matā'upu Lona Tolu (Chapter Three) is Tofā'a'anolasi. As part of a tautua, the author adopted a Samoan research framework for understanding how to use Critical Discourse Analysis in educational research, not just for the aims and significance of this thesis, but for other scholars who may find this approach useful in their own research projects. Matā'upu Lona Fā (Chapter Four) is Tautai and it has the design of the study. As the word tautai (or wise fisherman) endorses, this chapter contains the detailed description of the methods of gathering data and information just like Samoa was methodical in his fishing techniques.

Matā'upu Lona Lima (Chapter Five) consists of the linguistic analysis of test papers analysed and is titled Filiga. This chapter focuses on the language choices used, linguistic skills tested, the questions asked, and the multiple choice answers provided which for the most part seem to disadvantage Samoan and other minority students.



Filiga, (to choose) indicates the careful choices made in identifying patterns and themes in the language used in the tests. Filiga also acknowledges the thoughtful weaving of the knowledge generated from the data presented and the participants' critique, leading to new understanding of assessment discourse.

Matā'upu Lona Ono (Chapter Six) is Fa'ataumatau. In this chapter is the discussion of the cultural analysis of test papers. The title Fa'ataumatau accentuates the need to level and balance the cultures, knowledges and interests tested in the standardised assessment tools examined and the diversity of cultures, knowledge, prior experiences and interests, students bring with them into the testing contexts.

Matā'upu Lona Fitu (Chapter Seven) is Sīliga, and discusses gender discourse of assessment tools. Sīliga or excellence, acknowledges the importance of dialogue that leads to practices of excellent value that benefit all students. Such dialogue addresses the male oriented nature of assessment practices, as explored and discussed in this chapter.

Matā'upu Lona Valu (Chapter Eight) is titled Filimānaia. As the final chapter, Filimānaia signifies the conclusion of this thesis and this tautua. Like Samoa in the story mentioned above, Filimānaia acknowledges the author's commitment to make a contribution to the education of Samoan students, by highlighting issues that have been taken for granted in the design of standardised assessment tools and practices in the New Zealand primary schools. The title Filimānaia endorses that participants' stories about assessments have been told. There are also recommendations for better understandings of assessment in terms of their designs, implementations and in terms of the management of the assessment data.

The second part of the title: 'A Samoan critique of standardised reading assessment in New Zealand primary schools', endorses what this thesis presents. This critical reflection, from a Samoan perspective, has highlighted the need to reconsider how conclusions are drawn unquestionably about the students using data gathered from standardised assessment, given the inequality of access to learning and the inescapable bias in assessment tools. This thesis hopes to influence constructive dialogue towards better understanding of assessment as a system.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the practice of standardised reading assessment in New Zealand primary schools and to articulate the effects such assessments have on the academic, emotional, and social lives of Samoan students in New Zealand schools. This research examines standardised reading assessment tools and their administration, highlighting the power and influence of assessment practices, and presenting opportunities to re-think assessments in terms of what they are for, what they do and why they are necessary.

Assessment is an important part of any education system and warrants significant attention (Cumming, 2008; Hawe, 2002; Hill, 2000; Madaus & Horn, 2000; Mahon, 2006; Sadler, 2010). In these discussions, historical perspectives on the purposes, nature and forms of assessments and effects of assessment practices on students are explicitly articulated. The belief that assessment is a tool to support teaching and learning has been replaced by the view of assessments as an unfortunate by-product of the standards and assessment movement, to drive education (T. Sadler & Zeidler, 2009). Amidst the plethora of previously-published critiques of assessment, are questions regarding the flawlessness of the standardised assessment practices within curriculum areas, such as, reading given the bias it encompasses in terms of culture, knowledge, gender, forms, structure and agency (ibid).

This thesis draws on critical theory and particular aspects of the theoretical frameworks of Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1972, 1977, 1980a, 1980b, 1981, 1984a, 1984b, 1988, 1991, 1992, 2003a). Foucault's philosophical research on power and discourse has enabled many critical theorists and others who believe that Foucault's analysis of power structures could aid in the struggle against inequality. Discourse analysis reveals how certain knowledge and systems have been hierarchized and legitimised. This method of analysis has exposed some aspects of assessments that are taken for granted within New Zealand primary schools. Utilising Foucault's notions of power/knowledge and governmentality, this study makes visible the current competing discourses dominating the general understandings of reading assessments in New Zealand including what has made their production and maintenance possible, and what has made possible the objects of which they speak (Foucault, 1972).

This thesis also draws on Pacific and in particular Samoan epistemology, ontology and axiology. The arguments are based on what the research participants see as vital and

critical in order to succeed in the test tools examined. Issues such as the mis-recognition of Samoan students' knowledge, background experiences, interests and culture have been identified as contributing factors to the difficulties students face in tests. An example of the mismatch in culture is the inferior portrayal of women and girls as implied in the language of the tests. In Samoa, the girls are known as their brothers' feagaiga or sacred covenant and are respected members in their families and community. The negative portrayal of girls and women in the test materials means that the Samoans students' own understandings of their culture and the world are subjugated and occluded by the gender biased language of the tests.

This chapter sets the scene for the thesis and explains the impetus for undertaking this research. To start to locate the study I share my own personal narrative below, in which I share a personal perspective on schools and assessments, and foregrounds understandings, experiences and biases I bring to this research as a Samoan student, teacher, literacy facilitator and researcher. This narrative is followed by an introduction to relevant assessment policy, including the New Zealand Ministry of Education's plans and goals for Pasifika students and their education. My tautua (service) to the Samoan students and community includes investigating these concerns from a Samoan point of view, which may help to clarify and address particular gaps in the current knowledge base about assessment for Samoan students in New Zealand primary school.

## **My story**

A little about my background follows. I was born to parents who had almost no experience in terms of Western education. My father was illiterate and could not even write his name. He was the eldest in his family, which meant he was expected to stay home to raise pigs and horses, tended the taro plantation, prepared and sold copra to pay for his siblings' school fees, and ensured that the family was well-fed. His job was to ensure the effective functioning of his family, which he did proudly, from behind the scenes.

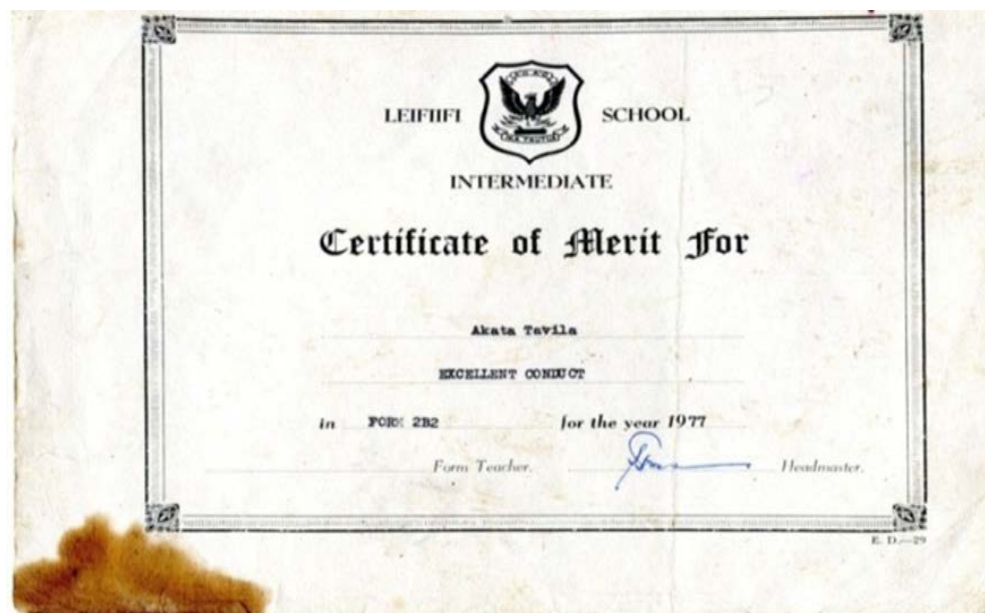
My mother's eldest-daughter status in her family of 11 conferred on her the responsibility of looking after her grandparents. Although she was never given the chance to attend St Theresa School with her sisters in a nearby village, she was lucky because her grandmother taught her how to read and write and in addition she had all the homemaking chores. My mother later became 'the teacher' who taught us all how to read, told me the memorable Cinderella and Rapunzel stories, and patiently taught my father to finally learn to write his name - Galuvao Tavila.

At the age of eight I was able to cook rice and elegi stew on an open fire. I was already multi-tasking as the days were too short for our family of two parents and five children to complete all the daily tasks. Growing up we all had to do chores together, from planting taro to preparing copra, to cooking, to clearing the land, to selling our crops, to fishing. Towards the end of 1975, I was given a chance to sit a national examination, which later enabled me to leave the village and my family for the bittersweet experience of a Western education.

### **My journey as a learner**

I attended Leifiifi Intermediate School near Apia for two years. All of the students in my class were from Savaii or the rural areas of Upolu. We were the pure brown faces of this English-speaking institution. My teacher spoke perfect English. She was good at encouraging me to join in the school activities. One Thursday afternoon she reminded us to bring in our sports uniform for sports the following day. 'Don't forget your sports uniform' she said. 'For' and 'get' separately were two words I knew. 'For' and 'get' together as one word was strange. So I tried what I now call 'making connections by building on the familiar' (McNaughton, 2002). That Friday morning, armed with my meaning of 'don't *forget*' I walked into Form 1 Accelerate 2 without my sports uniform only to be called 'stupid idiot' by Mrs S. I wished she had explained exactly what she meant. More still, I wished she knew how hard I had worked the previous night to work out precisely 'what she was trying to get at' (McNaughton, 2002, p. 8).

The pain of living away from home and parents was overwhelming. Trying to get used to the new learning environment was difficult. There were palagi (European) students and teachers with their strange looks and language. The severe consequences of speaking in Samoan prompted in me the ability to 'self - police' (Foucault, 1970), for which I was rewarded with the Certificate of Merit, not just once but both years I was there (Ata. 1.1).



### Ata 1.1: Certificates of Merit for excellent conduct (1976 & 1977)

Later on, I moved to Samoa College, in Vaivase, near Apia for a further five years of study (1978-1982). I began to notice that my poor grasp of the English language alienated me from really fitting in with everyone at school overall. While Science subjects were laden with technical language, the Arts courses were loaded with a plethora of texts in the English language. Moreover, for a student struggling to come to terms with English, achieving a New Zealand School Certificate and University Entrance qualifications was a far-fetched idea.

Vivid images of my parents' slaving in the hot sun to raise money to pay my expensive Samoa Collage fees, served as the most powerful motive to push ahead. The fast-paced teaching in the foreign English language often left me with questions and confusion, yet I managed to rote-learn the subject matter and answered just enough test items in the School Certificate and University Entrance Exams to obtain a pass.

In 1983, I started a three-year programme of study to become a secondary teacher at the Samoa Secondary Teachers' College, in Apia. I realised I was growing apart from my family. My parents and siblings were struggling to understand the jargon I was bringing home on holiday. It was sad and unfortunate to live with the burden of pursuing the achievements in the world that I believed my parents wanted me to pursue. After graduating I taught school in Samoa for a few years before migrating (like so many other Samoans) to New Zealand. I was hoping for a new and better life.

### **Becoming a New Zealand education professional**

In order to teach in New Zealand, I was required to attend a two-year refresher course to familiarise myself with the system. I was in awe of the existence of the child-centred programs and the implementation of the discovery of learning. During Teaching Practicum observations, I watched and was amazed by the careful consideration my associate teachers put into their individualised planning for teaching. Soon enough I was able to speak the language of the curriculum, from effective analysis of data to effective classroom practice, to running records to NEMP, PAT and STAR. I also learned about terms such as 'inclusive', 'diversity', and, yes, 'Pasifika' too.

'Pasifika' as embraced in this thesis is a collective term used to refer to people of Pacific heritage or ancestry, who have immigrated or have been born in Aotearoa New Zealand (Wendt-Samu, 2006). While the label seems pragmatically viable, care must be taken when designing effective strategies to cater for the needs of these people. These island nations are distinct in terms of ethnicity, language, social structures, histories, values, beliefs, and practices. The term does not account for the diversity between its constituent groups, such as the difference between the resident people of each island community and within the immigrant community, between individuals who were born on the island and those who were born in New Zealand. There are also differences between groups, such as, in gender roles, social class, educational attainment, inter-generational differences and so on (Coxon & Mara, 2000; Ministry of Education, 2012; Wendt-Samu, 2006).

From my personal point of view, teaching is both complicated and rewarding at the same time. With the given opportunity to make a difference in the lives of young children, one could only marvel at the excitement of this challenge. As a teacher trying to stay attuned to the changes within the profession, I slowly and steadily continued to pursue the theory and research that was relevant to my classroom practice. This commitment to acquiring the ‘language of the powerful’ (Janks, 2010, p. 133) drew me to teach and also to study part-time for the past 18 years. During that time, I have completed my Postgraduate Diploma in Education and Master of Education, with Honours, from the University of Auckland.

On successfully completing my Master of Education degree, I felt I had a chance, whether big or small, to make a difference. As an experienced and now well-qualified teacher, the ‘subaltern’ was no longer afraid to relentlessly pose the hard questions (Morton, 2007). In 2010, I started on this journey towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

### **Never good enough**

The year 2010 was a controversial year in the local education scene, with the implementation of the much-debated National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics. I was seconded from my school by a group contracted by the Ministry of Education, as one of their facilitators tasked with the ‘roll out’ of the National Standards. Working that year as a Literacy Facilitator turned out to hold new learning, and some of the experiences were quite different and unusual.

In my experience, being ‘different’ was a real challenge for my new job. Its expectations contradicted the values and attitudes I was expected to manifest as a Samoan. For example, in order for me to be persuasive I sometimes had to courteously interrupt other teachers’ conversations to get certain messages across. As I was expected to be assertive, I had to forget listening with my ears, my eyes and my heart and could not respond in the forms that sounded polite in my tongue (Metge & Kinloch, 1989; Tui Atua, 2009a). The overall expectations to be individualistic and zealously authoritative in my right to speak as an expert were personally challenging. In order to do the job, I struggled to mentally ‘undo’ my true self. This anticipation plus many others quickly developed into disciplinary technologies that, in turn, afforded me the title of a ‘Professional Learning Facilitator’.

My tedious journey taught me a few lessons. First, my facilitator colleagues and I were subjects of a specific discourse, with a powerful authority to control us into 'obligatory individuals' (van Dijk, 1999). This was reflected in the ways that I had to be watched closely to ensure that I spoke correct grammatical English, and I had to 'disembody myself in order to be accepted' (McKinley, 2005, p. 491). This power was subtly exercised in many forms of everyday practices within this discourse, such as, the subtle dismissal of any other language and knowledge (like mine) that was different from that of the majority. Second, our employers themselves were docile bodies of a much bigger discourse, played out to ensure political obedience for the demand of a much bigger governing body. In our case, it was the discourse and demands of government.

As a literacy facilitator, part of my job was to run in-depth literacy and assessment workshops in schools. During these visits I witnessed that schools in the area of literacy were still faced with the issue of failing students, most of whom are Pasifika (Amituanai-Toloa, 2006). The thought of Samoan students' 'on-going' failure (as well as the experiences I had throughout my life as a student, teacher and literacy facilitator in New Zealand and Samoa) triggered the urge to carry out this project. After reviewing large amounts of literature on Pasifika students' achievement, I realised that a critical examination of assessment tools has to date been limited, yet these tools and their implementation may well contribute to the phenomena of failure among some Samoan students in New Zealand.

### **Tests and assessments - differentiating terminologies**

Black (1998) writes about the difficulty about terminology and the need to introduce words with unusual or difficult meanings (p. 4). He explains how the terms assessments and testing can be problematic as they do 'overlap' (p. 4). According to Black, these overlaps can often be said to mean the same thing, and carry different overtones: testing being hard, rigorous, inflexible and narrow minded; assessment being soft, sensitive and broad or wooly minded (p. 4). Black cited a differentiation of the terms in the Department of Education and Science (DES, 1988) as:

Assessment: A general term embracing all methods used to evaluate performance of an individual pupil or group. It may refer to a broad appraisal including many sources of evidence and many aspects of a pupil's knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes, or to a particular occasion or instrument. An assessment instrument may be any method or procedure, formal or informal, for producing information about pupils: for example, a



written test paper, an interview schedule, a measurement task using equipment, a class quiz.

Test: Strictly, any assessment conducted within formal and specified procedures, designed to ensure comparability of results between different test administrators and between occasions. For some, it implies a set of written questions, externally prescribed, with written responses marked according to rigid rules: for others, any of a broad range of assessment instruments with standardised rules of administration and marking which ensure comparability of results (Black, 1998, p. 5).

For the purpose of this thesis, I build on Black's definition to include aspects of both assessments and tests that are relevant to the New Zealand classrooms. In this thesis, 'assessment' and 'testing' are used interchangeably. They can range from informal, even almost involuntary observations by teachers to more formal pen and paper exercises, which allows the teachers to draw conclusions about student understanding and the future developments their teaching and learning programmes. 'Standardised testing' on the other hand refers to formal assessments for which grades are given, and which the school and government use to record students' achievement and guide funding.

## **Research questions and significance of the study**

I have stipulated previously at the beginning of this chapter that the focus of the study was to examine standardised reading tests to see if there were any unacknowledged issues in their contents; and whether or not these issues contributed to the underachieving dilemma Samoan students were facing in New Zealand primary schools. The research questions are:

1. How do Samoan students understand their experiences of taking the asTTle and STAR tests in schools?
2. What patterns of discourse and language found in the asTTle and STAR relevant to Samoan students' culture and language?

The New Zealand Ministry of Education urges the need for 'more high quality research to improve the education system so it works for all Pasifika learners' (Ministry of Education, 2012). It is timely therefore to research the details of an ethical assessment environment or milieu for Samoan students in New Zealand schools, who are caught up at the centre of so many assessment practices that underserve them. This thesis adds to the current knowledge of school assessment through a detailed critical analysis of the discourses used in representative examples of the available national assessment tools.

This analysis highlights the components of standardised tests that are taken for granted in terms of their production, internal structure and overall organization, which taken together have the effect of under-serving Pasifika and other minority students. This research assumes that standardised test designers will ‘exercise reason and caution in attempting to foresee the consequences for everyone ... of the measures they are proposing’ and will have ‘thought rationally ... about the long-term consequences of what it is they propose’ (Elwood, 2013, pp. 207-208). Assessments must be designed to promote the child's best interests as well as satisfying the needs of government. The fa'afaletui conversations carried out in this study gave Samoan students a chance to discuss their feelings and experiences of the standardised tests examined and of tests in general and propose what they believe is good for them (please refer to Matā'upu Lona Fā below). Students discussed the choice of topics; the vocabulary, the difficulty of the English language, and how these issues combine to affect their performance during standardised tests.

As stated above, this study aims to examine the issues that are not acknowledged in terms of the design of standardised reading tests by which Samoans are assessed in New Zealand primary schools from a Samoan perspective. The absence of a critical Samoan (or Pasifika) discourse analysis begged the adoption of an alternative Samoan research framework, that goes beyond the traditional cultural protocol of working with participants (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu, & Finau, 2001), to utilise a Samoan form of interpretation and explanation. Examining standardised tests from a different stance, this study needed to problematize them as ‘subjects of critique’ (Devine, 2010; Pennycook, 2001; Peters, 2004); transforming them into problems to which diverse solutions were possible (Vaughan-Williams, 2006). This adapted Samoan method of critique builds on Foucault’s analytical tools, which will be discussed further in the third and fourth chapters (Matā'upu Lona Tolu and Matā'upu Lona Fā). The finding of this research framework is an important addition to the pool of Pasifika research methodologies.

The study of activities including assessments in the macro- and micro-levels can lead teachers to question the ideologies that construct the socio-political and economic realities driving the design and implementation of assessments. This study will cultivate what Freire calls ‘conscientization’ whereby an individual teacher’s naïve understanding of the world is replaced with a more rigorous understanding of the various perceptions that present themselves as forms of reality (Bartolome, 2010, p. 49). Such provisional

understanding will itself encourage teachers and others working with students from persuading themselves that they have The Truth, or The Reality.

### **New Zealand assessment: changes since 1989**

The New Zealand education system underwent a major administrative restructuring between 1984 and 1989. Some of the changes included disestablishing the former Department of Education and creating several new, quasi-independent education organizations, such as, the Ministry of Education, which was concerned with policy development and funding; the Education Review Office that supervised the accountability of schools; the Teacher Registration Board that monitored the professional standard of teachers; and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (Jesson, 2001). Also established were thousands of legally separate autonomous primary and secondary schools governed by Boards of Trustees (BOT) comprised of elected parents responsible for the governance of the school and the appointment of teachers under charters negotiated with the government (Philips, 2010). National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) and National Education Guidelines (NEGs) provide a constraining framework for that autonomy. The ERO review each school according to their own (ERO's) established criteria and reports publically (on the internet).

Two of the government's political arms, the Treasury and States Services Commission (SSC), brought neoliberal ideas such as managerialism into education practices (Jesson, 2001, p. 94). Managerialism can be described as the way of organising or running government agencies as if they were capitalist firms. Therefore, decision making is no longer about following bureaucratic rules rather it is about defined lines of accountability and short term specification quantifiable outputs. Employees work within performance - based appraisal contracts which are tightly specified for subsequent measurement and contribution to profits and customer service. Management sets out detailed instructions for the performance of work which workers then carry out. Managers recommend re-evaluating all jobs to allow the necessary inputs and outputs to be identified more efficiently. Inputs are those entire things that go into a production process, considered as resources to be managed, such as, funds, labour, materials and physical resources. The output of government is established through a 'sale-purchase process' in which the Minister purchased various specific outputs, such as, the class sizes, the curriculum and the types of assessment to be done (Jesson, 2001, p. 95).

Schools were set up with the above mentioned self-managing model of organisation as implemented through Tomorrow's Schools. Members of the BOT were expected to be like the company directors that govern the school, with the principal as the chief executive officer, managing the workers who produced - or delivered the curriculum; parents were considered to be users of education (Jesson, 2001, p. 95). The market for education became the market in education opportunities. Teachers were turned into something like factory workers. Issues like class sizes and assessments were not seen as professional, they were viewed as managerial questions.

Education was therefore seen as a commodity: something to be bought or sold. Parents buy through enrolling their children in schools of their choice and taking their children away when they are not satisfied. The education providers offer education while parents as 'consumers' shop around between competing providers. Roll growth becomes an important market signal and an indicator of success. Management responds to market signals from the parents who as customers are free to move their funding, in terms of school fees, elsewhere if they are dissatisfied. This process, according to Treasury (1990, p.136), where parents could choose freely and where state funding moved automatically with the child would 'put greater pressure on school to perform' (cited in Jesson, 2001, p. 96). Interference in this exercise of parental choice by central government was seen as an interference with customers' 'individual rights', transforming education from a public good to a private benefit (ibid). Since education is funded by the state from taxes, the state imposed market discipline into the education sector, with a greater focus on extracting value and efficiency via the mechanisms of competition and choice than empowering communities (PPTA Executive, 2008).

The reform created a system of 'micro-technology of control' articulated by patterns of self-regulation (Wang, 2011, p. 112). First, the disciplinary practice of management is seen as productive rather than coercive, that increases the power of the managers and the managed in some respects, while at the same time making them more docile to fixed indicators of performance. In this case, power paradoxically both liberates and enslaves. Both managers and managed are implicated in power relationships, wherein the manager's autonomy becomes the teacher's constraint. These power relationships are self-reproducing and are exercised within the sphere of the schools in a particularly meticulous way, and proliferate throughout the system. Foucault calls this an 'infinitesimal mechanism within 'a microphysics of oppression' that does not work

coercively down from the state, but through a bottom up, capillary process of local and unstable relations' (Wang, 2011, p. 118).

The *educational* reforms focused on the curriculum, assessment and qualifications. The changes were claimed to aim at reducing the disparities in student achievement, improve the number of students with qualifications and enhance New Zealand's economic competitiveness, by increasing the proportion of skilled workers at a much reduced cost. Curriculum therefore became much tighter in terms of what it is that students were expected to learn, and invigilating systems were put in place to monitor students' learning, and teachers' performance. Critics highlighted the state's distrust of educational professionals because of the purported fear of capture by the already market-driven interests (Codd, 2005; Gordon, 1992). They (critics) also emphasised the likelihood of increased disparities between different groups in society, driven by the 'neo liberal' policies (Thrupp, 1997).

During the 1990s, new assessment policies and programmes were implemented to ensure that students' achievements were accurately recorded and reported on. Specifically, that they (the achievements of the students) were described more accurately in relation to the more tightly specified outcomes of the New Zealand curriculum. As a result, a new form of surveillance was implemented at a system wide level (Marshall, 2010). Examples were a wider range of nationally-developed assessment tools: the examples of assessment activities in the national curriculum statements; support materials, for example, the *Assessment: Policy to Practice* issued in 1994; and 'teacher professional development in assessment', through a series of contracts to assist with formative and summative assessment related to the achievement objectives in the curriculum (Philips, 2010, p. 146).

More assessment tools were developed to collect a national baseline data to enable analysis of the achievement of sub-groups, such as, Māori, Pasifika, ESOL and others. These tools included the Assessment Resource Banks (ARBs) and others that were contracted to the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER), such as, the Years 4 to 9- Progress and Achievement Tests in Mathematics, Science and English and the Supplementary test for Achievement in Reading (STAR). National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) was the main mechanism used by Government to get a national picture of the trends in educational achievement (Philips, 2010).

In the first few years of the new century, more than 1,500 resource sheets and groups of assessment items were available mainly in a multi-choice format. While the standardised

tests enabled and created an imperative for national data collection and monitoring, the international literacy and numeracy studies, such as, Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) allowed for a comparison between the achievement of students in New Zealand and students in other countries. The data gathered was occasionally used to support national policy makers in identifying areas of the curriculum, which might require further resourcing. Critics questioned the success of what seemed to be the overwhelming expectations of teachers to meet the new requirements for monitoring student achievement (Hill, 1999).

New assessment tools have since been developed and implemented to assist schools to better analyse which students are achieving and where the school's efforts should be placed in helping to raise student achievement. According to an assessment expert consulted about this research, schools and teachers could choose from these different tools, both formal and informal, to suit their own students and contexts (C. Darr, personal communication, 17 January, 2013). This assertion is stipulated in the Ministry of Education position paper on assessments that:

Effective assessment entails the consideration of a range of information from multiple sources in order to learn and respond appropriately to improve learning. This may include the use of assessment tools and resources. This will contribute to reliable and valid judgments if used appropriately along with skilful interpretation of the information produced (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 8).

In 2012, Flockton reported that new tools and assessment ideas have appeared to assist teachers and principals. The new tools provided more diagnostic information about students' strengths and weaknesses, as well as benchmarks against which student achievement have been monitored (Flockton, 2012).

However, in spite of the already available assessment tools as mentioned previously above, some schools, such as the ones involved in this research project, chose mainly the asTTle and STAR tests to assess their students' learning. Several reasons may have contributed to this decision. First, the schools tend to trust the asTTle and STAR tests since the government has endorsed them, as explained further below in Matā'upu Lona Fā: Tautai – Study design (Chapter Four). Second, school leaders may find these two tools more appealing as they are readily available; STAR is a pre-prepared booklet and the asTTle is available in paper form and on line. Moreover, the computer marks the asTTle tests, generates and interprets the data and gives out the 'where to next' in the

form of learning pathways<sup>1</sup> for teachers to follow. Principals and teachers may find this convenient and more favourable especially given the widespread pressure to produce data for the parents and National Standards. I have written more about the asTTle and STAR below in the Study Design chapter (Chapter Four).

The Ministry of Education also noted that nearly one in five of New Zealand's young people leave school without the skills and qualifications they need to succeed (Ministry of Education, 2009). To lift student achievements, National Standards were brought into effect to 'ensure' students are taught and have mastered the much needed literacy and numeracy skills to participate in the curriculum, to stay engaged in learning, to leave school with good options, and ultimately to succeed in the workforce. National Standards came into effect in English-medium schools with pupils in Years 1 to 8 in 2010. The National Standards set 'clear' expectations that students need to meet in reading, writing and mathematics in the first eight years of school (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 5). Early identification of students who are falling behind is meant to help schools, teachers, and parents to make informed decisions about how to improve student achievement and to provide additional support as appropriate.

However, a conflicting position is clearly evident in Professor Warwick Elley's (2014) critique of the current NCEA and National Standards. Titled 'Lessons for our Government' he points out the following.

In view of these clear patterns in PISA scores, over 12 years, an outcome which many of us were predicting, the lessons for our Government and NZQA should be clear. Neither National Standards in primary schools nor NCEA in secondary schools will raise performance levels. As high-stakes events, they generate more testing, less creative teaching, obvious grade inflation, less "stretching" of brighter students, less cooperation between schools, lower achievement levels and larger gaps between high and low-performing schools – to name a few of the negative consequences. A "one size fits all" system which sets arbitrary and vaguely-worded standards, which are too easy for some, and too hard for others, ignores the natural individual differences that exist between students. It often fails to challenge the high-fliers, as they slow down once they have achieved enough credits – and the data do show the declines are greater at the top. Moreover, it does not solve the problem of the under-achieving tail (Elley, 2014, p. 12).

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<sup>1</sup> Teachers and principals use the information in these learning pathways to identify the next learning steps for students <http://easttlehelp.vln.school.nz/reports/understanding-the-individual-learning-pathway-ilp>

In regards to low socio-economic schools which most Samoan students choose to attend, he adds the following:

...as the league tables start to bite, there is a usually a drift away from low socio-economic schools, which lose their reputation, their best students and teachers, resulting in a loss of morale and a real problem in attracting experienced, committed teachers. The gap between schools only gets wider (ibid).

Professor Warwick Elley argues the following:

In any new policy, there are some winners and some losers. Using our own figures, our Minister has created an illusion of more winners. In an international context, using assessments that search more broadly, we expose the gaps in our students' knowledge and skill and the upshot is that we are actually falling back. Many of these consequences have been documented overseas before, but our policy makers ignore them (ibid).

The discourse used in the Tomorrow's Schools model is associated with the ideological shifts and political influences as revealed in the neo-liberal conception of the ideal citizen to be highly knowledgeable, self-regulated individuals, entrepreneurial and innovative. Education is therefore structured by the political economy. Schools are set up to mirror business and the environment stressed competition of user pays and individual choice. At the heart of the capitalist state lies the conflict between administration, politics and the economy. This struggle provides the constraint within which the education system must operate, as well as the opportunities that enable the education system to develop (Jesson, 2001, p. 103).

### **Theoretical view of Standardised tests and testing**

Olssen (1988) writes about testing as an outcome of thoughts such as those of Francis Galton. Galton (1869) believed that intelligence was an inherited biological capacity which causally underpins differential achievement within the social structure. Applying his theory to real life, Galton argued that the class structure of Britain reflected a hierarchy of innate ability, where the elites and professional middleclass population were at the top and the poor, unemployed and criminals at the bottom. Galton suggested the use of testing to restrict the poor and safeguard against inferior stock (Olssen, 1988, p. 31). What stemmed from these assumptions was a measurement of intelligence that was relative rather than an assessment of an absolute quality. Standardised tests were created to measure and see whether one individual had more or less of certain (class-marked) ability than another. Today, this form of measurement is still used, as in



standardised tests, to measure the individual's relative standing in a group (Olssen, 1988, p. 33).

Binet's (1905) ideas were built on Galton's beliefs concerning measurement. He constructed tests to assess a child's performance within a particular chronological age (Olssen, 1988, p. 33). Moreover, he rejected the notion of biological control of intelligence and so created tests to separate the natural unlearned intelligence from school instruction (Olssen, 1988, pp. 34-35). These tests involved number, verbal and spatial problems to measure general intelligence and reasoning. Binet's profound influence on the subsequent development of mental testing provoked the wider use of these tests by other test creators and test thinkers (Olssen 1988, p. 35).

Binet's arguments raise questions. These are: (1) was 'natural unlearned intelligence' a code for 'comes from a family environment which has provided the student with a lot of desired characteristics before s/he even went to school?' and; (2) was it even possible to separate 'natural unlearned intelligence' from 'what is learned at school?'. The latter is based on my own experience as a teacher that 'effective literacy pedagogy' builds on the students' home and background experiences and knowledge (also Gibbons, 1996; McNaughton, 2002). I argue that Binet's tests were neither class-proof nor race-proof, simply because students came from different families and cultures and they grew up exposing to different familial environment.

Terman (1917) on the other hand took a perception that was racist and eugenic. He believed that intelligence was a fixed biological endowment, and advocated testing to 'fix a person's position in the ladder of abilities and life itself' (Olssen, 1988, p. 36). He argued that people could be rated from being 'most stupid to most able' (p. 35).

According to Terman, the low achievers in tests were:

Very common amongst Spanish-Indians and Mexican families of the southwest and among Negroes; their dullness seemed to be racial, or at least inherent in the family stocks from which they came...

He also argued that:

Children of this group should be segregated in special classes...They could not master abstraction but they could be made efficient workers (Kamin, 1974, p. 6, cited in Olssen, 1988, p. 36).

Testing categorises the population and therefore has far reaching social effects. Standardised testing is underpinned by the very idea of equality of opportunity, that all individuals should have the same chance to compete for positions of importance within

society (Popham, 1999). Testing is beneficial to industries, businesses, and the maintenance of society in general (Olssen, 1988, p. 38). Many testers /test creators link their work to political goals as they see testing as a mechanism to sort out those with whom to entrust the complex tasks of leading society in terms of politics, morale, industries and education. As century progressed, business leaders who want to ensure that the working classes are able to compete for societal resources on a fair and equal footing continue to promote and validate the use of standardised tests.

### **Standardized tests**

In my experience as a teacher in New Zealand; standardised tests such as the asTTle and STAR tests analysed in this thesis, are constructed by national experts and published for use in many different schools and classrooms. This is in contrast with Popham's (1999) definition that standardized tests in America are created and sold by companies owned by large corporations, who like all for-profit businesses, attempt to produce revenue for their shareholders (Popham, 1999). Kohn (2000) added that 'these companies then turn around and sell teaching materials designed to raise scores on their own tests' (p. 3). These definitions clearly emphasise the business related definition and function of standardised tests. Standardised tests have been and are still being used given the continued desirability of employing people with certain, class-marked, race-marked and gender-marked characteristics to positions in industries and the allocation of resources (Olssen, 1988, p. 38).

Drawing on Olssen's argument in the previous paragraph above, it is clear that the asTTle and STAR tests, given that they are standardised tests of the New Zealand English language, are designed purposefully to help mould young New Zealand students to become better equipped for future employment. This aim supports the vision of the New Zealand curriculum to produce students that are enterprising, economic and lifelong learners (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 7); who are able to operate and function in the technological global market. According to one of the experts consulted for this project, the asTTle and STAR tests were designed to closely match international English reading comprehension tests (C. Darr, personal communication, 17 January, 2013). Given the global importance of the Standard English language, the Ministry of Education aims for all students learn it, in order to succeed both nationally and internationally; in education and employment. However, given the mismatch between what some Samoan students bring into the testing context, and what is needed for them

to succeed, some of these students will not be successful in some if not all of both national and international examinations.

Standardised tests are made up of different types of items such as multiple-choice, true and false questions and matching questions and are defined by the standardization of their designing, administration and marking. Standardized tests are usually available as 'paper and pencil' tests although nowadays, some of the standardised tests available in New Zealand, such as the asTTle, are administered via the use of the computer and the internet. Standardized tests are practical and easy to administer. Results collated from standardized testing are quantifiable and are usually scored by the computers. Since the scoring is completed by the computer, the results are objective and not subjective to the teachers' bias or emotions.

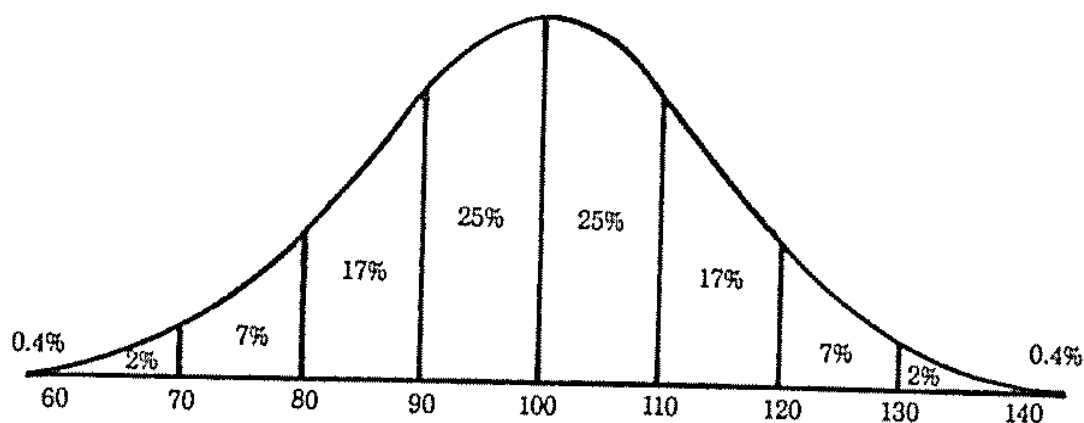
In a study of standardised tests in Australia, Pearce and Williams concluded that standardized English literacy tests are typically 'normed' on English mainstream populations (Pearce & Williams, 2013, p. 430). This means that the students' expected standard of achievement is measured against those of students whose first language and culture is English. This normalisation marginalises the Australian indigenous students, resulting in many of these students dropping out of school early (Schwab, 2012). Others such as Ball (2009) argue that in standardised tests:

Test items use the Standard English dialect as the point of reference for judgements about correctness with respect to grammatical forms, lexical items, and pragmatics. While the standardized testing context is deliberately unnatural, the experience may be less familiar and more daunting to children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds than for the majority of children from mainstream backgrounds (cited in Pearce & Williams, 2013, p. 430).

So the potential for bias in assessing children from non-mainstream backgrounds, such as the Samoans, is inherent in the use of standardized tests. Unlike typical classroom tests where students are tested on how well they have learned about the content of lessons and mastered the skills taught in class, standardised tests are generalized to the entire population, so most items assess general knowledge and understanding (Popham, 1999). In fact, according to Popham, standardised tests are characterised by aspects such as (1) testing-teaching mismatches, where the test items in the standardised tests do not match the skills and content taught in classroom; (2) confounded causations, as explained in the next paragraph.

In his own study of standardised tests and testing, Popham concludes that some standardised tests contain items that test: (1) what the students have learnt in schools; (2) the students' native intellectual ability and; (3) the students' out of school learning. Given the diversity in ethnicity, socio-economic, background experiences, culture as well as school curriculum, it is difficult to avoid biases that what works for one student may not work for the other. Popham concludes that in spite of the standardised test designers attempt to select a handful of test items that are likely to measure all of the important knowledge and skills, the one-size-fits-all tests they come up with produce outcomes that lead to spurious conclusions about students' achievement. Popham argues that standardized test scores should be regarded as rough approximations of a student's status with respect to the content domain represented by the standardised test (Popham, 1999).

Assessment tests such as standardised tests usually accept the existence of a Bell Curve (Scharton, 1996). The Bell Curve assumes that any group has a pre-determined proportion of a top, middle and bottom (p. 70). The actuality of this Bell Curve is supported by those, such as, the psychometricians and assessment writers, imbued with the knowledge and power of the assessment discourse, who require and ensure that assessment tools are routinely constructed to produce this very result (Fischer et al., 1996, p. 30). For example, they make sure to include some words that only one person out of a 100 will not know and some words that only one person out of a 100 will know. Whether knowing these words has anything to do with intelligence as a capacity for inferring or applying relationships drawn from experience is, in effect, irrelevant. The very common and the very rare words define the ends of the Bell Curve scale (ibid, p. 31). The appearance of the Bell Curve is provided in Ata 1.2. It has most of the scores clustering around the average, with fewer students achieving higher and lower scores.



### Ata 1.2: The Bell Curve

Olssen (1988) contends that the 'Bell Curve' presents a belief that (1) mental proficiencies are explainable by some uni-dimensional capacity of intelligence, ability and aptitude; (2) this capacity is unlearned. The latter is in line with Popham's (1999) explanation of tests confounded causations (mentioned previously above) that (1) tests also test the students' native intellectual ability and (2) tests demonstrate a claim that 'social structure is a consequence of differences in human capacity' (Olssen, 1988, p. 50). Olssen points out:

This assumption is necessitated by the use of normal curve because it is patently obvious to everyone that learning, achievement and human experience are not distributed in this way. Access to knowledge and learning varies systematically not randomly within the social structure (Olssen, 1988, pp. 50-51).

He goes on to argue that:

These are rather hefty assumptions, to understate the issue and no matter what the rhetoric of contemporary test constructors, their use of these statistical devices commits them to the logic of psychometrics, for the social assumptions of the early test developers are buried deep within the structure of the statistical procedures used...it is also a major assumption that human cognitive performances are unitary or vary according to the normal curve (Olssen, 1988, p. 51).

While no objective measure of intelligence is possible, the Bell Curve is presumed to exist and is 'made' to exist as a result of test construction (Olssen, 1988, p. 51).

Psychometricians and standardised test designers insistence that there must be a Bell Curve creates a self-filling prophecy, and hence adds to the procedures to ensure failure for the poor (Rist, 2002).

Mons (2009) points out that assessment theories seldom explain exactly which processes in the standardised assessment model are intended to boost pupil attainment (p. 11). The arguments put forward to support the use of standardised tests tend to implicate tactics of fear such as ‘accountability’ and ‘being accountable to stakeholders’ as explained further below. However, this theoretical top-down model is not perfect. In my experience as a teacher, it is often difficult to apply recommendations based on standardised tests and research designed for other contexts in my own classroom and school. This struggle is also echoed in Duru-Bellat and Jarousse (2001), who argue that ‘the effectiveness of an educational practice is often linked to context and that tests are necessarily tied to the conditions in which they were carried out (cited in Mons, 2009, p. 10).

In Mons’s (2009) study of the National Testing of Pupils in Europe, she shows how standardised testing has become a key instrument for policy reform of OECD education systems. This view of standardised testing is based on the notions of the social supervision of teachers and schools by education administrations and the schools’ expected accountability to the general public, and more specifically to parents. In sum, standardised testing has become a political and management tool that indicates the quality of the education service's output and influences the actions of the implementing agents (Mons, 2009, pp 5-7).

Standardised tests force teachers to form common expectations irrespective of the pupil's individual situation (Mons, 2009). Standardised tests are seen as a way to help to improve performances among pupils from disadvantaged social groups (Mons, 2009, p. 12). Although standardised testing can cause teachers to ‘pigeonhole’ students as ‘above’, ‘at’, ‘below’ and ‘far below’ the standard, teachers do respond quickly to this data and use it to generate targeted planning and teaching to get students to the pass mark. Studies in the United Kingdom show that the publication of school performance indicators tends to influence teachers' actions in the light of fierce competition between schools (Mons, 2009, p. 26).

In similar veins, Kohn (2000) asserts a more political definition that:

Standardised testing allows politicians to show they are concerned about school achievement and serious about getting tough with teachers and students. Test scores offer a quick and easy although inaccurate way of charting progress. Demanding high scores fits nicely with the use of political slogans like 'tougher standards' or accountability of raising the bar.

The public seems to be interested in test results as tends to reflect our penchant for attaching numbers to things. Any aspect of learning and life that appears in numerical form seems reassuringly scientific, and that if the numbers are getting larger over time, we must be making progress. Tests scores, like sale figures are calculable and used to define success and failure (Kohn, 2000, p. 3).

Kohn seems to highlight the very idea that standardized testing value uniformity and conformity over diversity and; prescription over teachers' autonomy and professionalism.

### **How standardised tests are created**

Standardized tests consist of a much smaller collection of test items than might otherwise be employed if testing time were not an issue. To achieve this requirement, standardised test creators sample the knowledge and or skills in the content domain. The enormous amount of knowledge and or skills students at any grade level poses genuine difficulties for the developers of such tests. If a test actually covers all the knowledge and skills in the domain, it will obviously be far too long (and will still probably not cover everything possible in that domain). The dilemma therefore is that these standardised tests contain too few items to allow meaningful within-subject comparisons of students' strengths and weaknesses.

The test developers' job is to create a test that, with a handful of items, yields valid norm-referenced interpretations of a student's status regarding a substantial chunk of content (Popham, 1999). This means that standardized tests always contain items that are not aligned with what is taught in a particular school. The manuals that accompany standardized tests (such as the asTTle and STAR analyzed for this thesis) contain descriptors that are fairly general. These descriptors need to be general to accommodate to the diversity in curriculum within a nation of educators and students.

Standardised test items that do the best job in spreading out students' total-test scores are those answered correctly by about half of the total number of students. Test developers avoid items that are answered correctly by too many or too few students, to accommodate the requirements of the 'Bell Curve' as explained previously above. From the perspective of test's efficacy, these test items do not provide comparative interpretations of students' achievements. Therefore, these test items which are too easy or too hard to answer usually do not make it past the final cut when a standardized achievement test is first developed, or will most likely be excluded when the

standardised test is revised. As a consequence, items which are typically taught in schools by teachers and on which students perform well are often excluded (Popham, 1999).

### **Validity, reliability, fairness and bias in standardized tests**

Validity, fairness and the absence of bias in a standardised test may give one confidence in the results. However, the review of the existing literature reveals flaws in standardised tests. For example: Chilisa (2000), Newfields (2007) and St Pierre (2000) have written about gender bias; and Berlak (2000), Delandshere (2001), LaCelle-Peterson (2000) and Thaman (2009) about cultural bias.

Cultural bias is the extent to which a test excludes and penalizes some students based on their ethnicity, gender or socioeconomic status (McCreanor, 1988). The extreme diversity of student population in some New Zealand classrooms and schools mean that the blanket standardized tests these students sit are almost naturally biased against them in terms of method of testing, selection of test items, and in the language of presentations. These biases are most damaging to some minority students, for example, Samoans, whose cultural values might be different from those discussed in the content of the standardised testing tools. To answer particular test questions requires appropriate cultural and language specific knowledge and not merely abstract intellectual knowledge. The mismatches between the cultural knowledge of Samoan students and that the standardised tests assume remains a stumbling block for the students. They are therefore disadvantaged before they begin. For some minority students whose first language and background experiences are other than English, not only they must have to cope with the culturally located content of the standardised test, they must also understand the English language in which it is written (May, 2010a, 2010b; Thaman, 2009; Volante, 2008). The dilemma students face in this case is that their academic abilities are often confounded by the language of the tests (Janks, 2010; Klenowski, 2009). Given the biases inherent in these standardised tests, many researchers (Klenowski, 2009; Mahon, 2006; McCreanor, 1988; Mons, 2009; Olssen, 1998; Pearce & Williams, 2013; Popham, 1999; Schwab, 2012) continue to question their reliability, and the validity of conclusions drawn about students' achievements as the result of these tests.

Reliability and validity of standardised tests is complex as they focus on whether the inferences and actions based on the test results can be justified (Black, 1998, p. 54).



Validity is defined as the extent to which an assessment accurately measures what it is intended to measure, in particular how accurately a conclusion, measurement, or concept corresponds to what is being tested (Mahon, 2006). Validity of the standardised tests therefore can only be understood as a function of the purpose of the test. For example, if the test is set out to assess students' competence in the English language, then it is not necessarily valid for assessing intelligence or native ability. So the generalized tests currently used which attempt to do all these things will be valid for none of them.

Several factors affect the validity of standardised tests (Black, 1998). First, a student's reading ability can have an impact on the validity of a test. If a student has a hard time understanding the question being asked, then the test will not be an accurate assessment of what the student truly knows about a subject. Second, the student's self-efficacy can also influence test validity. A student who does not believe in her or his own ability to do well in a particular area may not do well in the test. In this case, the student's own doubts may hinder his or her ability to accurately demonstrate knowledge and understanding. Third, a student's anxiety of the standardised test can also affect the validity of their test results. Tests can sometimes cause students emotional and physiological anxieties, which lead to a misrepresentation of student knowledge. Olssen (1998) echoes the same argument that 'as a performance, a test is not simply assessing an underlying capacity but that all manner of other things is contributing to the outcomes obtained (Olssen, 1988, p. 54).

Sandoval and Duran (1998) share the same concern as mentioned above. In their own research on the impact of testing on English language learners, they ask:

What inferences can be drawn from the use of tests with individuals limited in their command of English? What inferences can be drawn when the tests have been administered so that the instructions or the substance and content of the task have not been completely understood by the examinee? What is the validity? It takes more than one year for students to fully master the English language. School reformers should consider this for ELL students (Sandoval & Duran, 1998, p. 181, cited in Mahon, 2006, p.480).

Further argument is presented in Daniels (1976) that:

...the correlation between test performance and school success in artefactual  
...the correlation is built into the tests through the selection of items...Items  
were selected because they served to distinguish children whose teachers  
judged to be bright or dull....Good items were those a good student got right

and the poor student got wrong...Items a poor student got right and the good student got wrong would be excluded ...So standardized test results cannot shore up validation arguments (Daniels, 1976, p. 150, cited in Olssen, 1988, p. 55).

Olssen (1998) argues that:

‘To answer the question ‘what is it that the tests test?’ all we can be certain of it that they test the number of questions answered correctly. The test itself constitutes a performance and demonstrates what the children have achieved with respect to the types of questions the test asks. It seems more likely that such tests measure the acquisitions of bits of information, attitudes, values, motivation and possibly specific cognitive skills (Olssen, 1998, p. 55).

Validity is therefore very difficult to check and is widely neglected (Black, 1998). Black advises that educators and test users need to examine both the forward aspect of test validity in relation to predictions, and the backward aspect in relation to effects of testing on learning (Black, 1998, p. 54).

Reliability depends on whether the results are reproducible with different markers, grading procedures, test occasions and different sets of questions (Black, 1998, p. 54). Darr (2015), in his article titled ‘A hitchhiker’s guide to reliability’ documented the factors that contribute to the reliability of a test. These include:

- the number of tasks in the test, where more tasks means higher reliability;
- suitability of tasks and questions for students, where questions and tasks that are too easy or too hard do not lead to a reliable test;
- the spread of test results, where the larger the spread, the more reliable;
- the clearness of marking guides and procedures in terms of wording of achievement rubric, which either makes it easier or harder for markers and graders;
- how well questions and tasks are phrased, where unclear questions lead to unreliable test results;
- anxiety and readiness of students, where assessing students when they are tired or straight after an exciting event will not produce reliable data (Darr, 2005, p. 60).

Darr recommends triangulating data to increase the reliability of data, using more than one source of data, for example, samples of students’ work (Darr, 2005). Although the above mentioned researchers and educators argue that the reliability of tests need to be

consistent across time, across tasks and across markers, Darr (2005) contends that given the diversity in the students' cultures, background experiences, language, socio-economic and pedagogy, 'no test result can ever be reliable' (Darr, 2005, p. 59). Darr's argument therefore means that the tests are indeed unfair for the Samoan students whose language, cultures and background experiences are different from that of the norm.

### **Standardised tests, standardised testing and equity**

As previously suggested, schools and the standardised tests they administer to students, serve to governmentalize schools and students alike, in the interests of the state. Through standardised tests results, schools are made accountable to the government in their role of agents of the state. Assessment results reveal that if the school is doing well, it could at the same time be subjectifying students into the discourse of school and assessment. Pedagogically, assessments serve as markers against which instructional strategies are measured and modified. Students who do well can be said to be more subjectified to the discourse of assessments and in return, they are recognised by certificates for their ability to conform. These purposes, however, have some profound consequences that tend to deprive Samoan students of present and future learning opportunities and employment.

Firstly, the gatekeeping nature of assessments entitles only those who have mastered the necessary skills and knowledge and have reached the pre-determined standard to be recognised with rewards such as scholarships and university entrance. To some extent, asTTle and STAR are used for selection purposes. In my experience, the asTTle and STAR tests results are considered in deciding whether Years 7 and 8 students are given scholarships to attend high decile schools. The high decile schools are usually better resourced and students are more likely to get the chances and opportunities to go further in education. Given the historical 'subjugating of the knowledge' (Foucault, 1972), experiences, languages and world views of the minority students, such as, Samoans in tests, there is often very little if any chance for these students to reach the standard, and become entitled to the implied rewards and privileges.

These pre- determined standards will continue to segregate the student population, into the 'normal' students and the 'others'. As mentioned above, the 'normal' students will always get certificates and go further in education, and later on into better jobs and better salaries (Pullin, 1994). The 'others' will remain envious of the par they may never be able to reach, that belongs to those for whom it was designed, the dominant middle class (and generally European) students. The continuous labelling and categorisation will continue

to remind and instill in these ‘others’ that they are second class, receiving second class acknowledgement, and second class services (Rist, 1970). Although they may get certificates, they will often come in as second choices, after the first class ‘normal’, in interviews and other academic competing ventures. The ‘others’ will continue to receive important negative messages about their performance and capabilities, that they are not working hard enough and at worst, that they lack the capacity to succeed in academic work. A young person who regularly receives such messages year after year is not likely to view academic work in a positive way and is certainly not likely to aspire to higher education, rather to opt out of education altogether. If assessment were to be used primarily as a form of feedback for enhancing the learning process rather than for screening and selecting, the cause of educational equity would be much better served (Astin, 1990).

The current assessment system we have in New Zealand tends to assume that all students are the same, in terms of prior experience and language. There is little if any recognition or rather little informed recognition of the needs of minority groups. This means that Samoan students sit the standardised tests, not necessarily ill – prepared, but ill-prepared for the kind of test items they will encounter. They may be very well prepared for a test, which relates to topics they are familiar with, which are not necessarily the topics that will be on the standardised testing. The topics in the standardised tests are often not subjects they studied or discussed in class.

The abundance of mostly world views, language and experiences of the mainstream middleclass in standardised tests is evidence of the ‘symbolic power’ of its validity as superiority (Bourdieu, 1991). On the other hand, the often excluded knowledge and experience of minority students signal the enduring ‘epistemic violence’ against them (Branson & Miller, 2000; Janks, 2010), which consequentially sets some of these students up to fail. Examples of this exclusion include the total absence of standardised tests materials related to the third gender, such as, the Samoan fa'afafine (as discussed in details in Chapter Seven) and the belittling of women which tends to be against the Samoan understanding of the feagaiga or sacred covenant as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The tendencies of some the assessment markers to misinterpret the students’ responses, often due to the Samoanised English in which they express themselves, and the difficulty to recognise students’ correct answers because non-standard English language gets in the way means that these students’ learning and achievements are confined to and confounded by the language of presentation. The excess time needed for Samoan students

to translate and internalise the concepts mean that these students are unable to complete the standardised tests in time. Due to all the factors mentioned here, categorising and comparing Samoan students to their mainstream middle class counterparts, means that most Samoan students are condemned to the ‘long brown tail of underachievement’ (Aumua, 2014; Johansson, 2014; Misa, 2005; Paenga, 2012; Rees, 2012). The seriously inequitable nature of assessment systems means that most Samoan students cannot be effectively assessed, nor can their learning needs be catered for (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 39).

In examining and reflecting on the experiences of the minority students in the United States of America, Fischer (and others) concluded that ‘groups score unequally in tests because they are unequal in society’ (Fischer, Hout, Jankowski, Lucas, Swidler & Voss, 1976, p. 172). These authors argue that minority students, such as, the Latino American and African Americans, grow up in environments where learning is difficult. Although the families value education, they cannot create the physical conditions, such as, access to books to help their children with their homework. Therefore, students tend to lack interest in academic studies because they have difficulty focusing on their studies. They (the students) belong to the bottom of the social ladder. The rest of the society consider them violent and stupid and discriminates against them. This subordination leads to low performance in three ways. First, students grow up suffering socio-economic deprivation, such as, low income, ill health, poor parental education, and the likelihood of reduced performance in tests. Second, students grow up experiencing segregation, exposing them (the students) who would otherwise do well, with the problems and the culture of those who are disadvantaged. As students grow up, they become aware that they carry a stigma of inferiority based on the wider society’s perception of them. Students respond in many ways to these identities. Some students become anxious, fatalistic and resigned. Others reject the wider society’s expectations and standards, adopting an oppositional stance. The perpetuation of this stigmatisation in schools tends to discourage self-efficacy in students, which eventually translates into academic failure (Rist, 2002).

Standardised tests normalise the students’ knowledge, experience and behaviour. Many forms of assessments, such as, the paper and pencil tests of the standardised tests, are designed only to test recall facts not problem solving (Chilisa, 2000). This constricting focus of standardised tests is a ‘mockery to the intellectual content of the subjects’ and a ‘betrayal of both the examiners’ and students’ ideals and obligations’ (Hoffman, 1962, p. 53); and captures poorly, if at all, what is meant to be smart in life outside the classroom

(Fischer et al., 1996, p. 186). Others, for example, Chang (2006) and Joyce (2007) agree that attention must be given to how students make meaning, and not just to the right answer. The use of complicated English texts in reading standardised tests cause cognitive overload for young children and especially for ESL students (including most of the Samoan students), indicates a gatekeeping agenda, brought about by a selection that is inherently unjust (Nagy, 2000).

Scholars, such as, Rata (2012) emphasise the importance of extending the knowledge of student beyond the parameters of their current world. She argues as follows:

Limiting the curriculum to experiential knowledge limits access to a powerful class resource; that of conceptual knowledge required for critical reasoning and political agency. Knowledge that comes from experience limits the knower to that experience. The shift to localised knowledge fixes groups in the working class to a never ending present as schools that use a social constructivist approach to knowledge in the curriculum fails to provide the intellectual tools of conceptual thinking and its medium in advanced literacy that leads to an imagined, yet unknown, future (Rata, 2012, p. 103).

Drawing on Rata's position, one can argue that given the paucity of Pasifika related texts, and the over-abundance of Eurocentric texts in the standardised tests, the overpowering effect can indicate an effort to Europeanise the knowledge of all students. This normalisation is exacerbated by the narrowing of the curriculum by market-driven goals which not only reduces the extent and challenge of materials and text provided to students, it also emphasises expectations that are often unrealistic, adding to the further detriment of those, such as, Samoan students, who are outside of this dominant discourse (Thrupp, 2008). The pressure to succeed in these standardised tests influences students to study to pass and some teachers to adopt unethical practices such as teaching to the test (Hill, 2000).

Student achievement data gathered in standardised tests is categorised and used to identify students, not according to the learning they have mastered in class, rather their ability to associate their knowledge with the knowledge tested, or in some cases, to guess the answers correctly. Although failure to make these associations or guesses results in various labels of failure, usually coded as 'not yet...' or 'has not reached', these labels are readily deciphered by students. These labels can damage students' self-esteem, since grades can easily and unnoticeably shift from describing the student's work to describing the student (Sadler, 1987). In the case of Samoan and other Pasifika students living in New Zealand, the data-driven stereotyping has unfortunately forced upon them a string

of labels such as ‘cultural and linguistic deficits’ and ‘underachievers’ (Amituanai-Tolosa, 2006).

Some educators struggle to interpret assessment standards and criteria (Dunn & Marston, 2003). Some studies (for example, Hawe, 2002, 2003; Wyatt-Smith & Castleton, 2005) have shown how some teachers tend to award assessment grades based on how they feel about students. This is an aspect Sadler (1987) calls ‘subjective judgements grounded in personal taste’ (p. 194). Shepard (2000) points out that some teachers lack the ability to devise and administer tests, and equally important, to effectively incorporate this understanding in the broader testing process. Nevertheless, the institutional knowledge teachers have, affords them the power to interpret the language of tests and apply their interpretation to the knowledge of the students laid bare to them as a result of the standardised tests.

Most of the research conducted on assessments has originated from Western concepts and expectations (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Carlson & Geisinger, 2002). Whereas in the case of students’ perceptions of assessments, a very few documented studies have been conducted in New Zealand (Gilmore & Smith, 2008), however many abroad, (Brown & Hirschfeld, 2008; Brown, McInerney & Liem, 2009; Matos, Cirino, & Brown, 2009). New Zealand research concerning students’ experiences of assessments in New Zealand has been from the perspective of others, such as, their teachers. Little if any research has reported students’ perspectives on standardised testing experiences directly. On the other hand, in the case of Pasifika and Samoan students, in particular, whose voice is totally absent from the research literature, this research thesis gave them an opportunity to express their perspective, to discuss how they receive, interpret, and understand school standardised tests. Given the long history of documented abuses and unintended negative consequences associated with high-stakes testing, particularly in multi-cultural student populations (Absolum, Flockton, Hattie, Hipkins, & Reid, 2009), the students’ perspectives are indeed a valuable perspective to explore, and not simply take for granted (Gilmore & Smith, 2008, p. 8)

### **Discursive production of the testing culture**

Mons’s (2009) explained how the standardised testing has become a key instrument for policy reform of OECD education systems (as mentioned earlier in this section). The global pressure from the OECD to accelerate and invigorate economic progress implicates heavily on the government. Since the Ministry of Education is the lead

advisor to government on the education system (MOE, 2013, p. 5), the pressure is exerted on the Ministry of Education by the government to devise an assessment system including assessment tools closely in line with international standards. In her summary, Mons (2009) affirms that standardised testing has become the most powerful political and management tool that indicates the quality of education service's output and at the same time influences the actions of the implementing agents (Mons, 2009, pp 5-7).

As a global compliant society, the New Zealand Ministry of Education and all its agencies, such as teachers, principals and test designers are all subjected to the expectations of the OECD discourse. The OECD discourse desires numerical accountability. Standardised tests give numbers, which the communities see as seemingly scientific hence a reliable form of truth. The numerical data produced is interpreted and therefore appears to give useable information (also Kahn, 2000). An example of a standardised test is the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) the OECD administers and publishes, which allows the performance of educational systems to be examined and compared on a common measure across countries. PISA measures the pupils' scholastic performance on mathematics, science, and reading. The publication of PISA results provides comparable data with a view to enabling countries to improve their education policies and outcomes. A glance at New Zealand's 2014 PISA results showed:

High but declining PISA scores conceal a wide variation in student achievement between low and high performers... In 2012, New Zealand 15-year-old students scored an average of 500 points on the PISA mathematics assessment – above the OECD average of 496 points but representing a decline of 23 points since PISA 2003. There has been a drop in the number of high-performing maths students (from 21% to 15%) – those who can develop and work with models for complex situations and demonstrate well-developed thinking and reasoning skills. At the same time there has been an increase in the proportion of students who failed to reach the baseline level of performance from 15% in 2003 to 23% by 2012 (Macintyre, 2014, p. 1).

Results such as the ones shared above are seen as the direct results of the work of the MOE, so there is pressure not to cause the government embarrassment by such disappointing results. The expectation is for the MOE to solve the problem. One way to solve the problem is for the test designers to design tests closely in line with other international standards, which in turn puts the pressure on principals and teachers to teach students to pass the tests, hence the discursive production of the testing culture.



## **Where to next with standardized tests**

It seems that reforms based on standardised assessment are backed by strong political rhetoric and on making the best possible use of public resources, particularly budgetary funds (Mons, 2009). Clearly, there is no entirely beneficial simple recipe for a standardised assessment model. Given the diversity of students in New Zealand classrooms, there is a real need to acknowledge the existence of the varying dialects of English language, culture and experience these students bring into the learning settings and score them accordingly. Pearce and Williams (2013) call this a “from the ground up” assessment tool to accommodate variations such as in dialect, differences in proficiency and cultural differences in communication style (Pearce & Williams, 2013, p. 437).

Klenowski (2009) in her attempt to address assessment equity of Australian indigenous students contends the need to address issues in language, cultural content, developmental sequence, framing, content and interpretation in assessments. She proposes:

- sampling the content for test material using the different groups of students who will be taking the test;
- contextualising assessment interpretations to explain explicitly what is being assessed, how it is being assessed and the expected criteria for assessment;
- studying possible social reproductions of gender, socioeconomic, ethnic or other cultural stereotypes in test tools;
- conducting equity scanning of test instrument before use;
- promoting research into the validity and fairness of assessment items for which the agency is responsible;
- employing specialist editors to examine the language of assessment instrument in terms of possible barriers to equal opportunity for all students;
- involving a range and balance of types of assessment instrument and modes of response, including a balance and range of visual and linguistic material and involve a range and balance of conditions;
- making available to the public, test designers values and perspectives of assessment.

In addition, Klenowski claims the following factors to be considered in the construction of tests:

- the cultural specificity of how the assessment task is framed;
- the cultural specificity of the normative models of child and adolescent development as reflected in the constructs of the test;
- the linguistic codes and conventions of the assessment;
- the cultural specificity of content knowledge (Klenowski, 2009, pp. 16-17).

In an article titled 'Linguistic bias in multi-choice test questions', Lampe and Tsaouse (2010) highlighted the need to consider the often overlooked linguistic biases in tests. They provide examples of how unnecessary use of unfamiliar words cause unnecessary complexities for students during tests. This is in line with Pearce and Williams (2013) recommendation to reduce the focus on Standard English language conventions that are used infrequently by indigenous students, in their Australian standardized tests.

Moreover, Lampe and Tsaouse (2010) propose that teachers should spend time teaching their students test taking skills. These skills include how to deal with multi-choice questions by prioritising answers in (Lampe and Tsaouse, 2010, p. 64). In terms of designing and writing tests, they emphasise highlighting important words in questions such as 'most' and 'best' by bold-facing, capitalizing, underlining, and/or italicizing, to help readers quickly discern the nature of the task. In their own research, they discovered the lack of clarity or consistency in the wording, errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling, to name some of the issues test designers need to closely work on before the tests are given to students. They highlight an ethical implications of students' failing poorly worded multiple-choice tests, and possibly courses, because of difficulties instructors have writing valid and reliable test items (Bosher & Bowles, 2008, p. 171, cited in Lampe and Tsaouse, 2010, p. 66).

Other researchers such as, Kohn (2000) proposes not allocating time for the students to complete standardised tests. This is because 'time' tends to suggest that the premium is placed on speed and not on thoughtfulness and thoroughness (Kohn, 2000, p. 13). In this case, the indication to students is that the ability to do things quickly and under pressure is one valued attribute of the standardised tests. Kohn also contends against the use of multi-choice in standardised tests, where all students can do is recognize one by picking it out of four or five answers provided by someone else; and cannot justify and explain the reason for choosing their answers. Kohn advises for the use of constructed response/s to also determine the students' cognitive abilities. I do agree with Kohn's arguments here because as this research will show that some Samoan students do need more time to complete the standardised tests and the chance to express their thoughts

and justify their choice of answers. I have written further about these aspects later in the Linguistic Analysis chapter (Matā'upu Lona Lima).

Solano-Flores (2014) highlighted a concern that students learning English as second language, such as the Samoans, are never considered and recognised in the designing stage of the tests. They are only considered in the end of the process, mainly when testing accommodations such as remediation are provided to them. Although this unfortunate omission may be due to worries about the students' limited proficiency in English, there is evidence that the majority of these students can communicate in English if they are given the opportunity to do so. As Prosser and Solano-Flores explained:

This takes place through an iterative process. In each iteration: the wording of the items is refined after trying them out with a sample of pilot students and obtaining from them information about the ways in which they understand the items and the linguistic challenges that hamper their proper interpretation. This information may be obtained through observation, cognitive interviews, or the analysis of the students' responses to the items. By including these students in the process of test development, test developers should be able to make better decisions refining the linguistic features of test items to be administered in English (Prosser & Solano-Flores, 2010, cited in Solano-Flores, 2014, p. 242).

This process is called item localization. It adapts the linguistic features of test items to the way in which language is used in a community. Localized and linguistically-simplified versions of the test items has comparable technical properties, although they focus on different aspects of language in which English is used in students' various community and school settings (Solano-Flores, 2014).

For reporting purposes, Kohn proposes narratives about the students based on continuous observation of students in activities. Parents can know from these stories how their children are doing and where to next in their learning. The current assessment and reporting system in New Zealand have shifted to this format, and away from depending solely on standardized tests for making statements about students' achievement levels and capabilities. The new system now expects teachers to choose other forms of classroom-based assessments, such as samples of students work and observations, to triangulate the data on which they base their overall teacher judgements about students' achievement. However, although this system is helping teachers and principals make informed decision about their students' learning and the teachers'

teaching, the system does not eliminate the bias, unfairness, unreliable and invalid nature of standardized tests.

Classroom tests and or assessments of any kind help teachers identify students' learning needs and next teaching steps. However, the political goals attached how the standardised tests are used to identify which students, teachers and schools that are doing well, and which are not tend to divert the purpose of assessments. This thesis is concerned with what the students know and feel about the asTTle and STAR; two of the standardised testing tools used to tests their knowledge and skills in reading. Using students' stories and examples from the analysis of the tests language, I will show that there is a real need for teachers and principals to rethink the testing system and especially the standardised test tools used in their schools. This rethinking may mean questioning the quality of the test papers and the standardised manner in which they are created, implemented, administered and managed.

### **My position as the researcher**

In the first part of this opening chapter to this thesis, I have revealed my own life scripts, ideas, experiences and influences and perspectives which drive this thesis project. My admission acknowledges the enmeshment of my subjective self in the research that in turn influences how I approach, analyse and interpret the discourses in the research. Instead of making a futile attempt to avoid my subjectivity (which is unavoidable), I acknowledge that subjectivity is a feature of my research (McLaren, 2009). This approach requires me to engage in self-reflexivity that broadens my own discursively-formed views, and exposes how my constructions and subjective experiences interact with my research. In the critical analysis of the data, a self-reflexive approach enables me as the researcher to work both with and against my own discursively-formed meanings in the critical analysis of data.

For me to deconstruct 'truths' about and within the discourses, I repeatedly question and check my multiple subjective positions and life narratives against post-structural concepts in the literature and with my supervisors, colleagues and research participants. Throughout the research project, I constantly examine the discursive construction of my inner thoughts, against which I perceive everything. I challenge and check it against what other post structuralists (mainly Foucault and those who have written about Foucault's work) have written. I am conscious of the fact that given my endeavour to succeed in the Western education system, I am still subject to the power of this discourse. My

inside/outside perspectives world views are beneficial to the research, hence the need for me to consistently self-reflect on the way my personal experiences do not interact with my analysis.

Methodologically, my own value-based reflexive approach is used to interrogate and explore the questions I set out to investigate. I realise that there is no one truth about the subjective experiences of the participants in the research, including my own. Not only that, there are numerous ways in which the researcher, could and should make sense about the lives and experiences of my research participants. This means that while I present my insights about the participants and their understanding of assessments, all I can speak about are my own personal observations and understandings about the discourses, assumptions, values, and worldview, as embodied in the information gathered.

As a Samoan who is an adult, a teacher and a researcher, carrying out a research project in schools with mainly Samoan students and teachers, I was automatically awarded the built-in recognition of the status of a Samoan ‘academic’ and ‘elder’ even if I did not want it. These labels culturally warranted the ‘respect’<sup>2</sup>, which oddly enough could work against me before I even began, as the participants could feel obliged to please me, instead of being honest with their stories about assessments. Hence being aware and sensitive of this aspect of the fa’asamoa practice, I made sure the participants (including myself) were well aware of the aims and objectives of the research, and their rights and responsibilities as participants. Moreover, I had to work against the influence of my own power, discursive formation and subjective positions in relation to my research endeavours, so that my unintended bias would be exposed (Etherington, 2004). As the researcher, I acknowledge that I have the power to choose how much and how little I can let my own self-knowledge influence the production of new knowledge with greater depth of meaning and authenticity.

### **Concluding comment**

In this chapter, I have recounted the difficulty minority students and teachers (this includes me) encounter every day at school as we struggle with the governmentalizing mechanisms, such as, learning a curriculum that is far removed from our reality, in a foreign language, for the sake of the state and the economic goals of the state. I have also

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<sup>2</sup> In the Samoan culture, elders, teachers and those who have the palagi knowledge are respected. This cultural practice is underpinned by the Samoan principle of ‘O le ala i le pule of tautua’ or ‘The pathway to success is through servitude’.

explained how these students live in an educational paradox that works both for and against them as participants in the education system. In other words, the more the students learn and achieve, and are docile bodies of the school discourse, the more they become alienated from their own families, family traditions and ways of doing things.

In this chapter, I have introduced a different stance on assessment as a discourse, underpinned by Michel Foucault's philosophical ideas. As a discourse, assessment has statements and rules to govern the actions and thoughts of individuals who take part in it. This discourse, like all other discourses is so powerful that participants, such as, students cannot operate outside of it, or they are doomed to be seen as failures. The students' determination to 'pass' turns them into subjects of the discourse, warranting more power to the assessment discourse. Powerful people within the assessment discourse accept knowledge of the standardised tests as the truth for this discourse and submerge the knowledge others have, in particular, those who are different, for example, the Samoan students, as illegitimate and false.

As the researcher, I have introduced this research thesis as a critique of assessment that attempts to examine the power within assessment practices from a perspective that is Samoan and while it is objective, it is also critical. Such an understanding is desirable for teachers, principals and others working with young people so that they may comprehend the impact of assessment language, expectations and discourse on the achievements of students. Such an understanding may also help generate insights for those charged with designing standardised assessments that are used to assess students in multi-cultural contexts, of any aspects of the standardised tests that have rarely if ever been questioned, hence they are taken for granted. Such a project may validate the urgency for a more accurate assessment of the capabilities of Samoan children (and other minority children) in a demographic context, such as, in South Auckland, in which the relative proportion of such children is increasing at an exponential rate. The next chapter discusses the theoretical framework that underpins the understandings of this research thesis.

## **Matā'upu Lona Lua: 'Igagatō-Theoretical framework**

Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word, governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself (Foucault, 1993, pp. 203-204).

This chapter explains how this research draws on critical theory and particular aspects of the theoretical frameworks developed by Michel Foucault in his work, namely, discourse, power/knowledge and governmentality. The new meanings given by Foucault's work to concepts such as power/knowledge and discourse have transformed research in education. Critical discourse analysis, with the help of Foucault's concepts, allows hierarchies to be uncovered and questioned, by analysing the corresponding fields of knowledge and associated structures through which those hierarchies are legitimated.

This section explains the key Foucauldian term 'discourse', the related term 'subjectivity' and the notion of 'power/knowledge'. These related ideas are integral aspects of Foucault's notion of discourse, and lead on to the further Foucauldian concept of 'governmentality'. These discussions pay particular attention to how the notion of governmentality is played out in the subjectification of individuals by assessment discourse, such as how Samoan students are subjected to standardised reading assessments in New Zealand primary schools.

### **Foucault's notion of discourse and practices**

Foucault's notion of discourse refers not only to language or to social interactions; it also refers to a set of common assumptions, which provide the basis for conscious and social knowledge. Discourse potentially includes whatever signifies or has meanings. These meanings are embodied and embedded in technical processes in institutions, in patterns for general behaviour, in forms for transmission and diffusion, and in classroom practice (Foucault, 1971). Discourse in this sense transcends simply a technical accomplishment, including notions and questions, such as, what can be said and what can be thought. These notions are determined by games of truth played within a determined domain (McHoul & Grace, 1998). Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. Discourses constitute the 'nature' of the body, the unconscious and conscious mind and the emotional life of the subject they thereby govern (Weedon, 1987, p. 108).

Foucault describes how discourses are governed by analysable rules, systems and procedures which form the objects they speak about (Hook, 2001, p. 6). These rules constitute 'systems of thought' that determine what might be said, who might speak, the positions from which individuals may speak and the viewpoints that may be presented (Foucault, 1984a, p. 12). These rules, systems and procedures comprise a realm of discursive practices within the order of discourse, which represent the conceptual terrain in which knowledge is formed and produced (McHoul & Grace, 1998).

Discourses are regimes of truth. Every society has its own regime of truth, its general politics of truth, or the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as if true (Foucault, 1980b, p. 131). For statements and thoughts to be accepted as reality or truth, a relationship exists between these statements and thoughts that make sense within the discourse. Moreover, subjects of the discourse are inclined to speak and think in accordance with the discourse's statements that constitute the recognised signs, patterns and meanings of the discourse. In other words, discourse, as knowledge and truth claims, play an important part in constructing what is real and what is important for individuals involved with the discourse.

Foucault (Foucault, 1971) asserts that the production of discourse is controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by procedures or rules that to be truth or truthful, statements must conform with to be truth. This seems to suggest that the privileging of certain statements as truth involves ritual and discursive practices. Young explains these procedures are not simply that which is thought or said, per se, 'but all the discursive rules and categories that were a priori assumed as a constituent part of discourse and therefore of knowledge' (R. Young, 1981, p. 48). In this way, the effect of discursive practices is self-reinforcing, making it virtually impossible to think outside of the discourse, and strongly linking to the exercise of power. This is how discourse ensures the reproduction of the social system, through forms of selection, exclusion and domination (Sheridan-Smith, 1972).

In order to be meaningful, discourse is structured by assumptions within which any speaker must operate in order to be heard hence emphasising that social processes produce meaning. Discourses are complicated by the fact that although composed of signs, they do more than just use the signs to designate things. These complications are necessary to reveal and describe in order to understand the true and intended objects discourses represent and speak of. Furthermore, meanings drawn from and within discourse do not



stem from language alone, they also derive from institutional practices and power relations that structure social interactions that include language (Ball, 2006, 2010). The possibilities for meaning and for the definition of words are anticipated through and in the social and institutional positions held by the speakers or authors of those words. Words and concepts change their meaning as they are deployed within different discourses over time. Nevertheless discourse may be contested, resisted and transformed by any of the participants (Foucault, 1972). Such contestation is part of what is called the 'critical approach' (McHoul & Grace, 1998, p. 27).

### **Power/knowledge**

Foucault's work is underpinned by the relationship between power and knowledge and how the former is used to control and define the latter and vice versa. Foucault's theorization of power departs from the traditional conception that views power as a commodity that is held by one and enforced on another (Foucault, 1980b, p. 98). Instead of viewing power as an object acquired and exerted, Foucault maintained that power is a relational force that is dispersed throughout a society and enacted at every moment of interaction. In this sense, power is not something to be overthrown. Power circulates throughout society and imbues people's actions. As such power is not repressive, it is productive in that it negotiates and produces entities such as knowledge, discourse and truth. Viewing power in this way suggests that people have the capacity to facilitate change since power is given effect through our actions and where there is power, there also can be resistance. This capacity can be viewed in the way that people in power create and deploy the kinds of knowledge that will keep them in power, while others who do not have the opportunity to exert power in this way, find that their knowledge can be discounted (Foucault, 1979).

In institutions such as schools, power also includes the forms of social control where discourse strategies are used to conform, circumvent or even contest existing power or power and knowledge relations. In this case, discourse provides the vehicle through which power/knowledge is created, circulated and maintained. Power in this case is not something possessed or imposed by someone, rather it is through relationships circulating through society. Foucault (1997, p. 27) wrote:

We should admit...that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any

knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (cited in McHoul & Grace, 1998, p. 59).

Power is exercised within discourses in the ways it constitutes and governs individuals as subjects, or subjected objects in terms of the discourse. Power can manifest itself positively by producing knowledge and certain discourses, such as that of assessments in education, which get internalized by individual students and colonise the thinking of student populations. In the case of minority students, for example, the Samoans, such colonisation is reflected in the way their knowledge is either absent or misrepresented in the standardised tests. I have written more about these misrepresentations in language (in *Matā'upu Lona Lima-Linguistic Analysis*), culture (in *Matā'upu Lona Ono-Culture Discourse*) and gender (*Matā'upu Lona Fitu-Gender Discourse*). Students in this case will have to overcome 'being themselves' in favour of the palagi knowledge (Mika, 2012) assumed in the standardised tests or face being 'otherized' on the basis of the Anglo-European ontology (Gegeo, 2001, p. 188). Indeed, this manifestation leads to more efficient forms of social control, as knowledge enables, and indeed demands individuals to govern their own communities.

This effect is acted out through the forms of knowledge that are legitimized and authorised mainly through the allocation of resources, status distribution and career prospects (Goodson & Dowbiggin, 2012).

### **Governmentality**

Foucault writes of governmentality not so much as the political or administrative structures of the modern state, but as the ensemble of institutions, procedures, analyses, reflections, calculations and tactics which lead to a convenient end (Foucault, 1991). According to Foucault, discourse as power/knowledge is an important way in which society is governed, or kept in 'versatile equilibrium' (see chapter epigraph). This collective of ideas, organisations and actions aim to produce subjects, to shape, to guide and to affect the conduct of people so that they become people of certain sorts (Marshall & Marshall, 1977). In effect, governmentalisation asserts not just the simple reproduction of existing social differences and ideological confusions, it warrants a re-coding of social means of exploitation and domination (T. Lemke, 2002). The concept of governmentality plays a decisive role in Foucault's analytics of power. It offers a view on power beyond a perspective that focuses either on consensus or on violence, by differentiating between power and domination.

Governmentality links technologies of the self with technologies of domination, and in particular, the relation of constitution of the subject to the formation of the state (Lemke, 2002). Technologies of power are imposed whereas technologies of the self are chosen by subjects to construct, modify or transform identity. For example, some individuals who are conscious of what is considered 'normal' may wish to achieve normality and be socially accepted by working on themselves, controlling their impulses in everyday conduct and habits. This is evident in the way some parents inculcate norms of conduct into their children. Therefore, by using the most convenient means, governmentality essentially is concerned with improving the lives of individuals in alignment with that which is in the best interests of the state.

Technologies of the self 'permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and thoughts, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immobility' (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Through this process, individuals govern themselves and others according to what they take to be true about who they are, what aspects of their existence should be worked upon, how, with what means, and to what ends. This process results in governmentalizing individuals as they have unconsciously (and sometimes unwillingly) turned into conforming docile bodies, taking the existing state of affairs for granted as normal and natural (Lemke, 2002).

### **Governmentality and assessment practice**

The power of the state permeates all levels of society. Foucault directs attention to the effects of government and political power on how students are shaped in institutions, such as, schools (Marshall, 2010, p. 25). Assessment practices constitute technologies used by the government to achieve certain social and political goals. Assessment plays a role in the domain of government whereby assessment practices yield information about the individual and about the schooling system. Modern government is dependent on such information as part of the disciplinary society. Increasingly, for state-funded education systems, assessment practices are expected to yield knowledge of the population that can be readily and efficiently calculated (Ball, 2010).

All standardised assessment practices, such as standardised tests are normative because it is by means of these types of assessment that comparisons are made between individual students as well as schools. This form of surveillance becomes a self-monitoring mechanism for all concerned. In these ways, a student's scholastic identity

has not only been constructed, it is made visible. Testing reveals the ‘truth’ about students and their achievements, so parents, communities, students and teachers accept it as in the best interests of the children. There is a widespread belief that the uniqueness of the individual child can be enhanced by the knowledge yielded by tests (Ball, 2010). Testing is therefore not generally seen as a controlling mechanism. It is through this association between testing and the child’s best interests that testing is secured as acceptable hence grants testing the power that consequently governs the actions of its participants.

### **School discourse**

Schools are subject to a discourse of disciplinary ideologies and social order (Ball, 2010). Schools are involved in the selective dissemination of social discourse. Students’ access to social discourse has traditionally been controlled by schools. Within schools, students are normalised into embracing dominant orders for their own good, which perpetuates and legitimizes the existing social order. Students are keen to take part in the education and schools are keen to ensure their success. Both parties believe in the value of education although this tendency to normalise naturalises foreign and potentially discriminatory ideologies, and render them invincible, adding to the disadvantage of linguistic minority students.

This section turns to Foucault’s work on discourse production and transformation to highlight its significance in the practices of literacy assessments. In particular, the notions of power and knowledge, normalisation and governmentality are discussed in terms of how they are implicated in assessments and as aspects of assessment discourse.

### **School assessment discourse**

Assessments are part of a specific type of discourse in schools that constitute systems to normalise the knowledge and behaviour of the student population. School assessment discourse has rules that govern all aspects of assessment including: the knowledge that is to be tested, how the knowledge is to be tested, who produces the assessments, how assessments are managed and delivered, how assessment data is used, and so forth. In the process of assessment, students are subject to strict expectations that govern their behaviour, such as, revising notes and studying hard, acting as good subjects of assessment discourse.

In the examination room, students are expected to observe governmentalized standard rituals such as sitting quietly for long periods, say 40 minutes, which for some can be agonising. Within the 40 minutes, students are subjected to further standardised procedures, such as, reading certain texts. Reading itself implies internalising someone else's knowledge and beliefs. Students engage in games of truth, such as, guessing why the authors have written the texts in question and what answers are expected of them, all the while under heavy surveillance by the teachers, who are also agents of the assessment discourse. In standardised testing practice, students are subjects of the discourse of individualism. The extremely individualistic nature of assessments is in direct contrast to the collectivism of Pasifika students.

Assessment is a form of technology because it is something put together for purpose, to satisfy an immediate need and to solve a problem. Standardised testing imply a complexity of arrangements to create a standardised means for attaining a predetermined end in schools. Assessment measure and monitor student learning throughout the school life of the students. Formative assessments, such as, feedback and forward help teachers identify what students need to learn and for students to know and learn what they need to work on. Summative assessments, such as, the standardised tests, on the other hand, are for reporting, certification, selection, accountability and national comparison. The explicit purposes of assessments, of one kind or another, now infiltrate social, corporate and political life. Given the driving visions of the current New Zealand Curriculum to produce students that are enterprising, technological, economic and lifelong learners (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 7), the assumed and less often acknowledged purpose of assessments therefore is to subject students to increasing global economic competition. Students are encouraged to stay on longer within the formal education system and are motivated to keep coming back to education throughout their lives.

In the preceding paragraphs students have been discussed as subjective participants in the discourse of individualism which is part of the discourse of assessment. In the next paragraph I will discuss how they are also *objects* in this discourse.

Students are participants in assessment discourse and they are also objects of the discourse. Teachers compile and arrange information in ways that construct students as objects of their discussions and teaching. The objectification of students depends on statements about students that are regarded as having 'truth value'. These truths communicated to the students as 'results' drive students to become active self-conforming

subjects, as they employ technologies of the self to better themselves to become even better subjects of the discourse (Ball, 2010). Within the assessment discourse, the student as a subject carries the twin meaning of an active knowing subject and of an object being acted upon, in other words, they are a product of the discourse. Within the assessment discourse, students are the subjects who speak and are spoken of. In terms of epistemology, students are the objects of knowledge and subjects who know (Foucault, 1970, p. 323).

### **Truth/knowledge in assessment**

For the student participants in this thesis project, the individual student's own 'will to truth and knowledge' allows power to work. Ironically, the students' striving to pass the English reading tests makes them contributors to the power of the assessment discourse. The students' failure and success are measured not according to the knowledge standards they bring into the exam room as Samoans rather for the most part only in terms of knowledge validated by the assessment discourse. The students who operate outside of the assessment discourse will have to gain knowledge of this discourse to be able to succeed in it.

Within schools and especially with the results of examinations, knowledge is being developed about students in terms of their learning behaviour and attitudes. The knowledge gained about students is believed to be true, and is then refined and used in planning to develop these students into what is regarded as normal or better than normal – 'excellent'. The knowledge gained as a result of examinations and standardised tests specifies whether the students are normalised and governable. Such discourses are not being used to shape students as such; it is used to legitimate such changes as the knowledge gathered about students is deemed required. Moreover, deeming the knowledge gained about students to be the truth it follows that this process legitimises the normalisation of students.

This more subtle and pervasive power of assessment defines and shapes every aspect of the educational life of students. As a system that is heavily influenced by politics (as discussed in the previous section), assessment is a governmentalizing tool to control the behaviour and actions of all those involved, both students and school personnel alike. The assessment regime constitutes the 'norm', and this serves the function of standardisation and normalisation (Wang, 2011). Assessments act as a form of surveillance that drives students to learn whatever the teachers teach them, teachers to teach, and schools to

provide support, so students pass tests so they qualify and are not labelled as failures. The perpetual comparison of students makes it possible both to measure and to judge. Assessment plays a major role here to identify if and to ensure that the individual is likely to lead a docile, useful and practical life (Marshall, 2010). Teachers, parents and students alike believe in its reality, its power, its importance, its scientific validity, and its social function, making an ultimatum possible. In 'Discipline and Punish' (1977a), Foucault posits that assessment is the most individualising mechanism of discipline, power and control.

The documentation of examination turns the student into an analysable and describable object (Foucault, 1977), leading to labels, such as, the student that needs to be trained, corrected, classified, normalised, or even excluded. Assessment then becomes a ritualised and scientific method of fixing the differences of students by the pinning down of each individual in his/her own particularity. This is because assessments, such as formative assessments, do not just identify students that need support, but the kind of support needed. Assessment in this case is a technology of power that assures distributions and classification. Assessment is at the centre of the procedures that constitute the student as effect and object of power, and as effect and object of knowledge (Madaus & Horn, 2000).

An awareness of political power and knowledge and the pervasive influence they have on assessment practices underpins this study. A research project such as this takes on Foucault's critical analysis to allow viewpoints that unravel the masks 'reality' 'wears' (Hoskin, 2010, p. 26). Such a position will recognise how power is exercised within systems of thoughts and actions, granting a chance for researchers/writers/thinkers/readers to oppose existing forms of political subjection and domination, and consider and reflect on whether or not resistance (and what form of resistance) could be, the appropriate response. Without an understanding that the classroom is heavily influenced by social and political factors, some teachers often end up reproducing the very same ideological elements that elicit cultural and linguistic resistance and relegation in minority students (who are often already alienated, or at risk of becoming alienated, from school life).

### **Power/knowledge in assessment**

Foucault is referred to by educationalists interested in questions of social control and the exercise of power (Ball, 2010, p. 12). Significantly, through what Foucault terms 'power/knowledge', techniques of educational assessment provide knowledge that is

important to governments in accomplishing certain goals. It is precisely this productive nature of power in the Foucauldian sense that makes it important that assessment should be investigated for its social and political effects, as a technology of government. As a means of translating discourses into bureaucratic practices, testing is productive in a governmental sense, because such testing produces knowledge of the individual and of the system (Foucault, 1980a).

Foucault regarded examinations as the most important instrument of disciplinary power. This is because examinations combine hierarchical observation with normalising judgement. The perpetual comparisons between individuals make it possible to both measure and judge, hence the main individualizing force. The documentation surrounding assessment turns the students into describable, analysable objects, and the calculated gaps between students provide their labelled classifications. Classification such as ‘underachievement’ has been closely linked to Pasifika students in the discourse and documentation that is part and parcel of New Zealand primary literacy assessment. Assessment documentation constitutes students as cases or individuals to be fixed, corrected or normalised. Foucault concluded that examination is at the centre of procedures that constitute the students as effects and objects of power, and as effects and objects of knowledge (R. Jones, 2010).

The distribution and appropriateness of education is mediated by the examination, in which slender technique is to be found a whole domain of knowledge and type of power (Ball, 2010, p.3). Examination is a key concept in understanding the nexus of power/knowledge relations. The process of examination embodies and relates power and knowledge in technological form. Standardised tests are used to profile and stream students and schools, hence creating for them their identities and subjectivities. The creation of remedial and advanced classes separates the abled from the disabled, promoting normalisation as well as stigmatisation, and at the same time, increasing the elaboration of the educational sciences such as educational psychology or developmental psychology. It is within these arenas that regimes of truth about education and students arise. Such truths include conclusions such as ‘minority students are culturally deprived, deficient and abnormal’ (Ball, 2010, p. 4). Teachers are provided with a multitude of educational scientific vocabularies to classify, justify, objectify and identify students. This knowledge gives teachers the power to label students. At the same time, the teacher, as the authoritative figure in the teacher-student relationship, has the power to gather the information and knowledge about students and the authority to publish it.



Assessment plays a key role in inducing students to conform to the state's predetermined desirable norms. The norms established as classifications either promote or remediate a student, and act as a governmentalizing technology to drive the student to adopt and accept the label as their own constituted identity. Professionals, such as teachers, who have the power through their classification and objectification to do so, do this labelling and objectifying. Thus power is exercised and knowledge is created by subjecting the students to a meticulous system of surveillance and normalization (Foucault, 1979).

The standardised tests are conceptualised in the discourse of competency-based education that articulates the needs of industry and political and economic imperatives (Ball, 2010). These benchmarks are nonetheless designed to locate the child in a normative field based on objective comparison, comparing those who are native speakers of English and those who are not. This normalisation is reflected in the New Zealand Curriculum rationale behind the study of the English language:

**Why study English?**

Literacy in English gives students access to the understanding, knowledge, and skills they need to participate fully in the social, cultural, political, and economic life of New Zealand and the wider world. To be successful participants, they need to be effective oral, written, and visual communicators who are able to think critically and in depth (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 18).

The statement above is evidence of a knowledge that has been taken for granted as the truth, in the state's pursuit to control and normalise the knowledge and experience of the student population. The statement validates the value of the English language in the state driven success across the all-important driven markets of the state, namely the social, cultural, political and economic aspects of the state. The statement has by-passed the existence of the Samoan language and culture (and other languages and cultures) in New Zealand. It also seems to neglect to acknowledge that these other languages and cultures have positive social, cultural, political and economic association for their respective members.

The second paragraph of the same quote (above) affirms that:

Success in English is fundamental to success across the curriculum. All learning areas require students to receive, process, and present ideas or information using the English language as a medium. English can be studied both as a heritage language and as an additional language (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 18).

This statement articulates the governmentalizing nature of the English language as a tool. It is clear that for students to be successful in schools, they will have to engage and

persevere in mastery of the knowledge and skills of the English language. The statement also implies the state's determination that students are successful in their command of English that three avenues for learning have been provided for 'all' students. These are: (1) as a medium of instruction; (2) as an additional language and; (3) as a heritage language.

The primary acknowledged purpose of assessment is to improve students' learning and teachers' teaching (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 39). It is therefore obvious that, in regards to the assessment of English, it requires 'subjectivity' on the part of teachers in order to apply 'subjectivity' to their students to socialise and acculturate them according to the politically- and economically-driven aims and goals of education. The teaching and learning practices associated with these aims are thought to be effective in helping students to be good subjects and citizens. Governmentality can therefore also be expressed as seeking to assist individual students to capitalise on their human potential (Marshall & Marshall, 1977).

### **Chapter conclusion: Foucault and Samoan students in New Zealand schools**

School discourse subjects students into normalising rituals and activities. Some activities, such as, the learning of the English language as part of the curriculum, disciplines students into a culture and mind-set that although may be foreign and far removed from that of their families, families and students themselves want to for their own good. In this case, students and families have internalised these compliances as an 'acceptance of institutional practices' (Fairclough, 1989, p. 33). Foucault regards this union of personal, institutional and governmental belief as 'governmentality'; or the pre-requisite to being a governable person who is part of their society.

Nevertheless, these everyday taken-for-granted practices are mechanisms of control, authority and power, which subtly control the behaviour of students into governmentalized rituals and activities. They are manifested and perpetuated by the ways language is used and the purposes for which it is used. In this case, it is to socialise the students into their roles as 'students' 'learners', 'docile bodies' and hence 'subjects' of the classroom discourse (Auerbach, 1995, p. 25). Foucault contended the notion that as students become subjectified within the classroom discourse, they in turn subjectify themselves into governmentalized subjects either through coercion (as mentioned), or by self-discipline (Foucault, 1979).

School and assessment, as examples of discourse, perpetuate the enmeshment of power and knowledge in ways that permit and legitimate certain particular claims to truth. The teachers, who have the deep knowledge and power, gather particular information about these students and use this information to categorise and label. This deep knowledge is specific, institutionalised and accessible only to the powerful, such as, teachers within the assessment discourse. Consequently, these labels and knowledge are taken as identities and truth about students, making student subjects of the accumulated knowledge of the experts, objects of their discussions, and cases to be fixed. Students, on the other hand, continue to self-direct themselves into governmentalizing procedures, such as studying hard, while being subjected to the knowledge and labels granted about them. In this case, the power of assessment is exercised and knowledge about students is created and accumulated, by subjecting them to a meticulous system of surveillance and normalization. Based on these theoretical understandings, this research project aims to conduct empirical investigations of the ways in which Samoan students in New Zealand primary schools are subjected to the discourses of school through assessment. The next chapter introduces and discusses the Tofā'a'anolasi research framework developed for analysis and evaluation in these investigations.

## **Matā'upu Lona Tolu: Tofā'a'anolasi-Methodology**

It is not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, with which it operates at the present time (Foucault, 1984b, pp 74-75).

### **Introduction**

I have stipulated before in the previous chapters that this research project seeks to interrogate knowledges and assumed truths manifested within standardised reading assessment materials, from a Samoan perspective. However, this examination is incomplete and unjustified without recognising the prevalent power these assumptions have on the lives of Samoan school students in New Zealand. As the quote above positions that power is not just to uncover the power of these truths, but also, to highlight how they operate to control subjects within social, economic contexts.

In this chapter I am introducing the Tofā'a'anolasi research framework. Tofā'a'anolasi is a Samoan research framework I created for this research thesis. For this research framework, I adapted and adopted the various methodologies developed and utilised in the work of other Samoan and Pacific education researchers. This chapter includes a survey of other Pacific frameworks currently being utilised by Pacific scholars to investigate different topics and in different fields. This review of methodologies led me to adapt some of the existing Pacific research theory and practices to shape the Tofā'a'anolasi research framework. Drawing on the work of Foucault, this chapter includes a discussion of how I adopted the 'Foucauldian tool box' (Motion & Leitch, 2007) to provide theoretical underpinnings of Tofā'a'anolasi, in particular, the problematisation of assessments and the application of Foucault's critical discourse analysis.

### **In search of a methodology**

Pacific scholars argue that Pacific research development needs to be influenced by Pacific thought (Sanga, 2004). This ambition is reflected in the numerous 'methodologies' that have been developed, used and discussed by Pacific scholars in different fields such as education and health. Some examples include: Fonofale (Pulotu-Endemann, 2001); Puna o le atamai (Silipa, 2008); Talanoa (Vaiolleti, 2006); Kakala (Thaman, 2003); and Fa'afaletui (Tamasese, Peteru, & Waldegrave, 1997). These frameworks signal the gradual shift away from Western based methodologies, to utilising and rethinking deeper

ethnic specific theories that allow inter and intra-ethnic nuances to be exposed and understood (Anae, 2010). These approaches are advantageous to Pacific communities since they afford the capability to draw deeply on intra-ethnic and inter-generational data. On the other hand, however, their specificity restricts Pacific-wide generalisation hence making their application to development difficult. This problem hinges on the fact that while there are over-arching commonalities across Pacific nations, there are also very distinct traditions, languages and histories (Anae et al., 2001).

These research frameworks are underpinned by Pacific understandings that the social world being is intangible and internal to Pacific people's cognition (Sanga, 2004). These frameworks accept that knowledge is local, relativist and contextual to the social realities of people. This is evident in the utilisation of construct, frames, and metaphors that are comprehensible to local knowledge by Pacific researchers. These constructs have historical and linguistic knowledges for common understanding as evident in the use of labels, concepts and names to explain reality and to express the spiritual, cultural and the social world by Pacific people. These methodologies place emphasis on identifying and promoting Pacific worldviews and the ways to make meaning and construct reality. These Pacific research approaches demand the active involvement of Pacific research participants in generating their own knowledge and understanding - an underpinning similar to the Kaupapa Māori research framework (L. T. Smith, 2000; Stewart, 2010). (Further discussions of analogy between Tofā'a'anolasi and Kaupapa Māori is explained in details in the next section).

On the contrary, Baba (2004) argues that current Pacific research frameworks lack the philosophical and the theoretical bases for research (Baba, 2004, p. 99). Mahina (2004) agrees that Pacific researches seem to hold a belief that things have intrinsic practical value, that there are no requirements for theoretical thinking to bring about their use for the satisfaction of human wants (Mahina, 2004). This attitude described by Mahina (2004) as, 'belligerent and indifferent', has led to practices being valued above theory even to the point of theory 'being dismissed as a form of unnecessary and unconnected abstraction' (Mahina, 1999, p. 43). Mahina warns that these low quality consumption-led strategies that tend to focus on technicity and not on critical quality' usually induce more dependency, which in turn is a tool of social and political control. Sanga (2004) suggests that Pacific research must develop philosophical orientations as the only way it can achieve confidence and credibility (p. 42). The obvious absence of Pacific methodology based on rigorous theory propelled me to seek, draw on, develop the already existing

theories, and to some extent develop theoretical understandings, which are much needed for this project. These theoretical underpinnings are explained further later on in this chapter.

### **The journey**

Reading research and academic articles about knowledge and research led me to an awareness that Pacific epistemologies are structurally and profoundly different from those of the West. Because of this profound difference, I started to look for a form of knowing that derived from Pacific ways of thinking for my research. I knew that to examine critically the standardised reading tests, a form of critical analysis of discourse was required and so a Samoan form of critical discourse analysis was in order to examine these tests, from a Samoan perspective. I started searching the existing and already established Pacific and Samoan research methodologies to see their suitability for what this research project aimed at examining.

I read research by other Samoan and Pacific researchers to see if a Samoan or a Pacific form of critical discourse analysis was utilised in their research. However, there was none. I began a search for the Samoan word for ‘critical discourse analyses’. I looked in the Samoan dictionaries and books. I asked other Samoan colleagues at my workplace. I asked Samoan church ministers. I asked Samoan lecturers and academics at the university. No one seemed to know of a Samoan word for critical discourse analysis.

My search extended to Samoa. I looked on the internet for support. I located a website for Samoan language online courses, by a well-known Samoan matai, educator and expert<sup>3</sup> in the Samoan language. In his response to my inquiry, I was asked to provide a detailed description of the research project to help him piece together an ‘appropriate translation’ for it. I found ‘appropriate translation’ (his exact words) problematic; this triggered a realisation that the attempted translation for critical discourse analysis was incomplete and not fully developed.

In sum, my initial search for a Samoan word for ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’ was fruitless. I concluded that there was none. The obvious absence of a Samoan word for CDA then set me on a course to create a term which became, eventually, ‘Tofā'a'anolasi’, as explained in the next section. During the first three years of this study, the Tofā'a'anolasi research framework was presented to six different conferences and several

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<sup>3</sup> Maulolo Tavita Amosa, founder and director of Faatuaiupu Consultant-Lauga Samoa ma Aganuu Samoa. [http://www.fatuaiupu.ws/index.php?option=com\\_contact&view=contact&id=1&Itemid=3](http://www.fatuaiupu.ws/index.php?option=com_contact&view=contact&id=1&Itemid=3) or [www.laugasamoa.ws](http://www.laugasamoa.ws)

collegial meetings for critique and constructive feedback. It is vital for this research framework to consider carefully the input of Samoan scholars and obtain their collective, consensual opinion (Tui Atua, 2005). These dialogues led to the strengthening of Tofā'a'anolasi: A Critical Samoan Discourse Analysis.

The fundamental difference between this research framework, based on Pacific ways of knowing and the critical discourse analysis associated with Foucault's philosophies; is that it offers an alternative to Western paradigms. This research framework seeks to be part of a necessary paradigm shift in the field of research that acknowledges multiple perspectives and alternative ways of looking at the world. Tofā'a'anolasi aims to critique the status quo to highlight the dominant assumptions masquerading as common sense that continue to constrain the life chances of Pacific families living abroad. It is based on Pacific worldviews and ways to navigate meaning and reality and demands the active involvement of research participants in generating knowledge and understanding relevant to them.

### **Introducing Tofā'a'anolasi**

Living languages are moulded, appropriated and shaped by their users who bend the languages to suit their communicative, social, psychological, political and educational needs. Language has an elastic quality that allows it to stretch with new demands and to embrace new concepts (Janks, 2010). Adding to this notion of language evolution, Tui Atua asserted that Samoan language too grows as 'only natural at times of change, in terms of language usages and forms' (Tui Atua, 2005, p. 66). Cautious not to change the fundamental components of the Samoan language, such as phonetics, grammar, spelling, he warns against replacing key components of the structure of the language. Nevertheless, he promotes the 'coining of new words to capture new contexts or new usages' (ibid, p, 66).

In the Samoan language, compound words are made up of smaller root words, a process capable of generating multiple meanings. Tui Atua (2009) points out that the word tofā means 'wisdom' and relates to self-reflection and self-assessment through deliberate dialogue and debate with others. He explained words such as:

- tofā mamao (tofā is 'wisdom', mamao is 'envision'; therefore, tofā mamao is the 'wisdom to envision');
- tofā saili (tofā is 'wisdom', saili is 'search'; therefore, tofā saili is 'wisdom to search');

- tofā tatala (tofā is ‘wisdom’, tatala is ‘allow’; therefore, tofā tatala is ‘wisdom to allow’); and
- tofā loloto (tofā is ‘wisdom’, loloto is ‘think deep’; therefore, tofā loloto is ‘wisdom to think deep’).

Drawing on Tui Atua’s explanations, I developed the term Tofā'a'anolasi as the ‘wisdom to critique’, as explained in the next paragraph.

Tofā'a'anolasi is a compound word that is made up of three root words: tofā; 'a'ano; and lasi; each of which has many different meanings. Tofā means wisdom, which promotes the notions of self-reflecting and self-re-assessing (Tui Atua, 2009c). The word 'a'ano means uiga maotua (deep meaning); lasi means tele (many). Hence Tofā'a'anolasi is the wisdom to identify the many and deep meanings of texts. Since deep thinking by its nature is in part critical, as it opens the possibility that one may reject assumptions and conventions; Tofā'a'anolasi therefore is the wisdom to identify and critique the many and deep meanings of texts. It is an amalgamation; and a new collocation to make a new combination that enables me to get an insight into the reality of assessment from the much needed perspectives of Samoan participants.

My search for a methodology and for theoretical understandings as I explained before led me to read about Kaupapa Māori theory and research. Stewart (2010) explains how the Kaupapa Māori theory is localized critical theory. Its resistant positioning against the status quo has been an essential component in facilitating opportunities and space for Māori research and researchers (Stewart, 2010). Kaupapa Māori theory and research’s greatest potential lie in their ability to both challenge and uncover the accepted but unexamined thoughts and practices (Mahuika, 2008). In the following section, I have written about the Kaupapa Theory and research and how Tofā'a'anolasi is analogous to Kaupapa Māori, but in the interests of Pacific peoples. I am calling these sections ‘learning from Kaupapa Māori’ as I am indebted to these theories and understandings, as they (and others as I explain before and later on in this chapter) indeed helped to shape my thinking of Tofā'a'anolasi.

### **Learning from Kaupapa Māori Theory**

Kaupapa Māori is a theory (and practice) of active resistance to the continued oppression and colonization of Māori people and culture (Mahuika, 2008, p. 3). It (Kaupapa Māori) challenges, questions and critiques expressions of Pakeha hegemony. In doing so



Kaupapa Māori engages with and seeks to intervene in; and transforms unequal power relations within Aotearoa, which continue to subordinate Māori aspirations (Pihama, 2001). Bishop and Glynn (1999) refer to Kaupapa Māori as the ‘flourishing of a proactive Māori political discourse’ (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). For these writers Kaupapa Māori has become an influential movement; a coherent philosophy and practice for Māori conscientisation, resistance and transformative praxis; advancing outcomes in many fields such as education and research.

Graham Smith (G. H. Smith, 1997) claims that Kaupapa Māori theory is based on a number of key principles within the context of educational interventions and research. They are;

- Tino Rangatiratanga or self-determination: that asserts and reinforces the goal of Kaupapa Māori initiatives, allowing Māori to control their own culture, aspirations and destiny.
- Taonga Tuku Iho or cultural aspiration: that asserts the centrality and legitimacy of Māori ways of knowing, doing and understanding the world.
- Ako Māori or culturally preferred pedagogy: that acknowledges teaching and learning practices that is inherent and unique to Māori.
- Kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kainga or socio-economic mediation: that asserts the need to mediate and assist in the alleviation of negative pressures and disadvantages experienced by Māori communities.
- Whānau or extended family structure: that acknowledges the relationships that Māori have to one another and to the world around them.
- Kaupapa or collective philosophy: that refers to the collective vision, aspiration and purpose of Māori communities.
- Te Tiriti o Waitangi or the Treaty of Waitangi (Pihama, 2001): that affirms the tangata whenua status of whānau, hapū and iwi. The Treaty of Waitangi also provides a basis through which Māori critique relationships, challenge the status-quo, and affirm their rights as Māori.
- Ata or growing respectful relationships (Pohatu, 2005): that guides the understanding of relationships and wellbeing when engaging with Māori (cited in Mahuika, 2008).

According to Graham Smith, Kaupapa Māori is related to *being* Māori. It is connected to Māori philosophies and principles; takes for granted the legitimacy of Māori, the importance of Māori and culture; and is concerned with the struggle for autonomy over

their own cultural wellbeing (G. H Smith, 1997). Its emancipatory objectives seek not only to describe or explain problems but also to provide tools for resolving them. It is about the desire to make a positive difference in Māori whānau, hapū, iwi and communities. This is evident in the way Kaupapa Māori questions the exclusion of Māori preferred interests in education and asserts the validity of Māori knowledge, language, custom and practice. This is also seen in the commitment to find innovative solutions, through research whilst protecting and sustaining Māori knowledge, philosophies, skills, expertise, processes and pedagogies. Kaupapa Māori theory provides a platform from which Māori strive to articulate their own reality and experience, their own personal truth as an alternative to the homogenization and silence that is required of them within mainstream New Zealand society. Inherent in this approach is an understanding that Māori have fundamentally different ways of seeing and thinking about the world and simply wish to be able to live in accordance with that specific and unique identity (Eketone, 2008).

### **Learning from Kaupapa Māori Research**

Kaupapa Māori research has emerged in the last few decades fuelled by the urgency of the need to revitalize te reo Māori as a living language and culture. Wider acknowledgement of historical injustices against Māori people in many societal systems such as education contributed towards more conducive conditions for its development (Stewart, 2010). Kaupapa Māori research therefore is said to arise out of the ethical and political concerns relating to traditional and mainstream research on and about Māori people (Bishop, 1998). This means that Kaupapa Māori research is defined in terms of its political orientation against racist treatment of Māori people (Mahuika, 2008).

Graham Smith (2003, p. 2) however posits that Kaupapa Māori research emphasises a shift away from an emphasis on reactive politics to an emphasis on being more proactive; a shift from negative motivation to positive motivation (cited in Mahuika, 2008, p. 4). With an ultimate goal to disrupt the commonly accepted or Western forms of research, Kaupapa Māori research places privilege on the unique approaches, perspectives, and on *being* Māori. In this way Kaupapa Māori not only questions legitimate or certified knowledge claims, but also questions the very process by which such knowledge is produced (Lopez, 1998, p. 226). With Kaupapa Māori research, researchers utilise Māori epistemology to view the world and organize their research in a perspective that is different from the West, but of Māori. By challenging the superiority of the West, Kaupapa Māori seeks to cause social justice by redressing power imbalances and bring

benefits to Māori community. Kaupapa Māori enhances the quality of life for Māori, and establishes Māori communities with their own research capabilities; on Māori-centred agenda where the issues and needs of Māori are the focus and outcomes of research (L. T. Smith, 1999).

### **Tofā'a'anolasi and Kaupapa Māori**

Like Kaupapa Māori research, Tofā'a'anolasi is also about questioning the dominant assumptions that have been accepted as common sense and at the same time, seeks to uphold Samoan views, solutions and ways of knowing. It is about empowering a Samoan voice, processes and knowledge. Tofā'a'anolasi ensures that Samoan ways of knowing, doing and understanding the world are considered valid in their own right. An example of the Samoan culture and way of doing things as discussed in this thesis is how the Samoan girls are highly respected by their brothers and families, which seems contradictory to the negative portrayal of girls and women reflected in the language of the standardised tests. Recognising and validating Samoan knowledge allows spiritual and cultural awareness to be taken into account. Tofā'a'anolasi addresses issues of injustice and social change. It encourages autonomy, control, self-determination and independence. It asserts the need to assist in the mitigation of negative experiences that disadvantage Samoan communities. Tofā'a'anolasi research seeks to be transformative, to produce positive change instead of replicating the same old same status quo.

Tofā'a'anolasi also acknowledges the respectful relationships Samoans have to one another and to the world around them. This rapport urges the responsibility and obligations of the researcher to nurture and care for these relationships and also the intrinsic connection between the researcher, the researched and the research. Like Kaupapa Māori research, Tofā'a'anolasi also centres on the collective vision, aspiration and purpose of Samoan communities, hence intervention systems and research topics are considered vital contributions and beneficial to the Samoan community. Tofā'a'anolasi research framework in this research thesis, allows for the interrogation of the unquestioned standardised assessments, which have been historically and profoundly disadvantaging Samoan students.

### **Tofā'a'anolasi and pacific theoretical underpinnings**

The Tofā'a'anolasi approach incorporates the Pacific understanding that value, knowledge and truth lie in the wisdom of the collective (Anae et al., 2001). It values the relationships between participants, researcher and the context. Nurturing this relationship

forms a directive action in negotiating research relationships, which in turn enhances the conversations that lead to the co-construction of knowledge, truth and value within the research community.

This framework is guided by the indigenous and indigenized Western epistemologies and critical praxis engaged in by Pacific people. It capitalises on the already-established practices of critical ontological, epistemological and axiological inquiry into the discourses that have been historically, explicitly and implicitly defining the social fabric of the lives of Pacific people (Manu'atu & Kepa, 2004; Nabobo-Baba, 2004; Sanga, 2004; L. T. Smith, 1999). Whilst people (including the Pacific people) apply knowledge in development, they constantly theorize and re-theorize, create and recreate, structure and restructure knowledge (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2002, p. 231; Mahina, 2004; Tamasese et al., 1997). Pacific people carry out these acts of theory or critique together, as communities, as they seek to reach consensus before final decisions are disseminated for people to act upon. For Pacific people, such as, Samoans living in their homelands, these critiques mainly in oral form are often about complex situations regarding local matters, such as, in the village, schools, church and politics.

In contrast, for Pacific people living abroad, their critiques are expanded to also include matters specific to their occupation in the diaspora. Such dialogue involves the analysis of underlying assumptions that serve to conceal the power relations that exist within society and, in particular, how the dominant groups construct common sense and facts, which contributes to the prolonged inequality and oppression of Pacific. These contributions offer alternative views as Pacific scholars' position their indigeneity in research for others to understand indigenous knowledge and improve indigenous peoples' way of life. These are evident in the plethora of post-colonial writing by Pacific scholars, such as, Lilomaiva-Doktor (Lilomaiva-Doktor, 2009b), Tanielu (Tanielu, 2004), Tuafuti (Tuafuti, 2000), Unasa (2009), Wendt (Wendt, 1996), and Wendt-Samu (Wendt-Samu, 2006). Māori scholars, such as, Bishop (Bishop, 1998), L. Smith (L. T. Smith, 1999), McKinley (McKinley, 2005) and Stewart (2010) also support the empowerment of minority communities (such as Māori) in New Zealand.

The debates mentioned above discuss the value of research for indigenous people and the need to retrieve spaces of marginalisation as spaces from which to develop indigenous research agendas (L. T. Smith, 1999). A paradigm shift is necessary that acknowledges 'multiple perspectives and alternative ways' of looking at the world. Tofā'a'anolasi, as

utilised in *this* research thesis, critiques the status quo to highlight the dominant assumptions masquerading as common sense, that continue to constrain the life chances of Samoan students living, studying and working in New Zealand.

### **Tofā'a'anolasi, a phenomenological approach**

This research study adopts the notion of phenomenology. This approach by Edmund Husserl explores the participants' world ontology and recovers a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Sanders, 1982). It develops an insight into the world of participants to describe their perceptions and reactions to a certain phenomenon, such as, assessment in this research. This phenomenological approach is carried out by systematically studying experiences as they are revealed, rather than rationally reducing the experiences to theory. In so doing, the researcher surrenders an expectation that meanings will emerge that call out particular notions central to an understanding of the phenomenon (ibid).

In the language of Foucault, students and teachers are not just assessment participants, but are both subjects and objects to the assessment discourse. Teachers and students want to achieve 'normality', which is socially worthy and personally desirable. As norms are usually enforced through the calculated administration of shame (Lemke, 2002), teachers and students subjectify themselves to the rules and routines of the discourse, to regulate and enhance their own conduct, and be better subjects of the assessment discourse. Phenomenology therefore allows a deep, on-going analysis of the texts of lived experiences of these participants, as it seeks to uncover essential meanings currently taken for granted. Particular stories of a lived experience are read and re-read in the process of hermeneutically interpreting the text for the meaning of everyday experiences. Interpreting stories and their meanings is more a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure, grasping and formulating thematic understanding. It is not a rule-bound process, it is a free act of 'seeing meaning' (ibid, p. 79). Tofā'a'anolasi seeks to uncover and make meanings of participants' stories as they experience phenomena (such as assessment), from a first person point of view.

### **Tofā'a'anolasi and the Foucauldian 'toolbox'**

Tofā'a'anolasi is based on my understandings of Foucault and his ideas. This means that this thesis is an analysis grounded in the work of Michel Foucault (1970; 1971; 1972; 1977; 1979; 1980a; 1980b; 1981; 1984a; 1984b; 1988; 1991; 1992; 2003a; 2003b). These

principles in terms of the proposed research questions provide an intellectual toolbox for theorising the role of power and knowledge in constructing and transforming assessment discourses and practices. Foucault (1974, pp. 523-524) asks that we draw on his theories and utilise them to best suit our own thematic research schema, or our own theoretical perspectives. He says:

I would like my books to be a kind of tool box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area. I would like the little volume that I want to write on disciplinary systems to be useful to an educator, a warden, a magistrate, a conscientious objector. I don't write for an audience, I write for users, not readers (cited in Motion & Leitch, 2007, p. 263).

With the aim to provide insights and new ways of thinking about assessment, the use of Foucault's ideas in this research highlights some of the deeply problematic, contradictory and questionable aspects of assessment practices. This analysis is carried out by placing meaning production and power effects, truth claims and knowledge systems at the centre of thinking and investigations. This study offers a different way of thinking about the topic of assessment practice, offering a perspective that asks how we might assess better, and how does it makes sense to do it at all? (Motion & Leitch, 2007). The following sections provide an overview of the relevant aspects of Foucault's work and how it is applied in this thesis.

### **Problematisation**

A critique does not just highlight that things are not right it also points out any assumptions, unchallenged and unconsidered modes of thought accepted as true and legitimate (Foucault, 1988). Problematisation is a technique presented to scholars challenging them to think differently about problems (Foucault, 2003a). Problematisation involves reflecting on and accounting for how certain systems of thought and practices have evolved to be conceived in a particular way. It highlights paradoxes, difficulties and 'the conditions in which human beings problematize who they are, what they do, and the world in which they live' (ibid, p. 10). Problematisation is an endeavour to know how, and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of carrying on thinking what is already known (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Pennycook, 2001). As Foucault posits:

This development of a given into a question, this transformations of a group of obstacles and difficulties into problems to which the diverse solutions will

attempt to produce a response, that is what constitutes the point of problematisation and the specific work of thought (Foucault, 2003a, p. 24).

For me, it was the discovery of the misconception<sup>4</sup> on page seven of the STAR Form 'A' Test booklet, that initiated the problematisation of reading assessments for me. This revelation started an interest to reflect on the previous experiences of assessments involving Samoan students. I recall bringing this same misconception up in one of the AUSAD Literacy Leaders' Conferences that aimed at analysing students' reading assessment achievement data, identifying learning gaps and planning differentiated learning experiences'. I was told the misconception should not be taken a problem, as 'it was just one out of several other questions' that students could have gotten right. Eight years after 'that' conversation, the misconception continues to appear in the standardised test paper, which is still being used in some schools to standardise students' reading achievements at the time of the current study.

Problematisation within the Tofā'a'anolasi research framework encourages actively questioning and critically scrutinizing established knowledge in academia and in society at large. It does so by offering a distinct alternative to the dominant mode of using the literature in a field for formulating research questions. For this particular project, rather than taking assessments for granted, problematisation poses them as an object of thought and a topic for discussion. The process allows me to stand back and re-evaluate assessments: placing them as 'objects of critique' (Crotty, 1998; Devine, 2010) and transforming them into problems for which diverse solutions are possible (Vaughan-Williams, 2006). The analysis of problematized assessment tools describes the field of constraints and enabling conditions in which assessment practice takes place. Thompson (2010, p. 127) posits that this type of analysis entails 'the historical, yet *a priori* condition that makes thought and practice possible and that, as such, govern them both' (cited in Wolf, 2013, p. 34).

### **Foucauldian Discourse Analysis**

Tofā'a'anolasi draws on my understandings of Foucault's critical discourse analysis. This critical approach is a form of discourse analysis that focuses on power relationships in society as expressed through language and practices (McHoul & Grace, 1998, p. 27). Foucault's methodology is to uncover the history of a word/phrase/practice by looking

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<sup>4</sup> The Palolo story on page 7, STAR Years 7 - 9 Form A Test Booklet (Elley, 2001) is discussed in details under 'Misconceptions' in Matā'upu Lona Lima.

for how it has been used in the past. This specific examination hinges on the assumption that some vestige of its previous usage sticks to it. A great deal of the critical power of Foucauldian discourse analysis comes from this technique or methodology. Scholars (for example, Fairclough, 1992; Hook, 2001; Janks, 1997; Punch, 2005; Stewart, 2010; Wetherell, 1999) utilise Foucault's ideas in their work; by applying his work appropriately to their own research inquiry; ensuring that the way his ideas are applied corresponds with his theories and philosophies; and addresses the topic of interest. An example of this theoretical approach is the counter reading of historical and social conditions, and the way mundane power relations feed into the organisation of institutional power relations.

Foucault's approach involves paying close attention to subjugated or marginal knowledge especially those, which by definition, has been disqualified and taken less than seriously, or deemed inadequate by officials. This approach also shows how, at the same time, official knowledge works as an instrument of the normalisation of knowledge to manoeuvre populations into coherent and functional forms of thinking and acting (Knight, Smith, & Sachs, 2010; Marshall, 2010). Foucault's critical discourse analysis explores the dynamics in the relationship between power and knowledge within a discourse, and makes these power relations visible. This is achieved by highlighting how some discourses maintain their authority; how some 'voices' get heard whilst others are silenced; who benefits and how. Hence, a Foucauldian critique is not just saying things are not right, s/he is pointing out the kinds of assumptions and practices which are familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered and taken for granted. The primary task of the analysis is to focus on the formation and transformation of such discourse or on how ideas are 'put into discourse' (Leitch & Motion, 2007, p. 72). The analysis offers alternative ways of thinking about how power operates and is transferred in discourses and how possibilities might be offered.

Foucault suggested parameters of analysis of power within the school system and in particular, research into practices that 'do not produce liberated children when such forms of liberation are presupposed in the very formulation and practices of the production processes' (Bartolome, 2010, p. 26). As schools are sites in which techniques and strategies of power are developed and refined, the methodological imperative is to examine processes of power (Hoskin, 2010). This framework might provide what Hoskin posits as a unique analysis of the use and refinement of power/knowledge in schools in the case of governance (ibid), which asks about the nature of power in schools.



Analytic attention is needed to focus on a variety of circumstantial variables, stretching across the examined material, to locate evidence that makes certain acts, statements and subjects possible. To unite the conditions of discourse analysis in one over-riding methodological imperative, it is argued that the analysis of discourse cannot remain simply *within* the text, but must ‘drive through the extra discursive’, moving ‘both *in and out* of the text’. This is so that the analysis is not limited in political relevance, restricted in generalizability, or and stunted in critical penetration (Hook, 2001, p. 38). Remaining within the text, maintaining a preoccupation with the contents of the text, and not referring to a greater macro perspective, where different and powerful material instances of power are intimately connected to its various textual elements, means that the examination of the discourse will not be able to properly engage with discourse as an instrument of power (ibid). This lack of attention to discourse as an instrument may itself become the insidious instrument of power, which is paradoxically, a part of the critique of the discourse.

Tofā'a'anolasi therefore proposes to unravel discursive domains within the practices of assessment. This can be achieved by seeking to define specific forms of articulation of assessment, that characterize their positivism which also function as the governing rules of their formation (Sheridan-Smith, 1972, p. 162). Tofā'a'anolasi situates its analysis at another level of the phenomena of expression, reflexion, and symbolization. For this particular research, the exploration of power and knowledge starts with the reading of texts in the standardised test papers. This approach however may be close to reducing the assessment discourse to narratives alone, which Foucault claims as merely ‘markings of textuality’ (Foucault, 1981, p. 66). As such, this activity would then be a critical interpretative exercise that is insufficient to expose the materiality of discourse. This superficial analysis would conceal the true power of the discourse and how it impacts on its subject, hence emphasising the significance of the fa'afaletui with participants to unravel the effect of the assessment practices on them as subjects of the assessment discourse. Foucault (1981) urged that attempts to engage critically with discourse, based on the analysis of language in texts would lack the ability in their attempts to apprehend discourse in the fullness of its capacity. He points out that the power in language links to, and stems from, external, material and tactical forms of power, which is a comment on precisely how *enmeshed* power is within discourse.

Analysis of any discourse would reveal that it is an active occurrence or something that implements power and action. In terms of the analysis of the discourse of assessments that this study undertakes, the standardised tests (vocabulary and language of the actual

assessment tools) are examined, to reveal the knowledge expected of students to successfully operate in this discourse. The analysis would expose skills students are predicted to have to succeed, which in turn would reveal how these skills are being used as instruments of power, which the students are supposed to animate. Students (as assessment takers), teachers (as assessment administrators) will reveal the impact of assessment discourse as an instrument of power in the forms of governmentality and normalisation over them, as subjects of the assessment discourse.

### **Appropriate texts for analysis**

Foucault (1969, p. 25) asserts that there is no free, neutral and independent statement. A statement always belongs to a series of statements. It is part of a network of statements and plays a role among other statements. Each and every statement is surrounded by a field of coexistences, that they (statements) presuppose others in ways, for example, affecting series and succession and in distribution of functions and roles (J. Lemke, 2005).

Texts do not speak from a single viewpoint. Instead, they invoke, through the semantic patterns they activate, the larger system of viewpoints in the community in which they have their meanings (Thibault, 1998). For Tofā'a'anolasi, a key task is to consider the types of texts suitable for analysis. Drawing on Foucault's discussions as noted in the previous paragraph, consideration must be given to the appropriateness of texts including: (1) being that of topic relatedness and; (2) methodology related emphasis (Foucault, 1992, pp. 12-13).

### **Processes of Tofā'a'anolasi**

Tofā'a'anolasi combines two main methods of collecting data; iloiloga o le gagana and fa'afaletui. The following section explains the process it necessitates.

#### **Iloiloga o le gagana (examining of language)**

Iloiloga o le gagana is a concept that is commonly used in Samoa, which has not previously been examined in academic literature. It is a process whereby language usage irrespective of its form is examined and interpreted. It is carried out everywhere when two or more people interact. Examples are during casual conversations, in meetings, in Samoan traditional speeches, in church, in politics, in family discussions, in court, in all jobs and in schools. This process invites, applies and debates meaning. It looks at participants and the role they play in the context, whether they are in power, in defiance, in exploratory or inspirational terms (Tupuola, 2009). The procedure carries challenges,

such as, potential misinterpretations of participants' intentions and meanings because the Samoan language is couched in allusion and allegory (Le Tagaloa, 2003; Tagaloa, 2010; Tui Atua, 2009b).

Language is at the heart of *iloiloga o le gagana*. This is because language is the medium for expressing meaning. Language conveys the history of thought and culture of a community through the words it chooses, and their historical associations. Language shapes and constitutes the objects denoted, whether it is from a notion of representation or a conceptual and methodological account of representation (Locke, 2004). This means that texts, oral or written require different ways of reading, to generate different meanings. The *iloiloga o le gagana* in this thesis is carried out through the interrogation of standardised test items and the examination of participants' narratives in which they share their experiences, opinions and ideologies, during the *fa'afaletui* 'focus groups', as discussed below.

### **Fa'afaletui ('focus groups')**

Fa'afaletui is a method of collecting primary data. It is a Samoan word derived from a historical incident when the brothers, all by the name of Tui, who, upon discovering that they had lost their only sister, dashed together into a house, in a state of shock to discuss what to do about it. The initial word was *faofaletui* which meant the 'Tui brothers (*tui*) have all plunged (*fao* or *fafao*) into a house (*fale*). Samoan people have been using a slightly changed version of the word from *faofaletui* to *fa'afaletui* to indicate meetings of respected participants, who have the knowledge of the issues to be discussed in the *fa'afaletui* (as is explained further below).

A *fa'afaletui* is regarded as a 'meeting of the wise'. Those that are 'wise' in the *fa'asamoa* are usually the older men and women who have had knowledge and experience of the world and of Samoa's ontology and epistemology. They are believed to have had the sacred wisdom that has been passed through generations. This means that the participants have earned their right to participate in the *fa'afaletui*. These rights include the right to be present, the right to hear the information discussed and the right to have his or her input woven into the new knowledge to be generated and gained within the *fa'afaletui*. For this project, the students who are the assessment takers, the teachers who are the assessment administrators are the participants in the *fa'afaletui*.

Fa'afaletui is also a phenomenology approach. This is because it allows participants to discuss (and during the process) study a phenomenon. These discussions reveal *how* participants understand, interpret and make meaning of their experiences. Similar to phenomenology, fa'afaletui reveals conscious experience from the subjective or first person point of view and establishes a renewed contact with the original and often taken-for-granted experience to explore their embedded meanings. Fa'afaletui is particularly effective at not only bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of students it also is *allowing* students' interpretations, from their own perspectives, to be valuable contributions to the outcome of the fa'afaletui. Adding an interpretive dimension to the fa'afaletui enables the fa'afaletui to be used as the basis for practical theory, allowing it to inform, support or challenge policy and action.

In the language of Foucault, the fa'afaletui participants are political subjects caught up in assessment, which are deeply embedded in political, cultural, social, as well as educational ideological agendas and consequently have an effect in shaping their lives. The fa'afaletui method therefore has the potential to reveal the effect of assessment as a political system of thought and practice on political subjects. Participants' disclosures expose certain limits and utterances which are viewed as valid, valued, retained, imported and reconstituted (van Dijk, 1993). Fa'afaletui will also unmask limits and forms of appropriation and how the relationship is articulated between the assessment as a discourse and its participants.

Fa'afaletui is not a practice with a pre-calculated agenda. Participants make themselves available for thinking. During the practice, the researcher does not dictate when or how thinking should occur but trust that the process will reveal itself amidst the thinking and that as ideas come together, themes will emerge. During the fa'afaletui, the researcher searches for language that clearly articulates the world of participants by interpreting its meaning in more accurate and insightful ways. The purpose of the fa'afaletui is to gather participants' narratives and experience of the subject matter that is investigated.

As a data collecting method, fa'afaletui supports cultural perspectives, etiquette, protocols, and expression of the Samoans participating in the research (Tamasese et al., 1997). It fosters the existing Samoan notions of collective ownership, which is pivotal in developing optimal relationships (Airini et al., 2010). Research using fa'afaletui has not only focussed on its cultural physicality, it has widened its scope as a way of

deconstructing, re-thinking and re-contextualising, where issues are discussed and new knowledge is co-constructed from within (Tamasese et al., 1997).

### **Strengths and possible limitations of Fa'afaletui**

Fa'afaletui in this research is carried out as 'focus group' conversations. The strength of fa'afaletui lies in the relative freedom of participants to discuss issues and reflect on problems. The group situation allows participants to prompt as well as bounce ideas off one another. Fa'afaletui works well in this research as the participants share some common characteristics (Waldergrave, 1999). Such common characteristics include being 'Samoan' and 'subjects of assessment discourse'. During the process of fa'afaletui, participants discuss the topic without the constraint of guiding questions, where the responses are guarded and guided by the questions and how they are asked. In the fa'afaletui, students speak freely about the issues at hand and the researcher is able to obtain as much information about the topic from the participants' point of view (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). There is a possibility for research participants to develop ideas collectively, bringing forward their own priorities and perspectives, 'to create theory grounded in the actual experience and language of the participants' (Smithson, 2000, p. 116). Puchta and Potter (1999) call this conversational construction 'collective voice', which is not just facilitated by the 'focus group', but constituted by it (ibid, p. 119).

However, as a data gathering method, fa'afaletui, has probable limitations. First, there is a possibility of one participant dominating the conversation. In the traditional Samoan context, participants are guided by *va fealoa'i* that is manifested in the participants' deep respect for one another. This respect expects participants to take turns to talk, and critique in polite and peaceful manners. A fa'afaletui with *students* is different because there is always a leader, who leads the conversations and others to follow, as was sometimes seen in this research project. In this case, it is suggested that more fa'afaletui sittings are needed, with assuring prompts to encourage the shy students to contribute to the sessions.

### **Ethics**

The Samoan value of respect is important in the Tofā'a'anolasi research framework. This respect is demonstrated in the fa'asamoa practices of alofa (love), fa'amaoni (honesty), amana'ia (to care), fa'asoa (to share).

Researchers working with Tofā'a'anolasi must ensure participants are physically and emotionally safe. Their cultures or ways of doing things must be respected throughout the

research process. The researcher must develop and maintain va fealoai with participants (Anae, 2010). Rapport and relationships must be developed and maintained during and after the research project. It is disrespectful and unethical for a researcher to 'just turn up' to extract the knowledges and stories from participants and 'walk off'. It is immoral too to use participants for research that are for the researchers own good. Therefore, it is important that research carried out using the Tofā'a'anolasi research framework must be of value (educational, health, or financial) to the community it is conducted in.

The selection of participants needs to be justified. Selected participants are the ones who have earned the right to be in the fa'afaletui. It is disrespectful to the issue researched and those who have the knowledge necessary to answer research questions if they are not selected for the research. Researchers utilising this research framework need to be caring of the participants and the issues researched. In circumstances where Tofā'a'anolasi is used in other fields other than mainstream education, special justification is warranted for vulnerable participants such as those in prison, minors and persons with mental disability. Psychological and social risks must also be considered.

Caring in Tofā'a'anolasi includes making sure any observations of participants and stories they tell, remain confidential. Participants need to understand the research topic, issues and their expectations as participants. To achieve this understanding: written and verbal communications need to be bilingual, that is, in the participants' ethnic language in addition to English. It is the researcher's responsibility to make sure language barriers do not disadvantage the participants. Caring also means that the participants are given the chance to opt out of the research project with no questions asked and have the right to hear and see the results of the research once it is complete. Honesty in Tofā'a'anolasi research is reciprocal. Participants and researcher need to tell their stories as they are, that is, the participants of their experiences and the researcher of the results. Honesty also entails acknowledging the intellectual ownership of the literature, and the knowledge and methodologies used in the research.

### **Concluding comment**

Tofā'a'anolasi is a Samoan research framework that draws on Foucault's critical discourse analysis. It has been adapted from a Foucauldian position to reflect a Samoan perspective. Its objective is to examine the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. Tofā'a'anolasi promotes emancipation. It is utilised in this research thesis in order to

understand, expose and ultimately resist social inequality by asking basic questions, such as, for example:

- How do more powerful groups control public discourse?
- How does such discourse control minds and actions of less powerful?
- What are the social consequences of such control? (Gee, 2005).

This method of critique assumes an analysis both at the micro and macro level of social order. At the micro level, Tofā'a'anolasi examines the aspects of language use, discourse, verbal interaction and communication. The macro level on the other hand looks at power, dominance and inequality. In everyday interaction, the micro and macro, and the intermediary meso levels form the unified whole (van Dijk, 2000). It acknowledges that every linguistic choice about how to produce discourse and how to interpret discourse is a choice of how the world is to be divided up and explained. This means that for every grammatical choice by the narrator, it reflects his /her world and paradoxically creates that world for the reader. In this respect, Tofā'a'anolasi considers that discourses and their systematic ordering are not only the ultimate state, it is the final result of a long and sinuous development involving language, thought, empirical experience, categories, the lived and ideal necessities, the contingency of events and the play of formal constraints (Sheridan-Smith, 1972, pp. 75-76).

The next chapter explains the study design. It describes the processes used to collect and analyse data in order to address the research questions.

## **Matā'upu Lona Fā: Tautai – Study design**

People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does (Foucault, cited in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. 187).

### **Introduction**

As the quote mentioned from Foucault explains; and as the researcher for this study, I knew what I wanted to do and why. I wanted to examine reading assessment tools and practices in New Zealand primary schools and their effects on Samoan students. The purpose of this chapter is to provide details regarding how the research methodology described in Matā'upu Lona Tolu above was adopted to investigate the discourse of reading assessment in New Zealand primary schools. This chapter is presented in five sections. The first section provides a detailed description of the initial meetings with the school principals. The second section has a detailed description of the texts gathered for the analysis. These texts include: (1) the five standardised reading test papers and (2) the participants' fa'afaletui stories. The third section explains how I set up the fa'afaletui, and how the participants of the fa'afaletui were identified and located. An explanation of the methods employed for data collection follows. Finally, there is, a detailed explanation of the method I utilised to analyse and evaluate the data that was collected in response to questions set out to guide the research.

These questions were:

1. How do Samoan students understand their experiences of taking the asTTle and STAR tests in schools?
2. What patterns of discourse and language found in the asTTle and STAR relevant to Samoan students' culture and language?

### **The initial meetings**

Prior to the commencement of the research process, the school principals and the Board of Trustees were made aware of the study and were supportive of the research being conducted in their schools. In the initial meetings, the principals and I discussed the best ways of getting the message to the parents of the students. One principal asked that letters be given to students for their parents' consents, the other suggested that I sat in on the upcoming Samoan parents meeting to share information about my project. The principal of the third school requested sending flyers to the parents, to make them aware of the project. The flyers and letters were left at school for teachers and principals to give out



(please refer to Itulau Fa'apipi'i V & H for the letter; K for the flyer). It was also established in the first meetings with the principals that asTTle and STAR were used as standardised tests in their schools.

During the initial meetings with parents, I spoke about my research and answered all of the parents' questions. However, consent forms were not given out until after the first meeting with students. It was not until after all the flyers and consent forms had been returned, that I began to arrange the first meeting with students. Students who attended the first meeting were those whose parents were present at the parents' meeting, and those whose parents had given their agreement through the flyers. During this meeting I explained the process of the research and gave out two A3 envelopes to each student: one with the Consent Form and Information Sheets for the parents; and the other, the Assent Form and Information for the students (please refer to Itulau Fa'apipi'i E, I, O, U, F, G, L, M, N, P). The sixteen students who took part in the research were those who returned both the signed Consent and Assent forms to me before the start of the research.

The initial meetings with the teachers took place in their schools. As administrators of the tests and subjects of the assessment discourse, their voice was important to the research. As teachers of the students who participated in the research, teachers knew the content of the curriculum the students had been exposed to and they knew the students well. Teachers had the knowledge of the asTTle and STAR tests, in terms of their contents, administration, marking, and recording and how results were interpreted and used in class for their planning.

### **Key informants (Assessment experts)**

I contacted key informants about their roles as assessment experts. These key informants were identified through the literature on assessment, via word of mouth and by searching the internet. All three key informants are also current members of the New Zealand Assessment Academy (NZAA). In the telephone and email conversations with the key informants, I was able to ask questions and gained information about the STAR and asTTle tests, how the tests writers were identified and about the writing and piloting processes. All of the key informants gave verbal permission to use the information they provided. Their contributions are cited as personal communications in this thesis. I have acknowledged my key informants and their contribution to this research in the 'Acknowledgement' section at the beginning of this thesis.

## Locating the fa'afaletui participants

Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants for this study. Patton posits that the 'logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth' (Patton, 1990). Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. The interests of this research with respect to the particular characteristics of assessment practices led to the deliberate selection of students, teachers and assessment experts as key informants, in particular, those who were best able to answer research questions (Cresswell, 2003; Davidson & Tolich, 1999; Punch, 2005).

I chose to work:

- with Samoan students (or those who identified themselves as Samoans);
- with an equal number of boys and girls (to avoid gender bias of sampling);
- with an equal number of New Zealand born and migrated students;
- in schools from south, west and central Auckland, to ensure a relatively wider geographical spread of student population;
- in schools with a higher number of Samoan students to ensure that I had the anticipated number of participants.

I chose not to include any schools in which I was working, or had worked recently before beginning the study.

### Students (Assessment takers)

Sixteen students shared their stories in this study. Students' points of view are windows into their reasoning. Each student's point of view is an instructional entry point. Awareness of students' points of view helps teachers challenge students, making school experiences both contextual and meaningful. Teachers who operate without awareness of their students' points of view often doom students to dull irrelevant experiences, and even failure (Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

The table below presents their profiles.

#### Fa'avasēgaga 4.1: Profile of participants

Name (pseudonym)	Gender	Year level	Preferred language of communication	NZ born
Vili	male	8	English	Yes
Sina	female	7	Samoan	No

<b>Toe</b>	female	7	English	Yes
<b>Rita</b>	female	8	English	Yes
<b>Anna</b>	female	7	English & Samoan	Yes
<b>Tony</b>	male	8	Samoan	No
<b>Molly</b>	female	8	English	Yes
<b>Lisa</b>	female	7	Samoan & English	No
<b>Mika</b>	male	8	English	Yes
<b>Terry</b>	female	8	English	Yes
<b>Toma</b>	male	8	Samoan	No
<b>Simi</b>	male	8	Samoan	No
<b>Sala</b>	female	7	Samoan	No
<b>Julie</b>	female	7	Samoan	No
<b>Fala</b>	male	8	English	Yes
<b>Josh</b>	male	7	Samoan & English	No

### **Teachers (Assessment administrators)**

Three teachers took part in the research. They were the assessment administrators who administered the asTTle and STAR tests in their classrooms. They marked the tests using the nationally moderated standards established by those who designed the tests. As asTTle and STAR test administrators, they had good understanding of both tests. Moreover, they were teachers of some of the students who took part in the fa'afaletui. The data gathered as a result of the tests they administered and marked, was important for their jobs as teachers. They had to use the data to compare and group students and to identify students that needed celebration and others, remediation. As teachers, they used the data to draw conclusions about the students as well as their own teaching. They too, were subjects of the assessment discourse.

At the time of the research, two of the teachers worked in Samoan Bilingual Units in their own schools. Two were syndicate leaders; one led a team of four teachers in a Samoan Bilingual Unit, the other in a mainstream syndicate. The teachers had between 10 - 18 years of teaching experience in New Zealand primary schools. Two of the teachers were formerly teachers in Samoa. During the time of the study, all three were teaching Years 7 and 8 classes.

### **Assessment texts analysed**

For this study, five specific tests of reading were chosen to be investigated. These were two STAR test papers (A and B), and three asTTle papers (Levels 3/4; Level 4; and Levels 4/5). These particular standardised tests were used in primary schools around New Zealand and in the three schools that participated in this study; as standardised

reading assessment tools that (1) contributed to the teachers' Overall Teacher Judgements of students' achievement level; (2) measured, and compared the achievements of students on a nationwide basis. These tests were the:

1. Assessment Tool for Teaching and Learning, or asTTle (Hattie & Masters, 2008)<sup>5</sup>;
2. Supplementary Tests of Achievement in Reading, or STAR (Elley, 2001)<sup>6</sup>

### **Supplementary Tests of Achievement in Reading (STAR 'A' & STAR 'B')**

The STAR tests were developed by New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) between 1999 and 2003. One of the assessment experts contacted for information about standardised tests explains that the purpose of STAR is to supplement teachers' knowledge of students' learning gained from observation, interviews with students or other reading tests (W. Elley, personal communication, 17 January, 2013). The STAR identifies students who require extra help in reading. Teachers use the information to group students for reading. STAR can be used more than once a year so teachers can check on the progress of the students. In regard to the reading programs, the teachers can find out how well the students are doing and measure the progress of the students in terms of their improvement. There are two parallel forms, STAR Form A and STAR Form B and STAR may be administered at any time in the school year. More information about this assessment tool can also be found on line<sup>78</sup>.

The Year 7-8 STAR test comprises six sub-tests. These sub-tests include word recognition, sentence comprehension, paragraph comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and the language of advertising and reading in different text forms. The tests are administered and marked to nationally moderated standards established by the New Zealand Council of Educational Research (NZCER).

In word recognition, students are expected to decode words that are likely to be in their spoken vocabulary. This goal is achieved by providing pictures of familiar objects or actions and asking students to identify the word that matches the picture. In the absence of any verbal context, students must decode accurately, using letters and sound. For

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<sup>5</sup> <http://e-asttle.tki.org.nz/>

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.nzcer.org.nz/pts/supplementary-test-achievement-reading-star>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ero.govt.nz/National-Reports/Assessment-in-Primary-Schools-A-Guide-for-Parents-December-2008/3.-Assessment-Tools-and-Terms>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.nzcer.org.nz/pts/supplementary-test-achievement-reading-star>

sentence comprehension, students show how well they can read for comprehension and meaning, by selecting a word that makes sense to complete a sentence, from a set of four possible words. The subtest assesses mainly decoding and the ability to use a range of strategies such as inference to determine the meaning. To some extent, students' responses reflect their knowledge of vocabulary and common idiomatic expressions in English.

In the paragraph comprehension section (Subtest 3), the cloze test procedure is used to assess students' ability to make meaning in texts. Students are required to read paragraphs and fill in words that have been deleted, using the context of the surrounding text as cues to meaning. The next subtest, (Subtest 4) focuses on the development of the reading vocabulary. This subtest measures students' knowledge of the meaning of words in context and is acquired by asking students to identify a synonym for each word.

In regard to subtest 5, it tests students' ability to read critically. Students are required to identify emotive words that are typically used by advertisers to attract consumers to buy their products or services. The last subtest (Subtest 6), expects students to read and understand the various text types involved in both formal and informal writing. Students are given some paragraphs that represent a range of text types, and at particular points are asked to choose a phrase that best suits the style and purpose of the writer.

The test has a total administration time of 40 minutes: 4 minutes for Subtest 1; 4 minutes for Subtest 2; 8 minutes for Subtests 3; 4 minutes for Subtest 4; 4 minutes for Subtest 5 and 6 minutes for the last one. Keeping to the required time frame is vital in maintaining the validity of this test. For example, students are expected to stop at the end of the allocated time for each subtest, even if they have not finished. In addition, they are not able to go back to complete or rework on a question even if they have time.

### **Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (asTTle)**

According to Charles Darr, one of the assessment experts contacted for information about standardised tests, the asTTle test is an educational assessment resource, developed for the Ministry of Education by the University of Auckland, to assess literacy and numeracy (C. Darr, personal communication, 17 January, 2013). The test can be accessed in either English or te Reo Māori. The aim of asTTle is to provide teachers, students, and parents with information about students' level of achievement, relative to the curriculum

achievement outcomes, for levels 2 to 6, and relative to national norms of performance for students in years 4 to 12.

Since asTTle has the ability to immediately analyse the performance of both individuals and groups, and display the analysis graphically, teachers can use the students' asTTle test results to identify subsequent learning steps for individuals, groups, or classes by linking to an indexed online catalogue of classroom resources<sup>9</sup>. The asTTle software generates tests from a pool of questions according to the content and difficulty levels the teacher requires. The students' answers to questions are loaded into the computer programs and scores are generated and can be compared through comprehensive reporting with nation-wide norms.

Moreover, asTTle is a tool that operates in both personal computer (PC) and Mac environments and is available on paper. Teachers can use asTTle to create 40-minute paper and pencil tests designed for their own students' learning needs. Once the tests are scored, the asTTle tool generates interactive graphic reports that allow teachers to analyse student achievement against curriculum levels, curriculum objectives, and population norms. Research and development over 2003–2004 has extended asTTle into years 8–12 and curriculum levels 5–6. For this particular project, three complete sets of asTTle reading test papers were collected and analysed. These tests were generated at the Levels 3 and 4, Level 4 and Levels 4 and 5.

## **Research methods**

This work aimed to highlight any unacknowledged issues specific to Samoan students in the design and practices of assessment in New Zealand primary schools. These issues include the linguistic aspects mainly the language of the standardised tests, which reflect the anticipated skills, and prior knowledge students have in order to answer questions. To fulfil these aims, the five test papers gathered for the research were analysed. To gather the students' experiences and understanding of these test papers as well as assessments in general (or as a discourse), their stories were shared, recorded and transcribed. Face to face communications with teachers helped to explain the context and manners and expectations of how the standardised tests were to be administered and managed

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<sup>9</sup> asTTle learning pathways help principals and teachers identify students' next learning steps  
<http://easttlehelp.vln.school.nz/reports/understanding-the-individual-learning-pathway-ilp>

specifically to maintain consistency. Essentially, two methods, iloiloga o le gagana and fa'afaletui, were adopted for the study, as explained below.

### **Fa'afaletui**

Data collection in qualitative research involves the study of spoken and written representations and records of human experience, using multiple methods and multiple sources of data (Cresswell, 2003; Punch, 2005). During the four weeks in which I had to wait for the consent forms to be returned, I bought and familiarised myself with the voice recorder. I also laminated complete copies of the STAR test 'A' and 'B', and asTTle Levels 3 and 4, Level 4 and Levels 4 and 5 to use as prompts for the student conversations. One to one interviews were not implemented, as they would have contradicted the collective con-census principles that underpin fa'afaletui.

### **Iloiloga o le gagana**

Iloiloga o le gagana involved the analysis of the language of the five test papers selected for the project. The breakdown of the language of the test papers was important because it revealed an in-depth knowledge of the linguistics that made up the assessment tools, to verify the setting, focus, purpose, intended audience, expectations, conventions and requirements of the test papers. It also revealed the communicative goals with respect to the standardised tests, and the individual strategies employed by the writers to achieve these goals (Egins, 1994; Wattle & Radic-Bojanic, 2007).

### **Applying methods to the research questions**

I applied the Tofā'a'anolasi as the overriding research framework to seek answers for the two research questions.

For the first question, 'how do Samoan students understand their experiences of taking the asTTle and STAR tests in schools?' I used the fa'afaletui method of collecting data. The fa'afaletui focus group conversations were effective because students were able to talk freely about their experiences of standardised tests without the constraints of interview questions. Interview questions, I believe, have the tendencies to guard and guide how the students respond, as mentioned previously in this thesis. Using the fa'afaletui, the students were able to reflect on their own experiences of sitting the asTTle and STAR tests. Students talked about what they saw and heard and how they felt before, during and after the tests.

Fa'afaletui with students started two weeks after all the consent forms from parents and students themselves were returned. These 'focus group' conversations were held at the students' schools, for an hour each. Before each fa'afaletui, students were made aware of their rights as participants. Students were made aware of the process and the expectations of fa'afaletui, that respect was expected for the protection for each other's mana and wairua. Respect was also expected of the information each participant brought into the fa'afaletui, as the information gathered and knowledge gained was a collective effort. Students were made aware that they could ask to stop the recording, or have the information they provided removed or even withdrew completely from the study if they wanted to. Students were told they had the freedom to converse in either or both Samoan and English, as the aim of the fa'afaletui was to gain their perspective and their voice. Post-it stickers and blank charts were made available for students to write their own stories and critique of the standardised tests if they needed to. The latter was to cater for students with difficulties talking about their experiences of assessments due to several reasons such as painful memories, shyness or difficulty in language use. However, since the students were able to talk about assessments, they did not use the post-it stickers and blank charts.

At the start of the fa'afaletui, I greeted students and asked about how their day had been going and how their families and parents were doing. I had to start the fa'afaletui with the kind of conversation that showed students that I cared for them, which in turn strengthened the relationship we had (as researcher and participants). Soon I would lead the conversations to the research purposes, students' rights as participants and eventually to assessments and test papers. Prompting questions were only asked to clarify or extend on the understandings that were shared.

During the fa'afaletui, I used laminated copies of the standardised tests. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the laminated copies supported the students to remember the actual testing contexts. Some students pointed to certain items as they recounted certain incidents and memories of standardised tests. Students talked about never having enough time to complete the tests. They reflected on the consequences of tests. These consequences included the labelling, certification and the shameful tactics employed by some teachers. As noted, the students bounced ideas off each other, and finished each other's sentences as they recounted the testing scenarios in their own classrooms. Students used the laminated tests to check and recheck, affirm and reaffirm with each other their prior knowledge and experiences of the two tests. What was revealed in



fa'afaletui were the students' recount of their overall experiences of frustration, confusion and dismay.

After the fa'afaletui, I thanked the students, encouraged them to work hard in school to make their families proud. I gave each student a kohā of pre-packed lunches and left. At home, I transcribed all the conversations. After transcribing the first students' fa'afaletui, themes were identified as well as further questions for clarification, which were then asked at the next fa'afaletui. During the second fa'afaletui, new ideas emerged and the previous ones from the first fa'afaletui were reaffirmed, and or extended.

For the second question, 'what patterns of discourse and language found in the asTTle and STAR relevant to Samoan students' culture and language? I used the iloiloga o le gagana method. The iloiloga o le gagana was carried out in two phases: first, with the students during the fa'afaletui and; second, at home all by myself as the researcher, as explained below.

In the first phase of the iloiloga o le gagana, the students discussed the topics of texts. Students reflected on the appropriateness of texts for themselves as Samoan students. Students talked about many issues, for example, the difficulty of the English language of the standardised tests and the absence of 'anything Samoan' in most of the test papers examined. Students skimmed through all test papers looking for test items relative to them as Samoans, Samoan students and Samoan teenagers. Students reflected on how outdated some topics were. They questioned the inclusion of certain topics in the tests and suggested topics they would like to read about in the tests. They pointed out mistakes in the tests. They pointed out modalities and argued against their use. Students located examples of vague and misleading questions. Students talked about images, choice of colours and the layout of the test papers. They questioned the many paragraphs they needed to read to answer very few questions and with very limited time. They discussed the tests items and tried to make meaning of what the tests items meant and what was needed to answer the test questions correctly. Students talked about the types of questions asked in the tests. What stood out in the students' analysis and conversations were the difficulty in the language of the tests, the mismatch between their culture as Samoan students and that needed to succeed in the tests and the need for more time to complete the tests.

In the second phase of the iloiloga o le gagana, I looked at the tests from my own perspective as a Samoan person, Samoan teacher and Samoan researcher. I examined the

language of the tests again looking at any other aspects that students and I may have missed during the fa'afaletui. What stood out from my analysis of the test language (although was never mentioned by the students in their analysis), was the negative connotation of the language related to girls and women. Therefore, I began to look closely for gender related phenomena. I examined the written and visual texts for salient aspects related to gender.

### **Fa'afaletui with teachers**

I talked with teachers at their own schools. Teachers' perspectives were important in this research project as they too are subjects of assessment discourse. In the fa'afaletui, teachers talked about their feelings and experiences of assessments and especially standardised tests. They talked about the questions and the stories students were expected to read and respond to in the tests. Teachers reflected on the mismatch between the content of what they taught in class and that of the standardised tests. Teachers talked about how foreign some topics were, from the world of the Samoan students in their classrooms. They reflected on how 'ill-prepared' some of their students were because of this mismatch. Teachers were keen to see the students succeed. They knew about the mismatch between the curriculum and the standardised tests and tried to help students in the classroom, although misguidedly, to compensate, as explained further below, in 'Teachers and tests - Inconsistencies in practice and knowledge' (Matā'upu Lona Lima: Filiga-Linguistic Analysis).

Teachers shared their own experiences of administering the tests. They shared stories about the testing systems in their schools. They revealed how some teachers were still learning how to correctly administer the tests, which seemed to suggest some inconsistencies and fallacies in some schools' testing routines. Public discussion in the staffroom of student results was embarrassing and humiliating to the point that the teachers felt abused. Students' achievement results were made a signifier of the teachers' competency. Teachers' fear of being embarrassed because of their students' low tests results led them to manipulate the tests and/or the achievement data. I noted these teachers' stories on paper and they are quoted throughout the thesis.

### **Procedures for analysis**

To help explain the themes identified from all texts collected as well as participants' stories, I drew on the works of van Dijk (1999), Fairclough (Fairclough, 1995) and Wodak (Wodak, 1999, 2001). These theoretical explanations articulate how social power,

dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted in language use, discourse, verbal interaction and communications. I used the research questions as the basis of the analysis of the material in the asTTle and STAR tests examined. The questions were:

1. How do Samoan students understand their experiences of taking the asTTle and STAR tests in schools?
2. What patterns of discourse and language found in the asTTle and STAR tests are relevant to Samoan students' culture and language?

First, I read the collected data to gain an overall general feel. My second reading was more focused on the identified aims and the research questions. During this reading, I categorised the several themes that emerged from the data.

The first theme derived from question one. The second and third themes emerged from the students' analysis of the test papers, in response to question two. The fourth theme derived from my own analysis of the test papers, as a response to the second question. These themes were:

1. The students' experiences of the standardised tests were that of confusion and dismay;
2. The English language of the standardised tests was difficult;
3. The culture and knowledge of the tests did not match the culture and knowledge of some Samoan students;
4. The tests were gender biased.

In sum, the students' negative experiences of the tests were a consequence of the problems with language, culture and gender presented in the tests.

### **Concluding comment**

In this chapter, I have provided details of how I applied the research methodology, which is described in the previous chapter, to the research questions. I have explained how the two methods of collecting the data unfolded to closely examine the signs, symbols and language of the test papers to reveal the inherent ideologies presented in the papers. I have detailed the assessment tools examined in this project and their presupposed purposes for implementation. I have justified the selection of participants as the rightful members of the fa'afoaletui since they hold the knowledge and first-hand experience as subjects of assessment practices in New Zealand primary schools. In this chapter, I have also introduced the main themes that emerged from the data. These themes are the students'

uncertainty brought about by the difficulty in the language, the mismatch of culture and gender bias in the language of the tests.

The thesis now moves to the presentation and analysis of the findings. The original research questions are not mirrored in the chapter titles, but they form the substance of the themes discussed in all analysis chapters. Chapter titles are based on the themes that emerged from the analysis of the tests materials as explained below.

First, the Linguistics Analysis chapter (Matā'upu Lona Lima) addresses the language of the tests papers to reveal technical difficulties and language related biases. These biases include the influence of the vocabulary, semantics, genre, translation processes, language preferences, and styles of communication that may be unfamiliar to some Samoan students; and the impact of these biases on the assessment process and student performance (Pereira, 2001). Second, the Cultural Discourse Chapter (Matā'upu Lona Ono), which addresses the language of test papers that tend to reveal biases in terms of content and experiences that are mainstream culture-specific and which are rare, inappropriate and disadvantaging for some Samoan students. Finally, the Gender Discourse chapter (Matā'upu Lona Fitu) which is the analysis of language and discourse in terms of gender. As mentioned previously above, this chapter addresses the male oriented nature of test papers; and how this particular nature of tests works as a bias against some Samoan students.

All of the chapters are of equal importance to the thesis. I have decided to place the analysis of the language first because it is by far, and in my experience, the most overlooked, in terms of bias in school practices. This is because the language we use in the New Zealand schools is seldom subjected to rigorous thought, and therefore leads to bias in school practice. I believe that although the mismatch of language is clear, as shown in this thesis, in my experience, educators do not necessarily see or take note of this factor. The cultural mismatch in the school curriculum, context and assessments has been a topic of discussion in numerous written and oral forums for a long time. Examples include Berlak (2000), Delandshere (2001), LaCelle-Peterson (2000) and Thaman (2009) as mentioned previously in Matā'upu Muamua. Gender bias in test papers and settings have also been debated by numerous researchers and educators, such as, Chilisa (2000), Newfields (2007) and St Pierre (2000) as stated earlier in the first chapter. The next chapter therefore, is the discussion of the linguistic analysis of the assessment tools analysed for this project.

## **Matā'upu Lona Lima: Filiga-Linguistic Analysis**

Language is not mere words, it constructs reality, discourse, manufactures people... it constructs subjectivities of 'us' and 'other'... language in many and varied forms, is the central element in ideology as power. Too often language acts as a gate that sorts and selects students, with their teachers performing the function of society's gate keepers (Janks, 2010, p. 59).

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I explore the linguistic discourse inherent within the asTTle and STAR test papers, by explicitly articulating the analysis of patterns of language and meanings conveyed in tests. Analysing these assessment tools involves applying the Tofā'a'anolasi research framework, to examine critically the pictorial items and texts. The tools focus on the lexical grammatical features of the texts, the choice of language and how the texts are structured to fulfil their assumed purposes, within the wider assessment discourse.

The analysis reveals the linguistic skills expected of the students to understand the text. The analysis of the discursive strategies employed and the linguistic means that support them reveal failures concealed within the testing tools and their administration that are consequentially disadvantaging some Samoan students and their academic performance. The emphasis of the tests on decontextualized language skills tends to favour mainstream students whose language socialization and acquisition match those expected of the tests. This chapter includes the analyses of technical difficulties in the paper, as well as discussions regarding the limited testing time, which are other significant factors in the assessment of students' reading abilities in the English language.

The findings in this chapter highlight certain discrepancies in teachers' understanding and practices with respect to the tests and of the school assessment administration and monitoring systems, which have an adversely impact on the students and their performance. The findings also reveal an overarching inconsistency in the language, culture, interests, knowledge, and prior experiences some Samoan students bring to the testing context and those expected in the tests. In terms of the language of the test papers examined, complexities exist in the types of genre, the concepts, vague instructions, mistakes, and difficulties with the language related to the explanations.

### **Language and Literacy**

Literacy is a social practice. Despite the fact that different cultures 'do' literacy differently, being literate in the Western education system is often understood, in the

middle class 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1980b, p. 131), as schooled, learned, cultured, cultivated, and genteel and marked by a liberal education, in the English language. These markers of being literate in English have since become the signs of a general politics of truth, accepted as classifiers that construct social categories, give orders, justify, explain, give reasons and excuses and construct reality (ibid). These signifiers have become tools and procedures to police and constrain access to knowledge and power; and are generated in institutions, such as, schools. This policing is evident in the way teachers and other educational specialists select, organise and distribute the right to be included in 'being English literate', and who to determine who is excluded (Siegel, 2006).

Since literacy controls and influences, 'being literate' in the English language wards off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery of its existence (Foucault, 1980b). This effect is seen in the way some parents want their children to learn English for a better and brighter future. This recognition of the English language as a means to an improved socio-economic status increases the dominance of English in schools (Janks, 2010, p. 128). As Janks posited:

Too often language acts as a gate that sorts and selects students, with their teachers performing the function of society's gate keepers. If what is beyond the gates are elite literacies that are out of reach for most people, then these literacies become highly desirable (Janks, 2010, p. 200).

Since literacy in the New Zealand primary school context is the 'ability to read, write and communicate in the English language of the curriculum' (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 18), the New Zealand curriculum itself is a 'procedure of exclusion' (Foucault, 1970, p. 109). The curriculum is backed by a multitude of 'disciplinary rules, methods, techniques, truths' that govern students, teachers, principals, BOT and parents, participating in the schooling system (ibid).

The current mainstream educational practices fail to provide a level playing field. Instead it serves to perpetuate and reinforce inequality and the dominance of some social groups over others (May, 2012; 2013). Giroux (Giroux, 1988) documents how language practices are used to actively silence some students, by favouring particular forms of language and knowledge hence disconfirming the traditions, practices, and values of subordinate language groups (p. 134). This subordination is promoted and powered by the naturalising of some languages such as English as the status quo and the natural order of things (Fairclough, 1989, p. 3).

The acquisition of English is a governmentalizing mechanism for economic and political purposes. Ignorance and assumptions of the value of English are the key drivers of this governmentality. However, it (the English language) is validated by recourse to a functionalist perspective that emphasises the global spread of English as useful. Although this expanse was initiated by colonialism, the beneficial nature of English is now seen in the abundance of chances and access to jobs and further chances for education (Pennycook, 1995, p. 40). In this case, students not only ‘buy in’ to reach a high level of competency in English to pursue their studies, they are consequently depending on Western knowledge, which is often inappropriate to their (students’) local context. Moreover, teaching English (as a second language) exports the culture and knowledge of the English speaking countries, which promotes their economic and political interests hence increasing global inequalities (p. 54).

Similar to all the other languages, English has the potential to convey meanings (Halliday, 1985). Although it is possible to view language as a closed abstract system, where each sign, each meaning-bearing unit, is arbitrary and derives its meaning from its place in the system relative to other signs, this tells us nothing about what happens when language is used (Janks, 2005a). When people use language, they select from options available in the system. People make lexical, grammatical and sequencing choices in order to say what they want to say. What is selected from the range of lexical and grammatical options determines how this potential is realised hence any choice of linguistic option implies a rejection of other options. As Janks contends:

All these selections are motivated. They are designed to convey particular meanings in particular ways and to have particular effects. Moreover, they are designed to be believed. Texts work to position their readers and the ideal reader, from the point of view of the writer (or speaker), is the reader who buys into the text and its meanings. Another way of saying this is to say that all texts are positioned and positioning. They are positioned by the writer's point of view, and the linguistic (and other semiotic) choices made by the writer are designed to produce effects that position the reader. We can play with the word “design”, by saying that texts have designs on us as readers, listeners or viewers. They entice us into their way of seeing and understanding the world – into their version of reality. Every text is just one set of perspectives on the world, a representation of it and language, together with other signs, work to construct reality (Janks, 2005b, p. 97).

Understandably, any selections made, direct our attention to what is presented in a text, and away from any sense of choices that have been elided, invalidated or reversed (Kress & Hodge, 1979). In the case of the asTTle and STAR tests examined in this thesis, the texts are more general, as tests designers try to recognise

and accommodate the diversity of the student population in New Zealand primary schools (C. Darr, personal communication, 13 January 2013).

Language has different meanings and is socially semiotic (Thibault, 1998). In the community in which the texts have their meanings, texts evoke and activate a larger system or viewpoint through semantic patterns. To unpack or recover the theme of the text, readers need to have prior initiation into relevant social practices related to text interpretations. Text analysis that focuses only on the semiotic choices that form the text is therefore limited because it says nothing about the text in relation to the social context or the conditions of its production and reception. A fine grained analysis of lexical grammatical choices can help to reveal the wider systems of social ideologies as voiced in any given textual production (Janks, 2005b, p. 100).

In line with the research framework, the chapter contains a collective analysis by the students, teachers and researcher, as demonstrated in the participants' stories quoted throughout the chapter to support, explain or oppose the analysis. The aim with respect to the participants' stories and the linguistic analysis is to contribute to the understanding of both. The chapter is presented in seven sub-sections. Each sub-section identifies and explains an issue in the test papers. It presents an example or examples and demonstrates how and why these issues are problematic for some Samoan students.

### **Use of unedited texts as reading materials**

Two of the test papers examined include unedited pieces of writing for students to read and answer questions related to the writing. 'A special gift', in the asTTle Level 4/5 is introduced with four sentences of instructions, asking students to read the unedited piece of writing and to think about the corrections and improvements that are necessary. The text comprises 23 sentences arranged in five paragraphs, two of which are displayed below. This text has five questions for the student to answer.



### A Special Gift

(1) It all began with a Father's Day gift. (2) The gift was an eight-millimetre movie camera, which was supposed to be used to record camping trips and other family events. (3) However, the father who received the camera didn't hardly enjoy using it, so he gave it to his 12-year-old son. (4) In no time at all, young Steven Spielberg having developed a passion for filmmaking.

(5) The boy's first films documented family camping trips. (6) Later he began to experiment with special effects creating some short films about trains crashing into each other. (7) At the age of 13, Spielberg made a 40-minute war movie that featured a battle between Nazi and British soldiers. (8) He used classmates as actors and produced his own special effects. (9) Titled *Escape to Nowhere*, the film won first prize at a teen film festival.

The text has two obvious mistakes in the first paragraph. Sentence three should have read: 'However, the father who received the camera didn't enjoy using it, so he gave it to his 12-year-old son'. The second mistake is in sentence number four, which should have been 'In no time at all, young Steven Spielberg developed a passion for filmmaking'. These 'mistakes' are common in New Zealand vernacular, especially among some working class native speakers.

The second text, 'Cats in ancient Egypt' is in the asTTle Level 4 test. The 20 sentences are presented in four paragraphs, with five comprehension questions to follow. I have included a few of the paragraphs for further analysis below.

*The following is a rough draft of a student's report, which may contain errors.*

### Cats in Ancient Egypt

(1) Many of us love cats. (2) They're beautiful, soft, intelligent, and loving. (3) The ancient Egyptians considered cats to be extremely important and honoured them with great respect. (4) There was good reasons for this attitude. (5) For one thing, cats helped people by keeping their homes free of mice, rats, and snakes.

(6) In addition, without cats Egypt could not have been the important grain-growing centre that it was. (7) In grain fields all along the Nile River, cats caught rats and mice that ate crops. (8) Though I don't know what other pets the Egyptians had, cats were probably the most important. (9) Cats were also trained to help hunters by picking up birds that had been shot with bows and arrows.

(10) The Egyptians appreciated cats so much that Bast, an Egyptian goddess, was pictured in the form of a cat. (11) Bast appears in artwork. (12) She was the protector of the house. (13) This idea made a special connection between cats and children. (14) That's why most Egyptian families had cats for good luck.

(15) The safety and preservation of all cats were of great concern to ancient Egyptians. (16) There were even laws against removing a cat from Egypt. (17) Foreigners sometimes smuggled cats out of Egypt. (18) They took the cats to other lands. (19) They traded them for treasures in these lands. (20) Egyptian soldiers were sent to pick up cats found in other countries and bring them back home to Egypt.

The text, 'Cats in Ancient Egypt' is presented with an instruction, shown below, that is tricky.

*The following is a rough draft of a student's report, which may contain errors.*

Unlike the former text, which stipulated the presence of mistakes, the latter uses the modal auxiliary 'may', which suggests that, students are supposed to decide whether there are mistakes in the texts. Later on in this chapter, I have written more on the use of modality in the tests and their impact on some Samoan students. This testing technique is highly problematic to both the palagi and Samoan students. There are potential difficulties beyond the aim of the test for all students in this kind of assessment.

First, the palagi students who grow up speaking English as their first language are more likely to speak and communicate in the 'standard' English. The deliberate inclusion of writing errors in the test, since it is unexpected, unusual and contrary to the norm, may be disadvantaging to some of them. Since it is 'unusual', students may unnecessarily spend more time trying to unravel the mistakes depriving them of time and may cause unnecessary stress. Olssen (1998) argues that student's anxiety of the tests can affect the validity of the student's test results, which leads to a misrepresentation of the student's knowledge (Olssen, 1998, p. 54).

For the Samoan students, there are other problems. The Samoan parents teach their children that the teacher, and the text, is always right. To these students, the tests and their contents, since they are designed and set by teachers, are necessarily error free. This is an example of a social, rather than an intellectual or linguistic problem and is sometimes reflected in the quiet and non-confrontational way students present themselves in classes. This is often an attribute many educators take, as 'being passive' and 'non-critical'. The inclusion of 'mistakes' in the texts then, since it is 'unexpected' for the Samoan students can be problematic and disadvantaging for some of them, but in a somewhat in a different way to the palagi students. It is a detrimental drawback, adding to the hindrance of their achievement ranking and marks.

It is vital to note that some Samoan students (and others in this similar situation), who are learning English as a second language, may take as long as four to eight years to learn sufficient English to be able to function academically in class (Cummins, 1986). Some students, who are just learning to read and write, may find the text, in its current unedited state 'normal'. Below are the two questions students are supposed to answer about the mistakes in the texts.

**Question 11, asTTle Level 4, Cats in ancient Egypt**

**What is the correct way to write sentence 4 ?**

(sentence 4) *'There was no good reasons for this attitude'*

(answer) *There were good reasons for this attitude*

**Question 03, asTTle level 4/5: A special gift**

**What changes should be made in sentence 3?**

(sentence 3) *'However, the father who received the camera didn't hardly enjoy using it, so he gave it to his 12-year-old son'*

(answer) *Delete hardly*

These two statements echo the dialectic form of English spoken by some Samoan students and their peers in their local communities and schools, so Samoan students may not see them as mistakes. It is one of the new variety of English spoken in New Zealand that is currently gaining in local prestige, and is now something that many young New Zealanders, Samoans included, claim as part of their identity (Hay, Maclagan, & Gordon, 2008; Starks, Harlow, & Bell, 2005). Students learn it from their parents, peers and from the media. Some ethnic teachers working with students sometimes speak it. The latter is not an issue restricted to the New Zealand ethnic teacher population, it is familiar in other parts of the world as well (Demirezen, 2007). This 'Pacific English' (Hay et al., 2008, p. 109) is quite acceptable and politically correct in the world of the Pasifika students who use it. More examples include: 'I'd do no such thing'; 'It ain't nothing like that'; 'You ain't taking no rubber from me'; 'I didn't say nothing'. These double negatives may not be correct in the standard English language, however they are normal and are regarded as 'standard' to non-native speakers of the English language, including some Samoans (Derewianka, 2002). Students who continue to get questions of this kind wrong are penalised because 'their standard functional English' is different from the norm.

Through this test, students from families and communities who communicate in these emerging varieties of English are reminded that their language is wrong and that it 'needs fixing' (Berlak, 2000; Madaus & Horn, 2000; Siegel, 2006). As Mika pointed out in the fa'afaletui:

*Some people might be used to the Samoan language and they have very little vocab...some kids have fob<sup>10</sup> and slang and they like have all those slang and not formally, so with formal language, they struggle...*

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<sup>10</sup> Fob stands for 'fresh off the boat' - a term used to label the new migrants into New Zealand

The non- recognition granted to the Samoanised English dialect of Samoan students is symbolic of cultural violence towards their spoken language, and an example of ‘institutionally manufactured compliance or consent’ (Janks, 2004). Highlighting students’ failure to communicate in the approved standard of the English language, not only teaches students to recognise the legitimacy of the English language, it emphasises the misrecognition given to their home dialect of the English language. Sledd (1969) noted:

No dialect, they keep repeating, is better than any other-yet poor and ignorant children must change theirs unless they want to stay poor and ignorant. So the message is clear that the varieties of language spoken by some social groups is inferior to that spoken by others (cited in Siegel, 2006, p. 159).

Janks suggests however that instead of a focus on penalising students for the variant dialect of English they bring to the classroom, teach them (students) to value the languages they speak and that linguistic diversity is a resource for creativity and cognition (Janks, 2004).

Janks contends that language and culture (and identities), tend to shift when they come in contact with other languages and cultures. These new contacts result in possibilities of new ‘hybrid identities, dynamic shifts in language forms and language usage and entirely new and innovative ways and being in the world’ (Janks, 2010, p. 148). According to Janks, people mould living languages to suit their communicative, social and political use. As people appropriate the language for their own needs, they destabilise it. Language has an elastic quality that allows it to stretch with new demands and to embrace new concepts. Pennycook (1995) noted that some of the new forms of English include Nigerian English (Bamgbose, 1982); Kenyan English (Zuengler 1982) and Singaporean English (Richards, 1982). In New Zealand, the change is now seen in the varied English spoken by mainly the Pasifika youngsters (Starks et al., 2005).

Expressing the difficulty of learning a new language, Janks posits:

Learning to speak in an additional language is difficult since it is hard to get mouths around strange sounding vowels and consonants. The tongue has to learn new movements and often the ingrained movements of the native tongue leave their mark on the accent in the new language. The micro movements of the tongue are just one example of the way language is embodied, in accordance with the other movements of the body including eyes, hands, stance and voice that we have acquired as members of the language community in which we live (Janks, 2010, p. 152).

If the point is to expose students to high quality reading materials while teaching reading and writing in New Zealand schools, then the use of unedited texts in the reading tests defeats *that* important purpose (Davis, 2007; McNaughton, 2002). The deliberate provision of excellent materials for students' learning aims to model the richness, preciseness and quality of language used for different textual purposes. The inclusion of reading materials of very poor quality is disadvantageous for students because mistakes could also alter the meaning of the text, affecting how students understand and interpret them.

Furthermore, the tasks expect students to read and engage in correcting grammatical mistakes such as, misspellings; mistyping; incorrect punctuations; inconsistencies in word usage; poorly structured sentences; conflicting statements and so forth. These tasks are in contrast with the requirements of a usual classroom reading comprehension activity students in the fa'afaletui are used to, where they (students) are expected to unpack the texts, comprehend and understand the meaning of what they read, apply and evaluate the knowledge and information. In these cases, the task has become a writing task that involves editing various texts and not so much understanding and responding to them.

### **Language difficulties**

Traditionally, literacy is the ability to read and write texts, to decode writing as a reader and to encode language in a graphic form as a writer. To decode a text easily, some background knowledge of the text is required, since the meaning is something that inheres in the text and corresponds with something out there in the real world (Pennycook, 2001). The difficulty of the text is usually thought of as getting the right balance between supports and challenges within a text. Supports are features of the texts that make them easy to read and the challenges are the potential difficulties for particular readers. This means that supports and challenges exist only in relation to the reader, in other words, what one reader may find a challenge may be a support to the other (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974).

For successful understanding in terms of reading, students are taught to attend to details of the texts in order to decode, find information and determine their meanings. These details include semantics or the meaning of words, syntax or the grammatical structure of the phrase or sentence and the visual aspect of the words. The process of understanding texts demands that students interrelate and sometimes combine the separate meanings of each word. It is a constructive process of synthesis and putting word meanings together

in special ways. Complex analysis of the relationship among the parts of a sentence requires attention for comprehension to occur.

For poor readers who are still struggling to decode, much of the attention is taken up to decode, and so their comprehension suffers (Samuels, 2004). Since the end product of reading is comprehension, the beginning reader is faced with a formidable problem. For most readers who may not be able to comprehend by switching attention between decoding and comprehension, the process is slow and difficult. As Toe, Rita, Anna and Sina confirmed;

*The words are complicated... (Rita)*

*Because the words are hard... some may find them easy, but most of us... they are hard... (Anna)*

*The language is complicated... the English is hard... (Sina)*

In class, students are taught the continuous process of attending and searching and making a connection to their prior knowledge as the building blocks for new learning. The breadth of the knowledge encapsulated in the students' schema is an ideal instrument to use in understanding the text. Students relate the information in the text to the knowledge stored in the schema in their heads. The speed with which students gain access to the knowledge stored in the schema is an important factor in reading fluency. Samuels (2004) established that poor readers generally have slower lexical access speed (Samuels, 2004). This means that comprehension difficulty may be caused by the fact that concept, and knowledge stored in the schemata, may not be rapidly and automatically accessed.

May (May, 2013) presents a similar argument, that for students to read with comprehension at any level, they must have previously acquired the knowledge and meanings of most of the words in the text in addition to the ability to read that text at a functional level of fluency. This thesis proposes that part of the problem is the mismatch between some Samoan students' schemata and the knowledge and experience demanded in the tests (McNaughton, 2002), which will be discussed further in the Cultural Analysis chapter (Matā'upu Lona Ono).

Students in the fa'afaletui spoke of the difficulty of the STAR and asTTle tests, particularly in the level of English language that is used. Some of the questions demand students' understanding of vocabulary, using contextual information. Students are

expected to tap into comprehension strategies taught in class to support their understanding of texts. As Sina declared:

*They try to get us to think about words and our prior knowledge and other stories, and whatever word comes to our mind we write them down, but they are usually wrong...*

It is clear from Sina's story that they have been taught, and she may have mastered the skills necessary for these kinds of test items, such as, to apply prior knowledge from personal experience and from previous texts she has engaged with. However, drawbacks arise when students have little if any experience of the particular concepts assessed, or have experiences and interpretations that are different from those of the tests. As two of the teachers articulated;

*We teach students to make a connection with the text ... tap into their prior knowledge as they read. Most of the texts students read in the test materials are **not** within their knowledge and experience... We teach them to visualise the text... without the background knowledge and experience they find it is often the English language in the test that is too difficult. Students are unable to visualise texts... so again they are disadvantaged...*

*We teach students to infer as they read... students infer using their own lens of understanding... their understanding stems from their personal experiences and culture... and the way they do things... They interpret the texts through their eyes and thinking as individuals... well... their interpretations are often different from that of the test writers and... are marked wrong and again they are disadvantaged... makes you wonder which inference is counted...*

The following examples illustrate the lack of contextual support available in assessment texts.

***(Question) Which word means the same?***

***Examples 1***

*Subtest 4, STAR Form A: A (bedraggled) boy stood at the door*

*(Answer) nervous / unfamiliar / cheeky / **untidy***

*Subtest 4, STAR Form A: After many requests, the animals were finally (liberated)*

*(Answer) Taken in/ given food / **set free** / given names*

*Subtest 4, STAR Form B: The speaker described his (whakapapa)*

*(Answer) **family tree** / marae / birth-place / home*

These test items do not have sufficient contextual information to support second language students' understanding. In the first sentence, there is no connection between bedraggled,

boy and door. Some Samoan students, who may not have background knowledge of the word 'bedraggled' and may have never seen or used the word before, will have to find and utilise another strategy to find the answer. The second sentence demands prior knowledge of protests and animal rights. These are concepts that are strange to some Samoan students. This is because in Samoa, animals are not caged therefore animals' rights to be liberated are not thought of or seen as necessary. The third sentence demands prior knowledge of the Māori language and culture. Students will be required to know the meaning of 'whakapapa' and how it is similar and or different from the optional concepts that are given to be able to decisively distinguish between them in order to avoid getting this question wrong.

Given the lack of background knowledge and support for some Samoan students to understand the words in question, they will have to search the words that are grammatically correct for the sentence. In that case, all are suitable, and any answer will have been correct, although the expected answer is what 'is right' from the test designers' point of view.

The examples discussed here show that students will have to 'have learnt' the meanings of these words and have used them in the same context, or have experienced them in real life to be able to get the answers right. For this prior learning to take place, teachers will have to 'deliberately' incorporate these concepts into their programmes, or give students a list of words to learn by heart. Moreover, whichever strategy the teachers choose, they will still be 'teaching to the test' (Gilmore & Smith, 2008; Hill, 2000).

### ***Examples 2***

*Subtest 4, STAR Form A: The country was in the grip of a (contagious) disease*

*(Answer) deadly / tropical / easily spread / very rare*

*Subtest 4, STAR Form A: The suspect had an (ingenious) alibi*

*(Answer) Clever / suspicious / weak / ridiculous*

*Subtest 4, STAR Form B: At a crucial stage, the officer's (courage) deserted him.*

*(Answer) determination / bravery / panic / ambition*

The above examples are more challenging for students. The sentences are complex and include words that are more difficult. Students will have to firstly, unpack each word, one by one, check their meanings to ensure coherence within the sentence, before attempting to locate the answer for the question. Unpacking words will involve prior acquisition of



extensive vocabulary together with a wider knowledge of genre and text types. Knowledge of texts and genres will support students to identify that these texts carry notions of ‘adult themes’ such as disease, suspicion and alibi. Some Samoan students, and others like them who are learning English as a second language, whether or not they may have the background knowledge of the concepts and genres being tested in these test items, will have found idioms such as ‘grip of contagious disease’ strange and difficult (May, 2013).

### ***Example 3***

*asTTle Levels 3/4; 4/5: Paragraph 1, Crowded House*

This text, Crowded House, is in two of the test papers analysed for the project. The first paragraph ‘alone’ is laden with terms that exhibited the writer/test designer’s admiration of Neil Finn and his work, which are too difficult for most students, such as some Samoans who are just learning English as their second language.

Neil Finn is simply one of the most accomplished, emotive songsmiths in the world. His evocative, textured and structurally intriguing works possess an often-breathtaking sweep that draws and holds and lingers. Deft and inventive, they set new standards for the contemporary pop song.

During standardised reading assessments, students are not given dictionaries to support their understanding of difficult vocabulary and content. The intense difficulty of this paragraph immediately disadvantages most students since they may not have the prior knowledge and experience of the specific music, they may also find the extended use of adjectives (most accomplished, emotive, song smith, evocative, textured, structurally intriguing, contemporary) and personification (possess, breath-taking, draws, hold, lingers) overwhelming and inaccessible.

The same observations were articulated in students’ fa’afaletui. According to Rita;

*The words are complicated... because the words are hard... English is hard...*

This was asserted by Toe who said;

*Only students that are good come out on top... and they might study the words and they might get it right*

Vili summed up his ideas of tests as;

*I think that the whole purpose of the test is to see how big your vocabulary is...*

The same difficulty was noted in one of the teacher's account;

*There is no evidence of maintenance and consolidation in students... which boils down to really just lucky guesses*

The examples discussed herein are reflexive of linguistic complexities since the language used in these standardized test papers does not have the same meaning for some Samoan students who are from a different cultural background. This mismatch is confounding for students and perpetuates the existence of the gap between the literacy achievements of mainstream palagi students whose home or first language corresponds with that of the school, and national educational assessment practices and others, including Samoans, for whom it does not (Amituanai-Toloa, 2006; Tuafuti, 2000; Tuafuti & McCaffery, 2005). Similar concerns are raised in other international studies, for example Hyun-Ju whose work illustrates issues in test materials from Hong Kong and Korea (Hyun-Ju, 2006); Klenowski whose work emphasises the inequitable nature of tests for Australian aboriginal students (Klenowski, 2009); and Volante whose work highlights the need for fairness of tests for the American black Hispanic and Latino students (Volante, 2008).

### **Technical difficulties**

Technical difficulties contribute to negativity towards tests, which ultimately affect students' performance and achievement. These problems include the physical colour, the layout of the test paper, and the small font sizes and illustrations. Students express how these factors affect them and their performance during the tests.

Firstly, some students insisted that the red colour of the STAR test was disturbing. As Terry expressed;

*Our minister tells us that red is the colour of sin...that is why the teacher uses it mark our books, you know and cross out our mistakes*

Lisa, from a different school; declared the same notion;

*This colour should never been used in the test... cos it means bad*

The above comments reaffirm that students' background experiences and knowledge play an important role in their education (McNaughton, 2002; Tanielu, 2004; Tuafuti, 2000). Students apply the knowledge and values of their home and church in what they are involved in at school. The association students drew between the red colour of the test, to

mistakes and sins and describing it as 'bad' indicates the impact this (choice of colour) has on these students. Teachers in the fa'afaletui agreed:

*Most of the students need to be ready as they are unwilling to persevere and do well... most have a negative attitude towards tests...and this is having an impact on the data. As soon as you say start, they get to it...and within the first twenty minutes, and fifteen minutes and even ten minutes...they push the paper forward saying...yea finish miss...they do not realise how serious these things are...they don't.*

Secondly, students spoke of the poor quality of photocopied test papers. The small pictures and font become difficult to read; because of the smudges of the ink. As Vili explained;

*Sometimes you look at the picture and the picture is not printed properly... so some people get it wrong...*

*It's like the ink ran out...or smudged and you can't see the picture...like a picture of a dog yet it looks like something else*

This was echoed by Molly (from a different school);

*Well to me it looks like a bird or a big ant... the pictures are not clear...it looks different... but a coloured one like the teachers would be better...*

Thirdly, students in the fa'afaletui talked of the struggle to read and differentiate the options on the last subtest, Subtest 6, of the STAR test. The subtest is made up of four paragraphs, each with a different writing style and purpose. At each point in each paragraph, there are three phrases and the students are supposed to choose the most suitable phrase to complete the sentences and the paragraph. As Josh and Fala affirmed;

*It's hard cos the questions and answers are in the same line... they should have it set out like those multi choice ones so it is easier to read and understand... because they are stuck together... (Josh)*

*...so we're are able to read...cos this one they are all stuck together... they should have like a, b, c ... (Fala)*

The examples below, from STAR Forms A & B, illustrate the obscurity students are concerned about.

*Original copy of STAR Form B, Subtest 6*

To Whom it May Concern

Dear Sir / Madam

I wish to apply for the position you advertised, delivering "Mainland" newspapers in our district. I am 15 years old and in good health. *My parents will support my application. • Mum and Dad reckon I'd be just great • I've got some OK references.* I have had experience of delivery jobs before, and *I think they're awesome • I did enjoy them • I do get a buzz out of being of service.* My phone no. is 049 0101. *Give us a go! • Please consider my application • Don't look any further than me.*

Yours faithfully

Jack Spratt.

*Photocopied version;*

To Whom it May Concern

Dear Sir / Madam

I wish to apply for the position you advertised, delivering "Mainland" newspapers in our district. I am 15 years old and in good health. *My parents will support my application. • Mum and Dad reckon I'd be just great • I've got some OK references.* I have had experience of delivery jobs before, and *I think they're awesome • I did enjoy them • I do get a buzz out of being of service.* My phone no. is 049 0101. *Give us a go! • Please consider my application • Don't look any further than me.*

Yours faithfully

Jack Spratt.

*Example 2, STAR Form B, Subtest 6, paragraph 2;*

### 1. Formal Weather Report

A south-west air-stream covers New Zealand. Tomorrow *at long last • I'm delighted to tell you • after a lengthy wet period* a ridge of high pressure will spread across the North Island, bringing fine weather. The South Island *will experience unfavourable conditions • won't like this • will be out of luck again,* as a cold front will move across the south, followed by *an extremely cold • a cruel, bitterly cold • a nasty freezing* south west flow. This will bring snow to low levels in the mountains.

*Photocopied version;*

### 1. Formal Weather Report

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According to Anna;

*This is the second hardest...to me it is hard cos of the way they write it it...it's all in pencil and we don't know which is the answer and which is the question*

Normally when students are asked to choose answers from given options, these options are lined vertically so they can be easily read and located. The arrangement of this text is problematic for students, especially when the test paper is photocopied in black and white (as in two of the schools that took part in this study). One of the teachers who stated shared this concern stated;

*The new STAR is coming out... it's even harder for students to see. The colour had changed from red and black on white to faint brown and black on white. The faint brown makes it more difficult for students to read...*

Students expressed their frustrations about questions that stretch over the leaf. The test papers are set out in a way that allows vast spaces between questions and answers. For that reason, some of the test papers have the text on one page and the questions on the next page. The teachers are concerned that it is 'noisy' during the test as students frantically flip back and forth. Students find it upsetting, time consuming and unfair.

Terry argued;

*It's unfair that we have to flip back and forth during the test, it's ripping us off of the time, and especially when the teacher says five more minutes, and you're like flipping ...flipping and frantically trying to read the text on one page and flip over to the question...it's hard*

She went on;

*Look at all that space [ran her hand down the page] why not have questions on the same page as the story...*

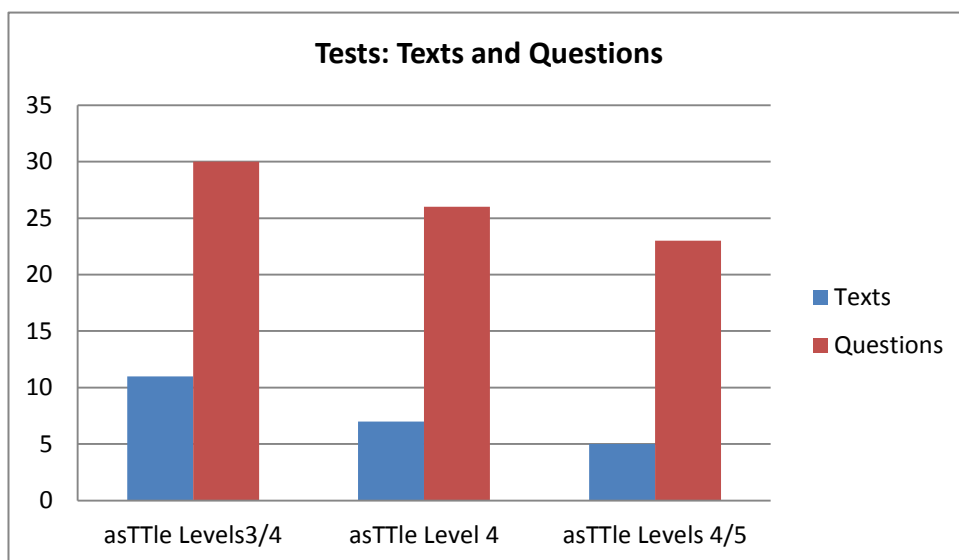
Lisa reflected on a previous test experience;

*One time...there was a question on one page and the abc answers on the next.... it's stupid*

### Inconsistencies of test contents

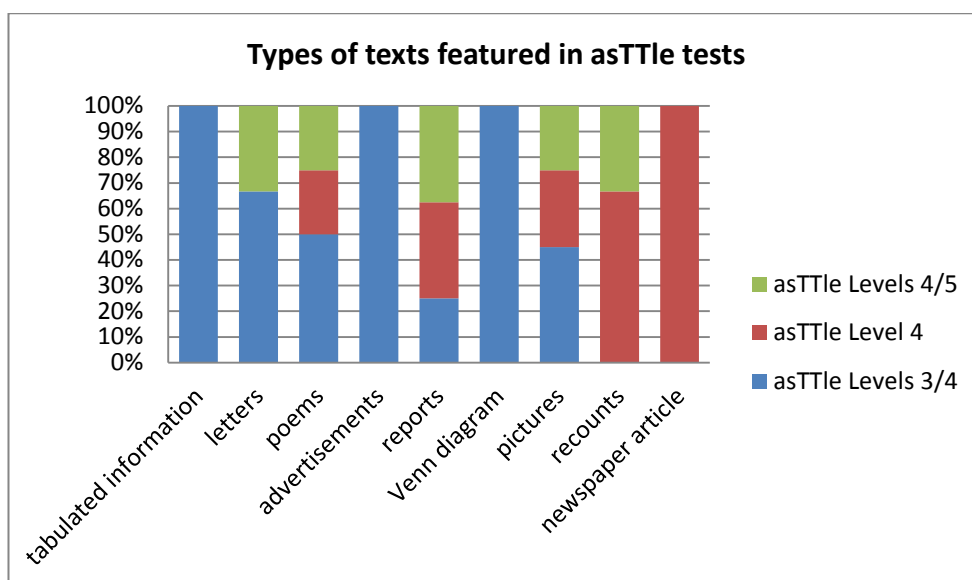
The analysis revealed an inconsistency in the amount of reading required versus the number of questions. This discrepancy is seen across and within the three levels of the

asTTle tests. First, a steady decrease is noted in the amount of reading expected of students, as the reading levels increased. In the asTTle Levels 3/4 test paper, students are expected to read eleven texts and answer thirty questions. Level 4 has seven texts and twenty-six questions. On the other hand, the asTTle Levels 4/5 is comprised of five texts and twenty-three questions. All tests are set to be completed in 40 minutes. This inconsistency is displayed in the kalafi (graph) below.



#### Ata 5.1: Test texts and questions

An inconsistency is also noted in the types of texts featured in the test papers. The nine texts in Levels 3/4 are comprised of seven different varieties of text types, including a table of information, two letters, two poems; two advertisements; two reports; nine pictures; and a Venn diagram. The Level 4 paper has one newspaper article; three reports; two recounts; one poem and six pictures. The asTTle Levels 4/5 include one letter, three reports, one recount, a poem, and five pictures, as shown in the kalafi below.



### Ata 5.2: Types of texts in the asTTle tests

It is alarming to note that the asTTle Levels 3/4 have *more* texts for students to read. This paper expects students to work faster than the others, to distinguish critically between the (purposes of) texts and tasks. These students face additional difficulties, such as, complex text structures, sentences and vocabulary. This low level test paper has more varied text types, than the higher levels (Level 4 and Levels 4/5). The asTTle Levels 4/5 paper, which targets the more able readers in this year level, is much shorter and does not have the variety of texts and tasks. The students in the fa'afaletui reported consistently that they were working at levels below the level 'expected by the teacher' (their chronological age). This means that for these students, sitting the Levels 3/4 test, it may be challenging to reach a mark that will allow them to get beyond the fail mark given the inconsistency in the amount and types of text read-hence which adds to their dilemma.

Students and teachers acknowledged the discrepancy discussed above. As students noted:

*It takes too long to read the stories... by the time I'm finished reading, I have forgotten what I was reading...not understanding most of what I read ...really... the hard language makes it hard... (Josh).*

*You're reading all these stories and then answer... there are only three questions... it's kinda like a waste of time reading all these for only three questions...like there's all these and there's hardly any comprehension questions... and you're like reading all this... it takes maybe 3,4,5 minutes to read or maybe longer. And you think you spend more time reading than answering questions... and the questions are on different pages and you're like going back to try to read them and like after reading*

*the story for 5 minutes and trying to remember ...and you're like flipping panicky through to get to the question and there's only two or three... and the more often you flip through the more panicky you get... (Julie)*

*Seriously...it's really like SSR<sup>11</sup>... (Mika)*

*The stories are too long. Students do not have time to read... they just rush to the questions and they try to look for answer...maybe the test should have two or three paragraphs would be good...this one has 8 paragraphs. I go straight to the questions and not to the story... (Fala)*

The lengthy texts are problematic for some Samoan students. Given the language barriers these students have, as discussed, in the previous section, these students face a hard job of trying to utilise the very limited similarity they share with the text in terms of prior knowledge and experience to unpack the text. It is a process that takes a long time, which they do not have in tests. As teachers commented;

*The texts are too long for most of my students. Some students have a limited attention span, a problem that we have in class. With the very long texts it is hard for most of them to retain the information. The difficulty of the texts makes the retention problem worse...*

*It's a biggy...students find the texts too long and hard and boring*

## **Types of questions**

Questions and types of questions were analysed to uncover the skills and knowledge necessary for students to respond appropriately and correctly in the tests. The analysis uncovers that the STAR test is designed to assess students' skills in: word recognition; sentence and paragraph comprehension; knowledge of vocabulary; language of advertisement and; functions of different types of texts. The STAR test does not include traditional question starters such as what, where, when, how, why, when and how. Instead, it has activities that require students to choose from the options given except for subtest three where they (students) are expected to complete a cloze test.

The analysis below is of the asTTle test papers. The three asTTle papers examined comprise seventy-nine questions: forty-one were questions for students to answer; and thirty-eight were statements for students to complete. Each statement and question has four optional answers to choose from.

### **Fa'avasēgaga 5.1: Question starters in the asTTle tests.**

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<sup>11</sup> Sustained Silent Reading (or SSR) is a form of school-based recreational reading where students read silently in a designated time period every day in school. The purpose of SSR is to help students learn to read by reading constantly.



	asTTle Level 3/4	asTTle Level 4	asTTle Level 4/5	Totals
<b>statements</b>	17	14	7	38
<b>what</b>	2	2	12	16
<b>how</b>	0	4	1	5
<b>which</b>	10	6	2	18
<b>where</b>	1	0	0	1
<b>why</b>	0	0	1	1
<b>totals</b>	30	26	23	79

When the same statements and question were scrutinised under Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956, cited in Fowler 2014), the results were;

**Fa'avasēgaga 5.2: Examples of statements and questions screened under Bloom’s Taxonomy (Fowler, 2014).**

Bloom’s Taxonomy	Totals	Examples of questions and statements
Knowledge	26	What sounds are heard on the cassettes? (L4/5) In letter one, which word could best replace ‘meandering’ (L. 3/4) What is the correct way to write sentence 4? (L.4) What words are used in the text to describe the songs written by Neil Finn? (L4/5)
Comprehension	35	What is the main purpose of the advertisement? (L.3/4) In paragraph 3, endangered means (L.3/4) What is the main purpose of the text? (L.4/5) Which words probably describe how the narrator felt towards his brother at the beginning of the story? (L.4)
Application	11	The chart will help Max to.... (L.3/4) Which of these could be a subtitle of the story? (L.4) What change should be made in sentence 3? (L.4/5) What revision (if any) is needed in sentence 16? (L.4/5)
Analysis	5	Which theme is both common to both ... (L3/4) According to the article, how are the .... similar? (L.4) What do you think happens to the Black Noddy at the end of the poem? (L.4/5)
Synthesis	2	How could sentences 18 and 19 best be combined? (L.4) If a student adds a concluding paragraph at the end of the report, it should...(L.4)
Evaluation	0	

The analysis shows an imbalance in the types of questions and skills asked of students across the three asTTle test papers. Most of the questions (77%) require students’ knowledge and understanding of the texts. While 13% of the questions require students to apply their understandings in other situations and much fewer (10%) to examine motives

or causes, or compile information together and propose alternative solutions. No question is asked for students to evaluate texts, to give students a chance to present and defend opinions or judge the validity of the ideas presented in the texts.

The next two paragraphs examine the types of questions further in terms of their purpose in the tests. This analysis focuses on the way some of the questions are asked and the impact they have on some Samoan students.

In any test, all questions need to be answered according to the understanding of the child answering them. This understanding is based on the child's prior knowledge of the text. The dissimilarity between some Samoan students' knowledge and interest and the texts' means students have very little chance of grasping the knowledge shared in these texts let alone understanding them. In this case, the test becomes a tiresome activity and students struggle to try to complete them.

The purpose of 'knowledge' questions is to see how much students have 'recalled' and 'memorised' of the knowledge of the test. Whatever the knowledge, and how much, and how difficult it is, are all the decisions made by those in charge of designing the standardised tests. On the other hand, the 'comprehension' questions test how much the students have 'understood' of the knowledge proposed for them to learn, right there and then in the tests. The application, analysis, synthesis and evaluative questions invite students to use and apply the knowledge learnt from the previous two stages of the taxonomy. Application, analysis, synthesis and evaluative questions stimulate divergent thinking and encourage independent learning (Ciardiello, 1998). The very high number of knowledge and comprehension questions (approximately 77% of all questions) tends to show that the standardised tests are 'designer driven'. Only 23% of the questions are assigned for students like Samoans to apply themselves and the knowledge they bring to the test.

### **Vague, misleading questions**


Students spoke of the confusing and misleading questions asked of them in some standardised tests papers. These expectations include seeing pictures for what they really are; and *also* from others' perspectives, making the questions more confusing. As Mika stipulates in his critique of the picture of the cow in example 5 (below), that even though the question is asking for 'what the cow is doing' (grazing), one can easily be mistaken as 'someone looking at the cow' (gazing). The same concern is expressed in Terry's

critique of ‘fright’ in example 6 (below) that even though the question is asking for ‘fright’, the woman in the picture also looks as if she is in a fight. According to students, both answers, in each example, are correct.

Examples 7, 8 and 9 draw attentions to the difficulty students face because of the lack of details in the pictures tested. The lack of detail makes it hard for students to read and make meaning of what is presented. It is highly problematic that students spend time figuring out test questions and answers that are poorly designed. For some Samoan students, who are already struggling with the mismatch of their language, linguistic abilities, prior knowledge and experience with those in the standardised tests, to have these deliberate distraction is even more catastrophic.

Below is an account of students’ critique of the Subtest 1 of the STAR tests Forms ‘A’ and ‘B’. This activity tests students decoding skills. The ability to decode is theoretically the first step to reading comprehension (Davis, 2007; Samuels, 2004).

### Example 1

3.		bowled	bald	boiled	bawled
----	---	--------	------	--------	--------


**Answer: bald**

Mika and Terry insisted;

*This man is not bald. He has some hair. He’s lost a bit on the top here [pointed], but he is technically not bald. Bald is having no hair. This is wrong... (Terry)*

*It’s the same as other kids who have short haircuts like number 2...we call them baldy but they are not bald...technically not bald... (Mika)*

### Example 2

12.		catalyst	catapult	catalogue	castaway
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**Answer: catapult**

Students argued;



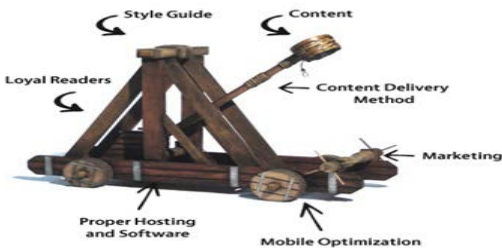

*That's not a catapult...a catapult is like this [demonstrated]. We did it in Science...remember...That is not a catapult... (Terry)*

*A catapult is when you smack it down (girl demonstrates) a catapult... that one uses a rock... (Sala)*

*That's a fagameme'i<sup>12</sup>, not a ..c-a-t-a-p-u-l-t...ia...o le fagameme'i... (Julie)*

*This is the worst...it's a sling shot...not a catapult...it is a sling shot...it works like a sling shot... we have a different word for it... (Terry)*

Students' perceptions of some concepts are different from those included in the tests. The bold inclusion of these mismatches in the standardised tests tends to exemplify the unquestioned power of the assessment as a discourse that items are included without being queried about their correctness. Moreover, the critique from the students prompted me to look up catapult and sling shot on Wikipedia<sup>13</sup> to find the vast differences between the two objects, as shown below.

What they look like:	
catapult	slingshot
	
How they work:	
catapult	slingshot
	
Where they are usually located / found:	
catapult	slingshot

<sup>12</sup> Fagameme'i is the Samoan word for sling shot. Children make sling shots using tree branches and rubber from old tyres. It is a popular home- made toy amongst young boys

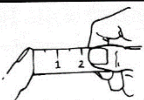
<sup>13</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slingshot> & <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catapult>



### Ata 5.3: Differences between a catapult and a sling shot

From the pictures, it seems that a catapult and a sling shot are two different objects in terms of what they look like, how they operate, and their sizes. It is also clear from the student stories that they do know these differences from prior experience. The problem may well be because, although in New Zealand vernacular English ‘catapult’ and slingshot are used interchangeably, technically they are different things. People learning English as a non- home language may well not adopt the New Zealand practice of interchangeability.

#### Example 3

6.		messy	measure	message	masseur
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Students said;

*You can have the ruler... but you don't really know what they are asking... (Julie)*

*Cos for some pictures they ask for the name of a thing...it is not asking for a ruler...no...it's measure...the action, what the ruler is used for...that's why they are hard... they are tricky... (Molly)*

*Plus, the picture really is small...some people who wear glasses forget to bring their glasses on the test day and they can't see... (Josh)*

#### Example 4

4.		displays	displease	dispels	displace
----	---	----------	-----------	---------	----------


According to students;

*...a book ... display...this is hard cos what you're seeing is a book not the glass... some questions ask you to label what they are..some ask for actions... (Josh)*

*It is displaying a book... it is displaying the action and not the actual book... (Julie)*

*It's difficult because it is not the display that you know of...it could have been something like a dinosaur statue...or something like that... but this is a book inside a box...yeah... a picture of something that we normally see around... (Sala)*

### Example 5


5.		greasing	gazing	grasping	grazing
----	---	----------	--------	----------	---------

Students said;

*That's a cow ...it's doing something but it's not showing... from another perspective you might think it's someone looking at it... so might circle gazing...not grazing... (Mika)*

*Ou ke iloa le povi, ae ou ke leiloa le ta'uga o le aiaia a le povi' (I know the cow is eating, but I do not know the word for it... (Molly)*

### Example 6


5.		fried	fright	fight	freight
----	---	-------	--------	-------	---------

Terry explained;

*See that, it's not even a thing to label... like a head or an action, like it's screaming... a fight... but fright?*

*E tricky! I can't tell what is happening there... looks like she's having a fight too*

### Example 7

6.		reverses	reverse	revise	revives
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According to students;

*They can have just an arrow pointing to the way it was coming out then it would help us... cos it looks like it's going back into the garage... (Molly)*

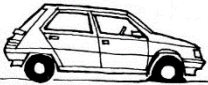
*Also hard was car reversing... could have put in an arrow to show the direction in which it is going... it looks like it is going into the garage and not reversing... (Tony)*

*The door is closing in on this one... there's no picture of the person looking back to show that it's reversing... (Lisa)*

*... but they should at least put a mirror there... or they could make it big...they only like Gosh... only they (speaker emphases) can tell... (Tony)*

*... oh its reverse... is hard... not really showing... it's showing only half the car... it is not showing if the car is going in or out... it looks like it's going into the garage... (Terry)*

### Example 8

8.		punctual	punished	punched	puncture
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Students' discussion;

*I see it as going down the hill... (Fala)*


*It's a vehicle... it's a flat tyre and people with limited English will not know what it is... (Julie)*

*If they could put an arrow towards the tyre... then it would have been easy... (Simi)*

*It's a car going down the hill... oh no it's a flat tyre... puncture... they should have zoomed in on the tyre... or instead of drawing the whole tyre they could have just drawn the tyre that is flat... (Josh)*

What makes this question worse is that the common term in New Zealand English is 'flat tyre' not 'puncture'.

### Example 9

4.		lunch	lurch	lounge	launch
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Students said;

*That a lur...lur...lurch...yeah that one is hard cos you've never seen these words before... like palagis they use different words from islanders... like they say boat...but they use one of those fancy as words... or ship...like the aroha ship and you just say no its a boat... (Terry)*

*Why not take off... (Toe)*

*Or may be a picture of a robe with someone taking it off to show its taking off... the pictures are confusing... (Terry)*

*The hardest was the launch... because it looks like it is floating...could have used other words like ship, yacht, boat (Anna)*




**Example 10**

**Sub-Test 1. WHAT IS THE PICTURE?**

**FORM A**

Look at each picture. Then read the four words on the right. Now put a circle around the word that tells you what the picture is. Let's do an example together.

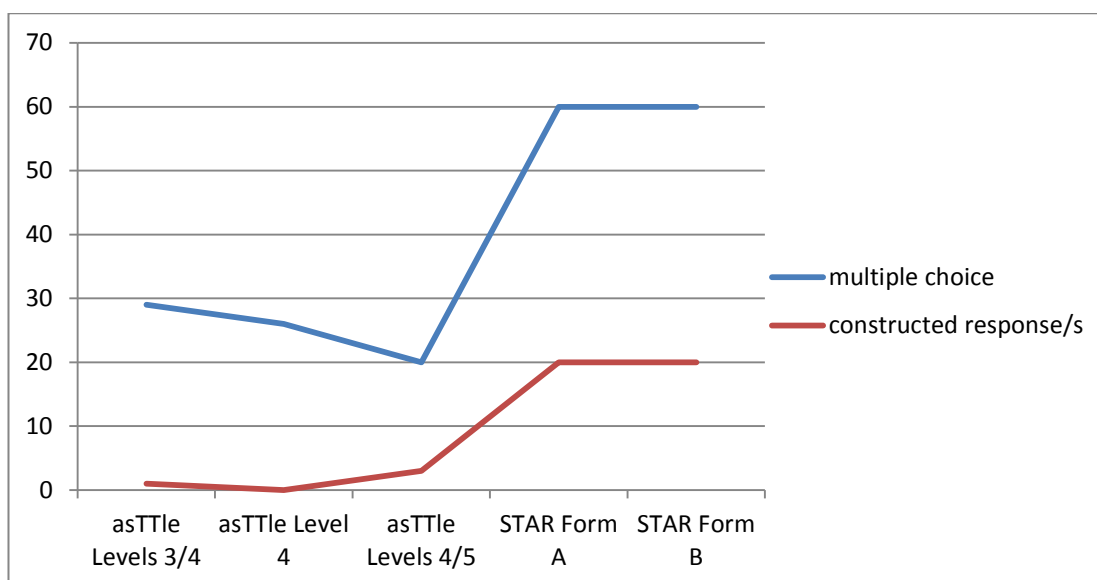
<b>EXAMPLE:</b>		apple	banana	orange	plum
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This last example is the instruction to the task, which is the same in the Forms A and B. The instruction says ‘... put a circle around the word that tells you *what the picture is* ...’ ‘What the picture is’ is ‘what is the name of the picture’. The picture of the banana in the example affirms this definition. It is not surprising that students will have expected to see names of pictures right through the subtest, since there is no indication whatsoever of any exceptions. However, the pictorial items in the subtest are not just about ‘names of things’ (catapult) but a range of concepts such as ‘actions’ (grazing); ‘feelings’ (fright) and ‘processes’ (conversation). Students would spend time looking for the names of things in the test item because the instructions clearly stipulate so. An extensive search in the Teachers’ Manual found no acknowledgement or comments on the nature of the pictures in the test, which shows how *easily* these aspects of test designing can be overlooked and taken for granted.

**Designer-driven answers**

The analysis reveals the heavy reliance of the standardised tests papers examined on providing multiple choice answers. The three asTTle tests consisted of 79 questions. Seventy-five are provided with multiple choice answers, and four require students to make up their own responses. The two STAR tests (A and B), on the other hand, are comprised of one hundred and sixty questions. While forty of the STAR questions are constructed response/s, which require students to fill in six cloze tests, one hundred and twenty are given multi choice answers. This means that with a total of two hundred and thirty-nine questions across the five tests analysed, 82% (195) test items are accompanied by multi-choice answers that have been designed and pre-determined by the test designers and 18% (44) are constructed response/s. Further analysis revealed that the constructed response/s are made up of forty single word responses (in the STAR A and B tests) and only four test items require students to make up their own answers to show their understanding of the texts. Three of these four test items are found in the asTTle Level 4/5 and one was in asTTle Level 3/4. As the kalafi below shows:





#### Ata 5.4: Types of answers in the STAR and asTTle tests

The multiple-choice format is arguably the most objective, efficient and cheap method of testing available (Elley & Mangubhait, 1992). It is practical as a method of testing large numbers of learners and it guarantees ease of marking for teachers. On the other hand, critics claim that these tests are prone to guessing on the part of the students hence raising doubts about whether multiple-choice items in language tests have any value as a diagnostic tool (Currie & Chiramanee, 2010, p. 487).

Multiple choice tests tend to create particular kinds of students, with certain multiple choice responding strategies. As they develop appropriate strategies, students become quite skilled in these types of test taking such that they read the discriminators carefully to eliminate wrong answers or even getting access to other tests for practice and revision. In terms of standardised reading tests, like the STAR and asTTle, multiple choice questions raise concerns about its validity to measure: the students' English language knowledge and proficiency; the students' ability to deal successfully with multiple-choice items; and their intelligence to understand the test contents. In sum, the results of such standardised tests are unlikely to reflect fully, the responses that the test takers will offer if the test was set in a constructed-response/s format.

The next example is taken out of the asTTle Level 4 test. The poem, about the Steam Shovel is followed by four questions. These examples demonstrate the incomprehensible nature of some of the answers in the multiple choice questions. The uncertainty created by the responses of these types lead to students' needing more time than they are given to unpack and understand them. Furthermore, these complicated

responses warrant misinterpretations by some students which lead to choosing incorrect answers and hence poor performance levels.

### Steam Shovel

*Charles Malam's poems ask us to look at everyday objects from a different perspective*

The dinosaurs are not all dead.  
I saw one raise its iron head  
To watch me walking down the road  
Beyond our house today.  
Its jaws were dripping with a load  
Of earth and grass that it had cropped.  
It must have heard me where I stopped,  
Snorted white steam my way,  
And stretched its long neck out to see,  
And chewed, and grinned quite amiably.

*Question 1: The poet uses a dinosaur to compare to a steam shovel rather than another creature because*

- A. steam shovels were also prehistoric creatures*
- B. dinosaurs ate earth and grass*
- C. steam shovels are huge and have long necks*
- D. dinosaurs are buried deeply where steam shovels dig*

It seems that huge assumptions are made about students' background experiences in this text. A steam shovel is something rarely seen or heard of therefore is not an 'everyday object' to some Samoan students. Students who may have the knowledge of steam shovels and poetry may find that all of the answers are correct. The use of personification in the poem has given the steam shovel human qualities (as in C). Steam shovels date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>14</sup>, so they are prehistoric creatures (as in A). Science textbooks have documented that dinosaurs ate grass and earth and are fossilised deep underground (as in B and D). The kinds of answers require students to think like the test designers who thought up and wrote these pre-determined answers, as it is only then that they (students) are able answer the questions correctly.

*Question 2: The effect of the line 'Snorted white steam my way' is to*

- A. compare the speaker's fear of the shovel's size*
- B. establish the historic validity of dinosaurs*
- C. continue the comparison between the shovel and a dinosaur*

<sup>14</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steam\\_shovel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steam_shovel)

*D. emphasise the insignificance of humans when confronted*

It is difficult to determine the right and expected answer from the list provided because none of them is correct. Toma and Simi declared;

*That was really hard, so hard... I just ticked any answer*

Mika on the other hand, has his own interpretation;

*I thought it was more like the steam shovel acknowledging the poet, not any of those...*

*Question 3: Based upon the description Malam uses, you would characterise the steam shovel as*

*A. rude*

*B. bored*

*C. friendly*

*D. loving*

All of these answers are correct. If the students consider how white steam is snorted towards the direction of the poet, then they may think of it to be rude (as in A). If students consider how it lifts its head to watch Malama, walking down the road, and stretches its long neck to see, then they may see it as being loving and friendly (as in C and D). If they visualise the steam shovel as something that is stuck to one position doing the same job of digging and shoving, then they may judge it as being 'bored' (as in B).

The same incomprehensibility is noted in the Subtest 4 of the STAR test. The question asks students to choose a word that 'means the same' or 'nearly the same', as the underlined word. The examples below illustrate the existence of more than one right answer which can cause confusion for students.

***Example: STAR B, Subtest 4***

9. At a crucial stage, the officer's courage deserted him.  
determination / bravery / panic / ambition

The word 'courage' means bravery in most writing dictionaries hence the correct answer. Nevertheless, students would possibly pick 'determination' and 'ambition' because both words meant 'nearly the same' as bravery.

The examples below demonstrate the same uncertainty for students. In these test items, students are expected to circle the word that ‘best’ completes the sentences.

*Example: STAR B, Subtest 2*

3. My Dad’s an expert in the kitchen; his chocolate chip muffins are . . .  
goodly / delicious / baked / sweet

*Example: STAR A, Subtest 2*

10. Grandma entered my room, and was confronted with a scene of utter . . .  
comfort / disappointments / chaos / mix-up

In the first example, some Samoan students can easily pick up on chocolate chip muffins as the key idea and ‘sweet’ being the experience they can associate readily with muffins, hence the ‘best’ answer. Moreover, ‘sweet’ means good and delicious in the New Zealand vernacular. However since ‘delicious’ is the expected answer, they will instantly be disadvantaged. Likewise, in the second example, when the expected answer is chaos, whereas disappointments can easily be a perfect option as well.

The types of answers demonstrated in the examples above exemplify how these types of answers (and questions) could become major drawbacks for some students, such as Samoans, who are not culturally aligned with the Standard English language use. Students are put through pointless stress and are forced to spend unnecessary time to try to unravel the puzzled options. Since students are working under the normalising gaze of assessments, such questions and answers channel students’ thinking and to what extent.

By contrast, constructed-response/s tests demand more time for students to make up and write down answers. Teachers also need more time to mark and moderate to address any inconsistency involved in marking. Although more time is needed to construct responses in tests, they may be more appropriate for some Samoan students. This is because constructed response/s tests allow Samoan students to interpret the test questions according to their own understanding of the world. Because students share limited understanding and prior experience with the test items, hence they have difficulty connecting and associating with the responses given in the standardised tests. The current multi-choice preferred testing system restricts students’ chances of expressing their understanding of the test items, to respond in their own words, and to have their thoughts encouraged, shared and evaluated.

## Modality

A modality is a linguistic device that indicates the degree to which an observation is possible, probable, likely, certain, permitted, or prohibited (Derewianka, 2002). These notions are commonly expressed by modal auxiliaries. Modality allows the speakers and writers to attach expressions of belief, attitude and obligation to statements.

The analysis shows a high number of modals scattered across the five test papers. These include modal nouns, adverbs and adjectives. Examples from the asTTle tests include;

1. *Which of these is the BEST summary of the passage?*
2. *Which of the following is CLOSEST to the meaning of...?*
3. *In her letter, Jodi Cook is MOST concerned about the...*
4. *Which words PROBABLY describe how the narrator felt...?*

From the STAR test papers;

1. *Put a circle around the word that BEST completes the sentence*
2. *Put the circle around the word that MIGHT persuade you to do what the advertisement says.*

These modals give the students information about the degree of obligation or certainty involved in the action. The words ‘best’, ‘closest’, ‘most’ and ‘probably’, as highlighted in these examples, are of low modality implicating expressions of a low level of necessity, permissibility and even negations of actions. These kinds of questions are confusing for some Samoans students who are used to hearing and following instructions and responding to questions asked in high modality such as should, must, will, have to, and so forth (Ochs, 1982). With the use of modality in the standardised tests, negotiations are open for students to choose according to what they understand as the ‘best and closest’ which usually is not the same as those expected in the tests. As Toe and Vili expressed;

*You know, what makes sense to us is not the same as what makes sense to them  
[answer sheet] ... (Toe)*

*They ask us to choose what we think is the best answer...which we do...but then  
they mark it wrong... (Vili)*

## Length of testing time

Students spoke of the ‘time’ and ‘understanding of time’ in the fa’afaletui. Students argued that another major problem of standardised tests is not having enough time to work out the answers. As Vili explained;

*We never have enough time... never... I never complete a test... STAR goes too fast and the asTTle is too hard and by the end of the test, I have not finished*

Terry argued that;

*We need much more time... to read and understand instructions... read and think about the information and form the answers to write...*

*...or even to locate the answers in the options; and to tick the right boxes*

Students feel that the STAR test is always ‘a rush’ and that it is unfair that they are not given the freedom to work across the paper to check and complete answers. Fala and Simi exclaimed;

*...cos you’re gonna read and you take longer to read and by the time you finish reading you get told to turn to the next page... (Fala)*

*...sometimes we have to read the instructions or question three or four times before we can start to answer it... (Simi)*

Vili commented;

*It’s like that... we rush, but then all the answers are wrong and it’s no good. Our parents get angry*

He went on;

*If there was enough time... and the stress levels are not high... we could read and take time and answer question... and maybe enjoy the tests... you know learn from it*

Some Samoan students naturally have to do twice the workload, compared to the native speakers of the English language. While the native speakers of English, who have already mastered the English language of the test, proceed straight to answer the questions, Samoan students, who have not, have to unpack and understand the language of the test first, before attempting to answer the questions. Students frequently translate from their first language to English in order to compensate for their limited ability to generate ideas and content (Uzawa & Cumming, 1989); solve vocabulary problems (S. Jones & Tetroe, 1987; Woodall, 2002); or write (Wolfersberger, 2003). More time is also spent trialling and reviewing tasks in English because constructs, task format and design are different

and difficult if working across languages. Worse still, sometimes if tasks are translated, constructs change in subtle ways so that what works in English does not work in the translated text (May, 2013). This means that students who utilise this strategy during assessments are further disadvantaged. Leki and Carson (1997), in their article titled 'Completely different worlds: EAP and the writing experiences of ESL students in University courses' explain how students who speak English as a second language experience writing differently depending on the types of texts students draw on to support their writing. They explain how time is important for students to unpack and internalise the language of texts and construct their ideas (Leki & Carson, 1997). During the fa'afaletui, students shared concerns about not having enough time to complete tests that seem to corroborate Leki and Carson's findings.

The multiple choice questions take time as students need to think and distinguish between the given options. The few constructed response/s questions require even more time since students take longer to understand the questions and create answers in the best 'intelligible' English they could come up with (Elley & Mangubhait, 1992). For some Samoan students, intelligible English includes the semantic, syntactical and grapho-phonical rules of the English language. For others, for example, the Asian and Middle Eastern students, intelligible English also includes a new system of lettering and font. Sometimes students who are not native speakers of English find transferring the answers in their heads to paper difficult (van Weijen, van den Bergh, Rijlaarsdam, & Sanders, 2009; Woodall, 2002). Students struggle during the response, constructing and writing process to plan, revise, edit and search for appropriate phrases, drawing on both their first and second languages as resources, and attending more closely to their ideas in respect to the forms of the second language (A. Cumming, 2001). This difficulty is only made worse if there is insufficient time for students to process, negotiate and work out the answers for the questions. The shortage of time is upsetting for students. Molly recounted:

*There's this boy in our class... the teacher called 'time's up' and he cried...cos he had only done one story... the test was too difficult... he spent all that time reading and working out answers for that one text... and he cried... I felt really sorry for him*

The same was reflected in Josh's comments;

*...they do not have enough knowledge because they get stuck and when the teacher says stop, they get sad and upset*

According to Julie;

*...it's actually the people that are slow at learning that need more time to do the test... you know; people like me with limited English ... some people take a longer time to find the answers but time is limited so they can't do it...*

Students pointed out that sitting still for the forty minute tests is difficult. Students feel infuriated and confused when the tests are difficult (Tony, Rita, Molly, Sala); annoyed that they cannot ask for support (Toma, Simi, Josh, Julie, Anna); nervous as they have to race against time (Sina, Vili, Lisa, Terry, Mika); and irritated when they forget what they have studied and read (Toe, Fala). Students claim that getting a headache, being sweaty, panicky and numb is normal and expected during a test.

These concerns were noted by teachers;

*Some students find sitting still for forty minutes hard... for example, some, especially the young year sevens and boys... we put it down as an unwillingness to persevere...*

*This negative attitude towards tests is not good on the data... As soon as you say start, they get to it... and within the first 10 minutes, and fifteen minutes and twenty minutes... they push the paper forward... finish miss... they do not realise how serious these things are... they don't*

*The tests are hard and they do not have the ability to carry it through... the limited attention span... sometimes the test can be hard so students drift off... they just give up*

Some students did not have an authentic awareness of time. While students all knew about the time expected to complete the different tests, yet a real knowledge of what the time felt like in terms of periodic lengths did not register. For example, Anna knew the asTTle was for 40 minutes however was confused every time the teacher reminded them of the remaining minutes. As she asserted;

*I don't know the difference between 40 and 20 and 10... perhaps I need to learn what '10 minutes' (quote) feel like... When the teacher says times up... and I haven't finished*

Vili added;

*No... we never finish... I just guess to try to finish...*

*Nah no one can finish the test. Too much aye...*

In sum, the impact of time and how it is allocated during the standardised tests has critical, physical, emotional and academic impacts on students and their assessment results and hence achievement level. In the language of Foucault, students, as participants of the assessment discourse: (1) are 'subjected' to these normalised rituals of discourse and; (2)



‘subject themselves’ to the expectations of the discourse. Either way, they become docile bodies of the discourse.

### **Teachers and tests - Inconsistencies in practice and knowledge**

Many teachers remain oblivious to the fact that they bring their own personal, social (and cultural) traditions of meaning-making to the classroom. These teachers tend to assume the best for ‘all’ students from their own Euro-centric world-view which in turn influences their teaching pedagogy (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). This means that a teacher’s classroom practice reflects beliefs and assumptions about teaching that are likely to be embedded in dominant discourses. The beliefs of the teachers are reflected in the powerful deficit thinking which has permeated teachers theorising of Pasifika students’ educational achievement (Nakhid, 2003; Phillips, McNaughton, & MacDonald, 2000); and Māori (Mahuika & Bishop, 2013). These perceptions lead to low expectations of student ability and a self-fulfilling prophecy of students’ failure (Rist, 1970). More New Zealand based research (Hawk, Cowley, Hill, & Sutherland, 2002; Hill & Hawk, 2000) have emphasised the importance of the teacher-student relationship in improving students’ educational achievement. These studies conclude those teachers’ attitudes, values, behaviours, efforts, skills and demonstrable understanding of, and empathy with Māori and Pasifika cultures is critical in the effective teaching of these Pasifika and Māori students (Hawk et al. 2002, p. 45).

As Mika articulated;

*Teachers have their fancy names for us ...you know when they put us in our groups...like ‘low achievers’ or ‘slow readers’ ... they kept saying we are not ranked cos there is no high or low group, but then usually somewhere in their long explanation are those names.... even when they say ‘those who need more support’ is ranking to me...that is kinda funny cos that’s ranking, isn’t it? ...*

Teachers make the effort to display seemingly sincere concern over students’ low academic performance however the terminology employed paradoxically contributes to the social inequalities in school institutions (Nozaki, 2006).

Implied also in Mika’s comments is the power of the discourse of assessments, backed by test results to create institutional discourses, which are then used liberally to create knowledge about students as readers. The accumulation of student marks forms categories, determines averages, fixes norms and labels students. And together with the

importance of rewards and sanctions, it regulates the actions of students hence giving assessments more power (Ball, 2010).

Teachers in the fa'afaletui spoke of the inconsistency in their school assessment systems. These are in terms of teachers' marking, teachers' knowledge of the assessment tools, and assessment administration. Teachers stated:

*Teachers have that freedom to mark their own students' work, there's the thing about you knowing your own students... so we get to make judgement as we see fit...*

*Teachers do sometimes disagree with the answers in the tests, especially the asTTle tests, and then there's the whole talk about answers and questions...it can be quite awful*

*The tests are designed by adults and so answers are from adults' point of view...what students see as right may not be at all, cos that's not what the answers say*

These inconsistencies result in students' evaluations being made entirely in the minds of teachers, which means that there are 'bound to be mistakes' (Sadler, 1989, p. 124), especially in the case of teachers with less experience. Since most of the teachers working with Samoan students are non-Samoans, and do not share the same cultural and linguistic knowledge as the students, such dissimilarity may easily lead to judgements of students based on extraneous factors such as handwriting and neatness, or the 'teachers' personal tastes' (Hoffman, 1962; Sadler, 1987).

The scenarios discussed above reflect what Foucault calls the enmeshment of power and knowledge in the discourse. As teachers are both test administrators and markers, they assume the knowledge and the expertise in the field and subject being tested hence the power to say which knowledge is accepted as the right and true answer. However, in the case of the multi-choice, it is the test writers who hold this power. Either way, the students' fates are at stake, because unless they are able to think like the teachers and test writers, they are bound to fail. As Vili recalled;

*Cos if you get it wrong the teachers can growl at you and make you do it all over again she can say look last year you were up here now you are down here.*

*They (teachers) are supposed to tell your level...but teachers, they put you up there... then you may not understand it.... like you don't get it...then they get all upset, then they put you down there again...*

The analysis seems to suggest that teachers' perceptions of classroom assessments influence their classroom assessment practices. The constant growling and fearful gadgets

employed on students, for example, put downs, withdrawal of praises and rewards, public display of acceptance for smart students and non-acknowledgement of students who are not 'smart', seem to emphasise the teachers' perception that assessment is testing to see how much students have remembered and applied what they have learnt in class. As teachers *too* are subjects of the assessment discourse, it is not surprising that they seem fearful of students' failure to improve their grades.

Teachers seem to have inconsistencies in their own understanding of standardised assessment practices. During the fa'afaletui, one of the teachers disclosed that:

*Teachers are to assume the job of feeling [emphasis] where their students are at... so they can be given that level of tests papers....*

The same teacher stated;

*You can give a Year 7 child a level 5 paper, and if they tick the right boxes... just by guessing... they surely come out at the top...and that is a good look for the data*

This revelation, though disturbing, is happening in the school this teacher is working at and the impact on Samoan students is critical. Teachers and school leaders need to look closely at their assessment systems so that students are effectively assessed so that their learning needs are objectively identified and effectively catered for (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Bradbury, 2011; Cumming, 2008; Cumming & Dickson, 2007; Drummond, 2003). Researchers (for example Brozo & Brozo, 1994; Reyhner & Garcia, 1989) warn against using only standardized reading tests to diagnose students learning needs, because teachers tend to treat these learning needs prescriptively through basic skills instructions. In this case, the teachers' efforts are focused on anchoring a better score. High stakes testing, where there are adverse results for both teacher and student invites manipulation of the testing environment.

In my experience as a primary school teacher, 'being accountable' to the MOE, BOT, the principal, the parents and the students is paramount. Previous research (Hill, 2000) into primary teachers' assessment and recording practices revealed how accountability demands have directed some teachers towards practices such as measuring learning at the expense of improving learning. Teachers who took part in the fa'afaletui were obligated to respond to this expectation of the assessment discourse and they seemed to express their accountability by 'caring' for their students and how they (students) fared in these standardised tests, even perhaps to the detriment of the accuracy of the results.

In the fa'afaletui, teachers referred to tests as being 'unfair' to students and blamed the 'unfair' tests as partially the reason for the students' failure in schools. 'Being unfair', as reflected in the mismatch between what the students learned in schools and what was tested, seemed to be the teachers' understanding of tests. Moreover, negative experiences seemed significant in teachers' understanding of what standardised testing meant. These experiences were due to shameful tactics employed by some schools where teachers whose students were doing well were glorified in staff meetings, and the others, were in turn humiliated.

Teachers' stories in their fa'afaletui seemed to relay limited knowledge of assessment and in particular, standardised tests and testing. There seemed to be uncertainty in administering the tests. Some teachers were still learning how to correctly administer the tests, in according to the guidelines set out in the tests administration manuals. Some teachers appeared to take risks with their students' reading level as they struggled to match the tests to the students' reading abilities. This could have been a contributing factor to the overarching negative notion of struggle students talked about in their own fa'afaletui. Moreover, there seemed to be an understanding that asTTle and STAR were the 'only tests' and hence capable of revealing the 'truth' about students' learning. Teachers did not mention overall teacher judgements and the many other assessment tools and tasks they were free to implement in the classroom to help ascertain their students' learning levels. The concepts that are considered important to assessment such as bias, reliability and validity were not mentioned by teachers in their fa'afaletui.

### **Where to next for teachers and school leaders**

It seems that substantial work is needed to grow teachers' knowledge of assessment. In a review paper titled 'The barriers/enablers of effective assessment professional development and practices in New Zealand secondary schools', Hill reports on the success of sustained commitment of the principals and external facilitators with in depth assessment knowledge and understanding in supporting teachers' knowledge and competence in assessment (Hill, 2017). Such targeted professional development and school wide commitment may be the ways forward to support teachers develop their knowledge and capability in assessment.

Teachers need to know the theoretical and political understandings of standardised tests. They need to know that standardised tests will always be based on the norm, which in New Zealand, is not Samoan students but the majority palagi culture and Standard

English language. Due to the nature of standardised norm referenced tests, which is to reflect a pupil's place in relation to the norm or the dominant discourse, calling for changes in the tests because they seemed unfair, in order to advantage the Samoan students, is unrealistic.

Many opportunities should be provided for teachers to explore and learn from other assessment tools available to them besides the asTTle and STAR tests. Some teachers may also need to learn how to read, interpret and use the students' achievement data to effectively cater for students learning needs. Support is also needed to help some teachers match the level of the tests to their students. Some support is also needed in determining the kind of assessment needed for some students. Some teachers may need help in knowing about overall teacher judgements.

School leaders should ensure the professional developments work for teachers. In my experience as a primary school teacher, well intentioned professional development programmes would stop at theory and seldom practice activities in the staffroom. Quite often, there were no real hands on opportunities for the teachers to apply the new knowledge and skills in their own classroom practices. There was always an assumption that the teachers would learn the new knowledge and skills after one session. Also, there were usually no follow up tasks or monitoring processes in place to encourage teachers to implement the much needed changes. Therefore, some teachers would not see the real need to apply the new knowledge and skills and would tend to fall back to the usual, very comfortable and ineffective old ways. School leaders need to closely monitor and encourage teachers as they learn new knowledge and skills as teachers and test administrators.

### **Concluding comment**

The analysis of the language of the asTTle and STAR tests papers using the Tofā'a'anolasi research framework has revealed how the Samoan students are disadvantaged in the asTTle and STAR reading tests. Many aspects of both the test papers and the way they are administered hinder the students' performance and are directly resulting in their poor achievement and negative experiences of standardised tests. As students disclosed in the fa'afaletui, the difficult English language of the tests makes unpacking and processing the information time consuming and frustrating. Therefore, the difficult English language poses, and will continue to pose linguistic challenges that misrepresent the students'

ability to demonstrate their content knowledge as effectively as their native English speaking counterparts.

Using iloiloga o le gagana as a method to examine the test papers has revealed the mismatch between some of the students' prior knowledge, experience and expectations and those of the tests. Being Samoan, some of these students are told 'of' things, 'about' things and 'to do' things. Therefore, students find modality in the tests 'tricky'. The answers students choose in the tests are often inaccurate, as the answers are choices designed and driven in the knowledge, interests, culture, and prior experience far removed and different from theirs.

The use of unedited texts as reading materials in the standardised tests contradicts that which is normal to some Samoan students and the idea that the teacher and the texts are always right. The students are disadvantaged by vague and misleading texts, questions and instructions. Given the mismatch in knowledge and culture, and the very limited time for students to negotiate the texts, the fact that they struggle to register the tricky nature of these texts means they are highly likely to get them marked incorrect. The technical difficulties such as, the poorly laid out questions and answers, the small and unclear fonts and images, mean that students need more time, to figure out the instructions, read the texts and decide on the best answers.

This chapter has revealed that some teachers and some schools are inconsistent in their assessment systems. Some teachers are still learning to effectively administer and manage the standardised tests. Some schools do not have sufficient monitoring processes in place to oversee that students are served fairly in this regard. Students' learning achievements and needs are misdiagnosed.

The effect of the English language is to conceal its political influence in terms of the curriculum and resourcing. Although schools do not possess people and knowledge, their policies and practices, such as, the compulsory learning of English, enhances and legitimises particular types of cultural resources which are related to unequal educational forms (M. Young, 1971). The English language works in the interests of powerful groups and consequently disadvantages some Samoan students. This is because English is not the students' first and strong language. During a test, students need more time to unpack and process the information, as some students need to translate between English and their first language to compensate for their limited ability to generate ideas and content to solve vocabulary problems before they can compose their responses to test questions. The

limited time given to complete the standardised tests means these students are deprived of the opportunity to show their reading skills and their understanding of texts.

Another key challenge of assessment for Samoan students is the mismatch between their culture and interests and those assumed in the tests. The next chapter will explore the interrelationships and, in particular, the disparity between the students' cultures and interests and standardised tests.

## **Matā'upu Lona Ono: Fa'ataumatau-Cultural Discourse**

The dilemma ...is addressing the more fundamental issue of power, of whose voice gets to be heard in determining what is best for poor children and children of color...To do so takes a very special kind of listening, listening that requires not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds. We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs. To put our beliefs on hold is to cease to exist as ourselves for a moment... and being willing to see yourself in the unflattering light of another's angry gaze. It is not easy, but it is the only way to learn what it might feel like to be someone else and the only way to start the dialogue (Delpit, 1988, pp. 296-297).

### **Introduction**

In New Zealand, students from cultures other than English are disadvantaged due to the predominantly Euro-centric nature and culture of assessment practices. Without even intending it, the way the assessment papers are constructed tends to promote the European knowledge and culture. This is particularly so if we examine the way the assessment tasks are framed including the choice of linguistic codes and conventions, and the choice of the knowledge and interests, that is far removed from the reality and experiences of some of the non-European students.

Foucault considers human beings as constructed by cultural discourse (Foucault, 2001). As people conform to the dominant cultural structure and discourse, they become both 'subjects of' and objects shaped and influenced by the dominant cultural discourse. Culture in this sense arises from the learned behaviour patterns, language, knowledge and perceptions that arise from inference, experience and reflection (Audi, 1998). The fa'asamoa or the Samoan culture includes practices, beliefs, philosophy, indigenous and 'indigenised' intellectual property of information, that is unique to the Samoans (Quanchi, 2004).

The Samoan culture in this thesis refers to that of Samoan communities living in Samoa. The New Zealand Samoan culture, in this thesis refers to the culture and interests of the Samoan parents living in New Zealand. The New Zealand Samoan culture is referred to in this thesis as the New Zealand fa'asamoa. Although they are not the same it is obvious that they are closely related. The two distinct definitions reflect the notion that the Samoans migrating to New Zealand have brought their culture with them and since then, they have tended to adapt their culture and traditions in ways they see fit for the context. The concepts of fa'asamoa and Samoan culture are used interchangeably throughout this chapter and refer to the Samoan culture itself.



In this chapter, I argue that both the Samoan culture and the school culture affect students. The New Zealand fa'asamoa, as well as the influence of the environment has resulted in the emergence of a subculture of Samoan students. This subculture reflects the tensions of the two cultural contexts that are for the most part completely different. These ideas are of their parents' New Zealand fa'asamoa and that of New Zealand suburban adolescent culture. As culture (or subculture) influences the ways in which students construct knowledge and create meaning from experience including how the students think about things, reason, and solve problems, it relates directly to the ways in which they learn in school settings (Mika, 2012). Assessment is part of the school culture and therefore the assumptions that the Samoan students' knowledge conforms to that of the standardised tests expectations of 'normal' actually is disadvantageous to them.

The culture or cultures assumed in assessments will be discussed in terms of the hegemonic nature of the standardised tests. This discussion will be organised into the language of delivery, the nature of administration and the knowledge and interest locatedness of the test items. In addition, in this chapter I will discuss certain assumptions inherent in the test materials that utilise the knowledge of Samoan students, yet paradoxically are disadvantageous to them.

The application of Tofā'a'anolasi research framework reveals an incongruity between the test/school beliefs and some Samoan students' understandings and experiences. The analysis of culture and interests in this chapter incorporates three cultural categories, specifically, the Samoan student, the Samoan parent/s and the tests. The Samoan student category includes topics and subject matter related to the suburban culture and the interests of students. The Samoan parent category includes topics and subject matter relative to adults and to the parents of Samoan students. The Test category has topics and subject matter that are centred on the dominant mainstream culture of New Zealand. Moreover, some of the texts in the Test category are 'adult focused' and as such are not oriented towards the Samoan students or their parents.

The outline of the Samoan culture, as understood in Samoa and in New Zealand is included in this chapter, to illustrate the incongruity of the assumptions found in the test items. These descriptions highlight the ideas and practices that are valued by Samoan parents and students. Through the analysis of the various cultural discourses represented in the test papers and participants' stories, I argue that cultural and linguistic minority groups, for example, Samoans are not at all well represented, positioned or served.

Therefore, it is not surprising that some Samoan students among others are experiencing low levels in terms of achievements according to the standardised educational assessment measures.

### **Samoan knowledge, culture and traditions**

Samoa's culture and traditions represent the accumulation of indigenous knowledge, understanding, skills and values that are unique and meaningful to Samoans. In particular, this indigenous knowledge system integrates the historical and technical insights along with detailed observations of natural, social and spiritual phenomena. This system sustains people, connects them to particular places and is crucial to their identity. Samoan traditions, deeply rooted in the past, continue to direct Samoans' lives at present (Lawson, 1977).

Samoa's culture and traditions are based on the core values of respect, caring for one another, communal collaboration and consensus. These values serve as a foundation for all Samoan practices concerning relationships; obligation and reciprocity; human responsibility; kinship; church and community; solidarity; commitment and loyalty; collective decision-making and action; cooperation and shared leadership; attachment to the land and the sea; humility and generosity; the upholding of human dignity; love, harmony and peace. Samoan children are taught that the way to knowledge and power is to honour their culture and traditions. Examples of these expectations include: observing the feagaiga between sisters and brothers as discussed in the next chapter; not commenting on anything the adults say or do, since this is viewed as impolite; and physically serving those in higher-ranking positions such as parents, grandparents, teachers and church ministers (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1991).

Samoa indigenous knowledge is communally made, sanctioned, shared and used with the aim of achieving the good life for all members. For Samoans these include the correct use of the Samoan language; an understanding of Samoan protocols; and knowing the Samoan ways of walking, sitting, standing and talking (Metge & Kinloch, 1989). This knowledge is traditionally passed on from the elders to the younger generation in daily life events, such as, fishing, weaving, meetings of the extended family, by word of mouth and most importantly, by modelling. Families living in Samoa and in New Zealand continue to uphold these traditional teachings through daily activities and chores, conversations and story-telling mainly by grandparents and great grandparents. Writers

who have written about the importance of story-telling include Simanu-Krutz (Simanu-Krutz, 2001), Tanielu (Tanielu, 2004) and Tui Atua (Tui Atua, 2009b).

## **New Zealand Samoan culture**

On the one hand, in a multi-cultural country, such as New Zealand, cultural identities are often considered politically progressive. It opens up identity categories that serve to increase diversity and fluidity. This is since New Zealanders, similar to other human beings, are products of historical process to date. We construct our identity based on thinking and thought patterns we have inherited from the past. On the other hand, the structuring and colouring of educational, social and political interactions still strongly reflect the 'old idea of European superiority' over others (Bell, 2004). This culture of New Zealand is very strong in schools where the students are expected to acculturate. The tensions inherent in the expectation of acculturation are widely documented (Stewart, 2010; Tuafuti, 2010).

Samoans who have migrated and are living in New Zealand have brought the Samoan culture and religion with them. Since they arrived in New Zealand, they have been negotiating tradition and modernity in this global, political and economic context the same as other Pacific Islanders. Through this process, Samoans are actively affirming and transforming their culture at the same time. Since then modified versions of the Samoan culture have emerged as people have adapted the culture to suit its application in this foreign country (Shankman, 2004; Unasa, 2009; Wendt, 1996). Nevertheless, and despite the hybridised contextual adaption and application of the fa'asamoa, the Samoan saying, 'E sui faiga ae tumau fa'avae' (Applications change but principles do not) confirms that in spite of the different ways people apply or practice the Samoan culture, the underpinning values of love, respect for others and for oneself, and communal care, never change.

The resilience of Samoan philosophies is evidenced in the way Samoans in the diaspora including New Zealand; continue to allow their cultural decisions to be influenced by their past-ness, for instance, decisions made by their parents, grandparents and great grandparents that have passed away. Evidence of this includes upholding the honour and privilege of the matai, the practice of fa'alagilagiga o fa'alupega (chanting of honorifics) during certain occasions, such as, at meetings, church, funerals and weddings where Samoans congregate and get together. During these special occasions, traditional 'ava ceremonies are also ritualised as a sign of respect and acknowledgment. The fa'asamoa,

or the Samoan culture is also acknowledged in the way Samoans maintain the va tapu'ia (sacred respect) between matai and family members, church ministers and congregation, parents and children; feagaiga (sacred covenant) between brothers and sisters; and va fealoa'i (mutual respect for each other) and between each other in the community.

Some Samoans living in New Zealand thrive in maintaining their modified culture and traditions in families, churches, work places and schools. They maintain close family ties in spite of distant geographical locations, attend churches, bury their dead and wed their loved ones in the fa'asamoa. In New Zealand, the diasporic fa'asamoa is carried out in fully enclosed halls instead of a village malae. The church congregation replaces the village in the cultural transactions. Larger amounts of money and food are used as exchanged gifts. From the standpoint of Samoa itself, every Samoan in New Zealand is believed to have money, whether from salaries or Social Welfare benefits.

Many diasporic Samoans in New Zealand find the physical detachment from the country, land, villages, families, jobs and loved ones challenging and difficult. This difficulty becomes a 'cultural phenomenon' specific to them and is immediately laid down as the emotional pathway to reflect on consistently whilst living abroad. This attitude makes possible what Said (1984, p. 55) describes as the 'plurality of vision', as the Samoans in 'exile' see life both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actually here and now; a double perspective that never sees things in isolation'(cited in Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 2001, p. 41). Parents work hard to earn money not just for themselves but for their families in Samoa. Children are consistently reminded by their parents, of the difficult choice to leave their homeland for New Zealand, for a better future. These talks reflect the sheer determination of the Samoan parents to make the move to New Zealand worthwhile, both materially and educationally. All Samoan parents, like any other parent, want their children to succeed. Although the way parents go about ensuring success is beyond the realm of this project, the students' stories shared in the fa'afaletui indicate the parents' passion for their children to persevere in furthering their education.

*They expect a high standard... they say to'aga e fai le aoga (persevere in your school work) ... (Vili)*

*To get a good score, to try harder, to do better... and it makes me feel determined to do well in the tests... (Mika)*

*My parents ask how well I do in tests, they ask what the words mean, but they get confused sometimes... (Vili)*

*They know education... they want what's best... (Lisa)*

*They expect me to do my best... they say do your tests now then think about a job later... (Mika)*

*They make sure I do my homework... do my best, they always say, do well at school... (Josh)*

*My parents ask about the tests, we discuss the difficult questions... they push my limits... they take me to classes, extra classes... and they get me the tutors for the subjects that I struggle with... (Toma)*

It is clear from the stories above that the students' parents value a New Zealand education, and want their children to do well. They know it is the best way for their children to have a chance at a better future and they tell them to do their work and remind them to do their best since these are the most obvious strategies to support these ambitions.

Some Samoan parents are also determined that their children maintain their language, knowledge and culture. This is reflected in activities such as the daily family evening prayers, the establishments of Samoan bilingual programs and Aoga Amata Fa'asamoa, radio programs in the Samoan language, regular family visits to and from Samoa and attending church. In church, traditional rituals are enacted, proper behaviour is rewarded, and Samoan values are reinforced. With weekly church services, choir practice, youth groups, Sunday schools and prayer meetings, churches play an important part in the raising and shaping of the lives of some Samoan children in New Zealand (Fletcher, Parkhill, & Faafoi, 2005; Tagoilelagi-Leota, McNaughton, MacDonald, & Farry, 2005; Tanielu, 2004). Barbara Burns McGrath noted the same observations in a study conducted in Seattle (USA) in 2002 (McGrath, 2002).

For some Samoan children living in New Zealand, these daily fa'asamoa practices are the normal aspects of their daily lives. The combination of these factors influences their understanding of life, their knowledge, their choices, and their educational achievements.

### **Samoan students' suburban culture**

Samoan students living in New Zealand are at the receiving end of two cultures, the New Zealand Samoan culture of their parents and the New Zealand culture of their peers, school and surroundings. At the same time, they have adopted a hybridised suburban culture, which is discussed further below. It is a constant struggle for these students to understand the contradictory nature of the way of doing things 'in the school' and 'in the home'. At school, the students' decisions and thinking are influenced by the cultures of their peers and the culture of the New Zealand schools. At home, their parents, whose

own thinking is still deeply embedded in the New Zealand Samoan culture, as discussed in the previous section, control students' activities and thinking. This conflict is expressed or felt in terms of what to do, how much, when to do, with whom and so forth. While it is not necessarily the parents' desire to control their children, it is to keep them safe, from danger and from themselves. The next chapter (Matā'upu Lona Fitu) highlights the importance of feagaiga as Samoan families living in New Zealand uphold its significance to keep each other safe.

At home some students watch their parents donate money and goods to the church and families (Unasa, 2009). Some students attend family meetings, weddings, funerals and church where the New Zealand Samoan culture is practiced. They (students) watch and hear the language and culture in action, take part in the presenting and receiving of gifts and in serving their elders. In the evenings some students read the bible, sing hymns and join in family conversations (Anae, 2002). The Samoan language is still used although in varying degrees and in dialect (Starks, 2005). Although some students may not speak their native language they can understand it. Some students who live with their grandparents receive the extra boost of the fa'asamoa by having to communicate with them in the Samoan language, and they hear stories about Samoa, explained in the Samoan language. Some parents living in New Zealand do emphasise 'respect' and 'caring for each other' as paramount since they not only signify Samoans as Samoans, also as a survival mode. These fa'asamoa values keep the family intact, in defiance of resistance to the individualistic 'palagi' context of New Zealand. Together with these fa'asamoa expectations, students are also exposed to the long hours of New Zealand Eurocentric values expressed through the television, the radio, the internet and other forms of public spectacle (Tui Atua, 1994).

At school, students are expected to speak a language different from that spoken at home. Some students who have been speakers of English all their lives, as they grew up in New Zealand, still find the teachers' English, as well as the curriculum in the English language to be different from their own, their parents' and siblings' form of English. At school some students may be ridiculed if they cannot articulate an evaluation or a critique of another person's ideas and work, yet they receive praise for showing good manners and being polite for that very reluctance to criticize at home. At school, some students are taught concepts concerning topics, such as, drugs and sex that are taboo and unspoken topics at home. Some subjects or pedagogical practices may require them to engage in activities that are considered to be offensive in their culture, for example, questioning a

teacher, or commenting on an adult's point of view. Consequently, some Samoan students hold simultaneous cultural obligations and tensions that prompt ambiguous and silenced identities, mixed messages, and prompt unspoken feelings.

This thesis is concerned with Samoan students at the ages of twelve and thirteen, who have developed, along with the dual culture of their parents and of New Zealand, a third, suburban hybrid, identity of their own. The three identities comprise a 'New Zealand Samoan child', a 'New Zealand Samoan student', and a New Zealand 'suburban teenager'. As children of New Zealand Samoan parents, they are expected to be content, obedient and polite. As New Zealand Samoan students, they are expected to speak their minds and ask questions, which seem rude and confrontational. As suburban teenagers, they are expected to hang out with their multi-ethnic friends; and engage successfully in a variety of communication media, such as, playing video games, and navigating online environments. Some participate in after-school programs; engage in everyday cultural exchanges; involve in countless other settings while still maintaining their integrity as children of New Zealand Samoan parents.

As these students go out in the community, the *fa'asamoa* of respect is supposed to define who they are (as mentioned in the previous paragraph) as implicated in the *amirolelei* (good behaviour) (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1991). For example, while they are at church, they immediately and automatically take on board the home culture in terms of being respectful and obedient. At school the students' home language and culture are left at the school gate (Keesing, 2000) and their New Zealand Samoan identity takes over as they merge into the New Zealand culture of the school, the teachers and the curriculum.

This ability of students to blend multiple identities seems to support Bhabha's concept of a hybrid identity that is not arrested, fixed or static, rather one that exists in a 'complex relationship to temporality' (Drichel, 2008, p. 589). Such an identity is fluid, responsive to changing conditions, and able to remake itself anew in each generation (*ibid*). Drichel (2008) points out that the temporality inherent in Bhabha's idea of hybridity as the third space invokes an identity in which the Samoan student, for example, in the New Zealand school milieu, is able to hold the tension of the opposition and explore the possibilities between the different cultural sources. The third space allows students the freedom to adapt principles to enable them to integrate contradictory identities at the same time. From a political and policy perspective, it is within this third space that the complexity of modern indigenous cultural identities remains, that constantly resists the closure of neat

political and policy solutions and resolutions to Pacific educational achievement and / or underachievement.

The figure below illustrates the life of the Year 7 & 8 Samoan students living in New Zealand.



**Ata 7.1: Illustrating the influences impacting on the life of a Samoan student living in New Zealand**

To a certain degree, this illustration shows the complexity of Samoan students' identity formation. At the centre of the illustration is the student whose daily responsibility is to learn as much as s/he can about the Western knowledge and culture of the school which is rapidly becoming more and more computerised. Surrounding the student are some of the inter-related factors that contribute to the wealth of knowledge and experience s/he possesses and brings to school, as explained herein (from top, then clockwise).

At the top is the student's family of grandparents, parents, aunties, uncles, sisters, brothers and cousins with whom they share a house and the contents, including clothes, pillows and sometimes toothbrushes and so on. The child's behaviour and knowledge is guarded and influenced by the knowledge and culture of his/her family. At home, the student is taught to respect and serve the elders as the way to success, which they obey. Since these



children are young and living with their families, they are expected to participate in family activities, such as attending church, funerals, weddings and the bestowing of titles while they observe and participate in the culture. Within their surroundings whether it is their home or their school, their lives are very much influenced by their peers as well as Facebook and other forms of media entertainment.

Living the hybrid-trio suburban identity is not simple. Previous studies involving Samoan students in the diaspora have highlighted their struggle to respond to competing sets of values (Anae, 2002; Duranti, 1997; McGrath, 2002; Tiatia, 1998), and the evolving nature of the Samoan language (Duranti, 1997). Some Samoan students, who must negotiate three separate identities all at the same time, are not successful in carrying any of them through to their satisfaction. Some struggle with all of them or with the New Zealand English and Samoan languages, ideologies and conceptual knowledge at home and at school. The students' exposure to the New Zealand culture through the various media and education is not sufficient to enable them to absorb and comprehend every English word they need to learn to enable success in activities including standardised tests. Seeing products advertised on television is not enough to teach them the purpose and effects of these texts. The Euro-centric curriculum is not sufficient to prepare students for tests. Whilst for non-Samoan students, the language is constantly reformed and refined, for Samoan students there is an abrupt break between popular cultural English and the high language of their church and political gatherings. These issues contribute to the dilemma and challenges faced by Samoan students, as evidenced by the high rate of under-achievement amongst them and other Pasifika students in schools (Ministry of Education, 2013; Sutton, COMET, & Airini, 2011). In sum, the current education and assessment systems does not succeed to effectively incorporate and build on the multitude of experience, knowledge, cultures, linguistic abilities, and interests these students bring into the classrooms. This is also reflected in the chapter epigraph (above).

On the other hand, the conflicting dynamics of Samoan students' culture to that of the norm adds fuel to the 'othering and marginalising' students suffer in schools (Borrero, Yeh, Cruz, & Suda, 2012). Balancing multiple cultural realities and school expectations often leaves students feeling alienated and alone (ibid). Students who choose to succeed in school often are confronted with the stereotypes that dictate their place in schools, as Jones found in her study on how Samoan girls were *expected* to learn in an Auckland college (A. Jones, 1989, 1991). And it appears, the 'othering' seems to be reinforced by the pathologizing of diversity in schools, the rupture of academic and cultural worlds, and

the delineation of insiders and outsiders by those in power (Borrero et al., 2012). What stands out though is the need for students to be subjected to the culture of the school (Ball, 2010).

### **Bi/multilingualism, multiculturalism, suburban interests and orientations**

The literature on bilingualism and multilingualism addresses a wide range of benefits from the social, emotional, educational, and scientific, to the globally economic, even to the point that possibly, bilingual and multilingual brains have the ability to delay the effects of Alzheimer's disease (Golda, 2015; Schweizer, Ware, Fischer, Craik, & Bialystok, 2012; Weigmann, 2014). According to Weigmann (Weigmann, 2014), having to switch between languages on a regular basis enhances executive control as students make frequent linguistic choices, where they activate one language and suppress the other. This action is beneficial as it is a form of practicing cognitive multi-tasking. Rapid globalization and economic growth, and the necessity for easy access to information warrant learning more than one language. Since this thesis is concerned with assessment, the focus of the following paragraphs is on the advantages of bilingualism, multilingualism and multiculturalism on the social, emotional and educational development of students, such as, Samoans.

During the tests, students including most Samoans, who speak English as a second language, move back forth between English and Samoan, using the two languages to unpack the test materials. This is an advantage of being bilingual, that the child is able to negotiate between the two or more languages to work out the answers. And this scenario, for example, works on the principle that the child utilises his/her knowledge of the known to support the learning of the unknown (McNaughton, 2002; Tuafuti, 2000). In terms of their linguistic ability, students engaging in this activity are capitalising on the language they are strong in, which is usually their first language, to support their understanding in the other, in which they are not as strong (Cummins, 1979; 1986).

### **Government recognition of multicultural New Zealand**

The increasingly multicultural nature of New Zealand is celebrated in various ways in schools. For instance: in the yearly celebration of ethnic languages, such as, the Samoan Language Week; the Diwali Festival; the Chinese New Year; and the annual Secondary School Polynesian-Festival. It is also acknowledged and celebrated in programmes such as bilingual classes, language nests, various ethnic Home Work Centres, Home-School

Partnerships and Family Reading Together. There are also research and professional readings made available (online) for educators and parents on the Ministry of Education Website<sup>15</sup>. These readings promote the bilingual education approach for students who speak English as a second language. Even so, the success of this approach depends on effective teaching based on student needs, goals, interests, cultural beliefs and knowledge, background experiences, and learning styles (Franken, May, & McComish, 2008). Unfortunately, even with this acknowledgement and understanding, the evident paucity of recognition of Samoan (as well as other minority groups) students' knowledge, culture and interests in the test papers, suggests the necessity for a major reconsideration and rethinking, regarding which knowledge is equated with 'achievement' in assessments, taking into account the extreme diversity of the New Zealand student population (Bishop, O'Sullivan, & Berryman, 2010).

Critics, such as Baker (1995) and May (2013), argue that a bilingual person's English language performance should not be compared with those with mono-lingual English language competence. This is because 'bilingual' is not the simple sum of two monolinguals, rather it is a unique combination and integration of languages. This ultimately means that monolingual norms are simply not appropriate for bilinguals. The recommended solutions to the problems of testing bilinguals include the following: (1) minimise the potential harm in the utilisation of existing tests for bilingual individuals; (2) ban all testing of bilingual students until more valid tests can be produced for bilingual populations and finally (3) develop alternative approaches to testing. This third option is the best one that would be most favoured by many teachers, educationists and parents. For example, it would introduce bilingual norms, more portfolio-type assessment and greater cultural and linguistic awareness of bilingual students (Baker, 1995).

### **The culture of standardised tests**

Standardised assessment is 'scientific' in definition and nature. It is something that is put together to satisfy an immediate need and solve a problem (Madaus & Horn, 2000). It includes a complex system of standardised knowledge, skill, methods and procedures for attaining a pre-determined end in social, economic, administrative and educational institutions (ibid). These descriptions suggest standardised assessment and testing are essentially instrumentalist, in other words, a form of technology (Johnston, 2004).

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<sup>15</sup> <http://pasifika.tki.org.nz/>

As a technology, standardised testing and, in particular, those that control the testing, assume the power to discipline, control and punish (Foucault, 1977) its participants, such as, students, teachers and schools. Standardised testing regulates schools and the people in them. This is demonstrated in the choices offered by some teachers to teach to the test (Hill, 2000), as mentioned earlier in this thesis, and some schools to manipulate their achievement data to avoid sanctions by the Ministry of Education for poor performance. Students are driven to study hard because these standardised assessments determine their chances of getting certificates (Rosengarten, 2000). For the Year 7 and 8 students this thesis is mostly concerned about, achieving good marks in these tests to ensure a good chance of getting a Year 9 scholarship from the local colleges or a placement in the desired higher decile<sup>16</sup> college their parents want them to attend after intermediate school. Overall, standardised testing controls and modifies actions of examinees and school personnel (Foucault, 1971).

Standardised assessments have a contextual culture that disadvantages students from minority social, cultural and linguistic groups (J. J. Cumming & Dickson, 2007; Janks, 2010; Klenowski, 2009; LaCelle-Peterson, 2000; Madaus & Horn, 2000; Volante, 2008). These shortcomings include the cultural biases and mismatches in the level of cultural competence that is necessary for these students to successfully negotiate standardised tests (Mahon, 2006). This is because the answers the assessors look for from the students are culturally determined (Gipps, 1999). Answering questions requires not just abstract intellectual or language specific knowledge; it requires cultural knowledge appropriate to the tests. In the case of the Year 7 and 8 standardised reading tests examined in this thesis, the appropriate cultural knowledge is that of the dominant mainstream middleclass culture of the New Zealand society.

Assessments often demand knowledge not covered in the regular curriculum. The enormous amount of knowledge and or skills students have at any grade level cannot be tested using one test. Popham (1999) explains that standardised tests consist of only a collection of test items that can generate valid norm-referenced interpretations of a

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<sup>16</sup> Deciles are a way in which the Ministry of Education allocates funding to schools. A school's decile rating indicates the extent to which it draws its students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students. More information can be found on <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/Schools/SchoolOperations/Resourcing/ResourcingHandbook/Chapter1/DecileRatings.aspx>

student's achievement regarding a substantial chunk of content (as mentioned earlier in the thesis). Nevertheless, and in the case of the Samoan students who took part in this research, the effort they put forth, in other words, their best attempt is not recognised. The asTTle and STAR tests examined in this project are biased since they tend to favour the privileged or students with the necessary 'cultural capital' of the tests (Bourdieu, 1991). Because of the high stakes involved in the standardised tests, students are sometimes caused to over think their answers hence produce low scores, an aspect Hoffman refers to as a mockery to the intelligence of the course and the examiner, as well as, the examinee (1962, p. 53). Although standardised tests are designed to monitor the adequacy of the school system and the curriculum, they often lead to the narrowing of the curriculum, as mentioned previously, in Matā'upu Muamua. This narrowing implies the prevalence of skill-and-drill instructional activities including the subjecting of students with low test scores to various forms of prejudice. Moreover, tests are often misused to deny students a good future through streaming and career choice (Newfields, 2007).

As a governing mechanism, standardised tests do not measure the cultural standards of excellence that shape themselves through space and time. They tend to concentrate on templates of measurement that are set up to gauge the quality of the learning that has been studied, and also to assess programs which produce data, such as, test scores and student grades in order to aggregate it. This aggregated data determines success rates and the alignment of a conceptual framework in line with the curriculum; hence it takes on a political life. In sum, standardised tests and testing are exclusive attempts to mystify the inherent power and control within educational institutions.

Drawing on Freire's (Freire, 1972) banking concept, I argue that the standardised testing is a tool to measure how well the students have mechanically memorized the 'narrated' content of the curriculum and tests. Within the classroom, the teacher holds the power to 'narrate' the education *to* the students, turning students into containers to be 'filled in' (p. 47). This narration causes the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content of the curriculum (and tests) with little question of it. Seemingly, the nature of standardised test is to obviate thinking. Standardised testing is an exercise of domination, which relies on the credulity of students with the intent to coach them to adapt to a culture of those who are being 'oppressed' (ibid).

The standard testing approach currently utilized in New Zealand primary schools is fundamentally ‘mono-cultured and epistemologically racist’ (Bishop & Glynn, 2000), as their Euro-centricity neither accommodates nor acknowledges the meaningful prior experiences and world view of non-European students. These standardised testing tools constitute a powerful subjectifying culture that subjects all of its participants to its expectations, rules, procedures, meanings and knowledge. These tools constitute the nature of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to acculturate. The Euro-centric nature of the standardised reading tests is highlighted in the analysis below in terms of the monolingual mode of delivery, the individualistic nature of administration and designers’ located-ness of knowledge and interests.

### **The Language**

The analysis of the standardised reading papers using the *iloiloga o le gagana* method highlights two important understandings required for successful completion and achievement in the tests. They are the knowledge of the English language and that of the reading processes. While reading itself is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols in order to construct or derive meaning, understanding the English language involves knowing the alphabet, phonology, grammar, register, rules of the language and how to use it. Students who have mastered the skills to read in English can decode and encode the texts written in the English language.

At home, Samoan parents communicate to their children in the oral Samoan language. Since the communication is face to face, words are momentary, meanings and intentions are uttered, received, negotiated and understood instantly by the speaker and hearer. When the need arises, meanings are made clear by using gestures (Duranti, 1997; Duranti & Ochs, 1993; Tagaloa, 2010; Tanielu, 2004). For some Samoan students, the written mode of the standardised tests is different. In order to be able to unpack the messages in the written texts, first, the students have to visually and silently unpack every word individually and at the sentence, paragraph and text level. Then they must internalise the information (often in both Samoan and English simultaneously), make up an answer; then search their answer in the list of pre-determined multiple choices given in the standardised tests. There is no chance at all to negotiate the meaning of the written texts with anyone, as there would be with spoken texts. Instead of the brief spoken texts (that usually consists of main ideas) they hear from their parents, they have to dissect a whole paragraph or a

whole text to uncover any inherent messages. Some students find this process laborious and frustrating (Brozo & Brozo, 1994; Samuels, 2004). As the students in the study disclosed during their fa'afaletui, the English language of the tests is 'so hard' it makes them feel,

*Confused, numb, shaky, sweaty, no good, bored, tired, sick, dizzy, headache, angry, mad, worried, embarrassed, regretting not knowing the answers*

Samoan students speak a language that is different from that of the test. At home, some students communicate in three languages simultaneously. These include a palagi dialect of the Samoan language, a Samoan dialect of the English language, which is often grammatically incorrect (as discussed in Matā'upu Lona Lima) and the Samoan language of their parents and grandparents. In the standardised reading tests at school, none of these languages, in their oral or written forms, are tested or incorporated. The standardized language measures of the test place emphasis on the assessment of decontextualized language skills favour students whose language socialization and acquisition are influenced by experiences within the mainstream culture that is not Samoan (or of any other similar minority).

Standardised reading assessments are tests of the written English language. Therefore, the difficulty of the language becomes the confounded assessment of the students' academic ability (Klenowski, 2009). It is a major problem in New Zealand schools, given the continued utilisation of a refined form of English in all standardised assessments, which is different from the English dialect of the regions such as South Auckland (Starks et al., 2005). These students have to deal with the content of the test as well as the language in which is written (May, 2013). In this case, the difficulty of the English language of the tests expresses determinate meanings and an immutable truth about the tests themselves, as well as the students. Emig argues as follows:

Almost all standardized tests have been predicated upon determining the invariant meaning of a decontextualized passage. But what if a text is just what each reader makes of it, because of her individuality [and] her situatedness in a culture that is as relative as the text's to that culture? (Emig, 1990).

The English language plays a major part in the shape of the social reality of any organisation. The ideologies of this language are not about language alone rather they endorse ties of the language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology (Fairclough, 1989). Because these linkages strongly underpin the social reality of

institutions, such as schools, they pervade schools and their familiarity makes taking them for granted easy (Wasson, 2004). As Jeff Siegel explains:

Not only does current mainstream educational policy fail to provide a level playing field, but it also serves to perpetuate and reinforce inequality and the dominance of some social groups over others. This is especially true with regard to language ... For dominant groups to continue to dominate; they promote certain views or ideologies, which appear to make common sense, and therefore are rarely questioned. The perpetuation of beliefs about the superiority of the language of dominant groups, and the inferiority of the language of marginalized groups, is of course maintained by the dominant groups to promote their own interests. This is done through the institutions controlled by dominant groups—such as the education system. The education system also perpetuates the standard language ideology. Children who speak marginalized varieties are taught that the standard is superior in both structure and importance (e.g. for getting a good job). At the same time their own speech varieties are shown to be inferior if not by denigration, then by being excluded from the educational process. This pertains not only to language but also to other aspects of marginalized groups' culture and history... By implication, their own social groups are then being excluded from the institutions of power... (Siegel, 2006).

The lack of equality of language clearly contributes to a lack of equality in the New Zealand schools. While students from dominant groups learn in and about a language and culture that is familiar to them, students from the disadvantaged groups do not. Students from dominant social groups who come to school speaking varieties close to the standard can use their own language without fear of correction or denigration. Students from marginalized groups are often not allowed to express themselves in their own variety of language, and research shows that this is detrimental to cognitive development (McNaughton, 2002; Tuafuti, 2000). As Giroux observes:

Within dominant educational theory there is no sense of how language practices can be used to actively silence some students, or how favouring particular forms of discourse can work to disconfirm the traditions, practices, and values of subordinate language groups . . . (Giroux, 1997).

LaCelle-Peterson (2000), May (2013) and Volante (2008), challenge the validity of inferences drawn from the results of tests by individuals with limited command of English, since the ability of the examinee to understand the instructions, substance and content of the task is questionable. Whilst the standardised tests are reliable for children who are socialized according to the norms and values of the mainstream English-speaking cultures of the tests, they are not valid for children whose primary language socialization and acquisition occurred in other cultures. Consideration is therefore vital while comparing the achievement of native speakers of English to those, including the Samoan



students, who are not. This is because low test scores, regardless of their accuracy or inaccuracy, become the shape of the educational profile and prospects for these students. In addition, these results lead to failure to identify students' real learning needs and lead to the misplacement of some Samoan students in remedial classes where they, and others like them, 'work daily under the spectre of failure' (Brozo & Brozo, 1994).

Without a doubt, English functions as the gatekeeper to positions of prestige in school and in society. Holding an important position in many education systems around the world, English has become one of the most powerful means of inclusion into or exclusion from further education, employment or social positions. Students are therefore subjected to the normalising power of assessment to reach a high level of competency in English to pursue their studies, which consequently are also dependent on Western knowledge that often has limited apparent value and is inappropriate to their local context.

Many countries embrace the learning of English as a deliberate government policy for economic and political purposes (Pennycook, 1995). In New Zealand, this determination is pursued via the allocation of resources to turn migrant students into docile bodies of the English language and culture. Teaching English as a second language is not only good business, in terms of the production of teaching resources of all kinds, it is also good politics. It is a good avenue for the export of the English culture and knowledge and the maintenance of social, economic and political elites. As English in this case is the language of international capitalism, it also creates global structures of dependency (Pennycook, 1995, p. 43), making English competency a powerful governmentalizing tool (as mentioned above) and for students, a 'self-regulatory' mechanism (Fox, 2000).

The five test papers examined in this thesis are intended for monolingual English speakers, to whom the rules, procedures, and systems of thoughts of the English language are valid and meaningful. On the other hand, as most of the Samoan students, are not part of this system, they are 'subordinated and excluded' (Bartolome, 2010, pp. 48-49). Samoan students can only answer satisfactorily if they become clones of the middle class English-speaking student. This 'cloning' is evident in the way funding is readily available to schools from the New Zealand Ministry of Education to teach non-English speaking and migrant students, as mentioned above, to be literate in the standard English of the curriculum. Currently, migrant and refugee students receive up to five years of ESOL

funding, while the New Zealand born children of migrant or refugee parents are entitled to up to three years of funding<sup>17</sup>.

English literacy education is a social field that is conceptualized as a structure within which various forms of power and capital circulate. As an 'instrument of governmentality' (Foucault, 1991), English literacy education forms a special moral technology for the shaping of young citizens into docile bodies of the English language, culture and knowledge. In this case, teachers are held accountable for the wellbeing of the English language as a discipline in the schools and in the wider society. Teachers are 'armed' with particular sets of practical possibilities, community cultural resources, and local political thresholds to effectively guard 'English' as the official language and knowledge and as the mark of being literate, educated and competent

### **Individualising nature of tests**

People from different cultures value different kinds of goals, which, in turn, are reflected by the rewards that are expected and received. In this way, cultural groups differ in the attributes they consider to be indicators of success (Yamauchi, 1998). Individualistic cultures tend to emphasize the rights and opportunities of the individual. This assumes that individuals act in ways to protect their own personal interests and to achieve personal goals. In contrast, the personal goals of those from collectivistic cultures are often subordinated to the interests of the group, for instance, extended family, church and a class. In return, the collective is assumed to protect the interests of its members.

Samoa's traditions and protocols explain the nature of Samoans as relational beings. That is, the Samoan person exists amongst others, and does not exist as an individual per se. Because of the communal orientation of the Samoan culture, families and villages work together to do chores and, for example, build houses, and grow vegetables, fish, weave mats and cook (Ochs, 1982; Odden, 2007). For some students living abroad (including New Zealand), they are engaged in this aspect of the culture in church and family activities (Fletcher et al., 2005; McGrath, 2002). However, this communal attribute of the Samoan child is in direct contrast with the individualistic expectations of school assessments.

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<sup>17</sup> More information on ESOL funding can be found on <https://education.govt.nz/school/student-support/esol-funding/#Criteria>

In school settings, Samoan students as a rule, construct different goals from others who are individualistic. They tend to prefer goals that are more group oriented and do better in settings where such goals and processes are emphasised. New Zealand educators are capitalising on this attribute of the communal culture during class times and across all areas of the curriculum. For example, during lessons, students are encouraged to work in groups, to share ideas in efforts to scaffold and co-construct the learning. Since standardised testing is an individualised activity, however, it not only contradicts the nature of the culture of the Samoan students, it also disputes a successful method of making meaning and knowledge (Amituanai-Toloa, 2006; Davis, 2007). During the fa'afaletui, students question why teachers do not assess group understanding, given they are encouraged to do group work in class. This argument resonates suggesting that assessment practices need to align with the experiences of students and their opportunities to learn (Cowie, 2009). As Toma noted:

*It would have been better if we could work in groups... to discuss and work out answers... I like that...*

Vili commented;

*Maybe teachers are worried that we might copy other people's answer, but we are not, we talk about problems then each person can do their own answer.... sometimes you have the answer in your head, you need only one person to help put it into good words*

Terry insisted on buddy work to give others with limited English a chance;

*Some students are good at reading and others at writing... there should be a chance for some of those who need the extra support. They may have the answer but cannot write... or may take longer to write, so they should have a buddy to write for them... cos it's a reading comprehension test not a writing test...*

Standardised testing (and examination) is the most individualistic technique within the disciplinary mode of power (Foucault, 1977). The individualism of standardised assessments aims to control the behaviour of test takers. This individualism is a subtle form of disciplinary power that is obviously traumatic to some Samoan students, as conveyed in their stories above.

In a testing situation, the students are subjected to individual reading, internalising, and most often mechanically repeating the knowledge their teachers have been feeding them, all in the physical gaze of a teacher examiner, who would later make educated and professional judgements about these students. In this case, the students are the subjects who need to know and the objects to be known (R. Jones, 2010). As a hierarchized top

down functional surveillance micro technology, standardised testing subjects students to possible micro-penalty in relation to:

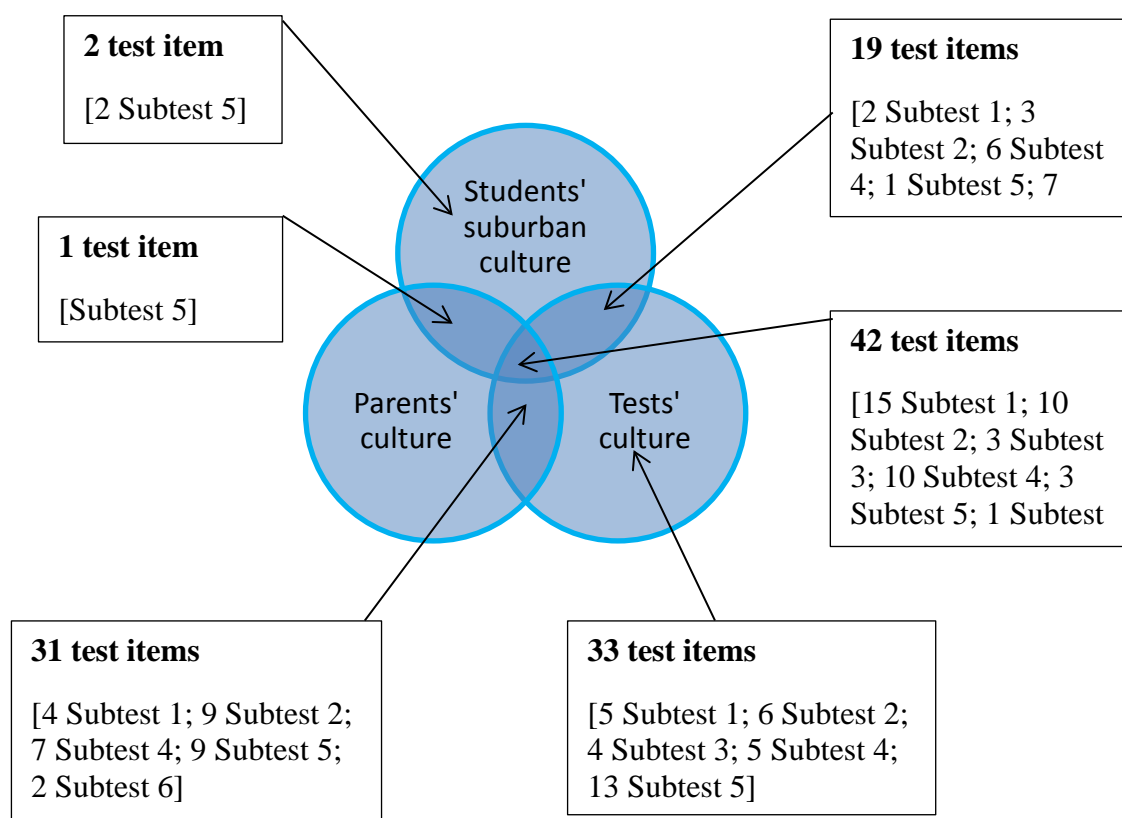
- time (to complete the asTTle in 40 minutes; and the STAR in 30);
- activity (to robotically follow the given instructions);
- behaviour (to remain calm throughout the full duration of the tests);
- speech (to be silent during the test)
- body (to sit absolutely still and not to disturb others sitting the same test).

Movement is not normal in a testing situation and may result in suspicion of cheating. The results of each student's individual test are what the teachers need to work out individual responses, such as, for example who can be rewarded with 'truths', such as, good, achieved at the standard normal expectation, and who needs to be trained; normalised; or excluded.

The following section is an analysis of the language of the STAR and asTTle papers to reveal the culture, knowledge and interest located-ness of the test papers. This analysis is the result of students' conversations as they apply the iloilogale gagana method to the test items during the focus group fa'afaletui. Students pointed out which test items they were able to relate to, some students were able to discuss 'why' and 'how'. I, on the other hand, as the Samoan adult researcher, pointed out the ones relevant to the Samoan parents. The test items left out as not-relevant to either the students or myself, were categorised as not significant or in any way recognisable within the cultural context of these students. These items were then categorised as relevant to the tests and the test designers.

## Detailed analysis of the STAR test papers

According to Charles Darr, one of the assessment experts consulted about the tests examined in this thesis, 'schools are not directly told by the Ministry of Education of the assesment tool and of the time of their assessment' (C. Darr, personal communication, 13 January, 2013). Despite this claimed freedom for schools to choose any tests, in actuality most schools use the STAR and asttle as mentioned and described previously in Matā'upu Lona Fā. The STAR A and B are analysed for relevance in terms of the knowledge and interests of the three groups of students, parents and tests. The assumptions made about what will interest students are reflected in the choice of items and the way they are presented in the tests to fulfil the purposes of the tests (Paltridge, 2006). The two STAR test papers are comprised of 128 test items, specifically 110 test questions and 18 examples.



### Ata 7.2: Analysis of STAR test papers A and B

#### Items related to the cultures of parents, students and the tests

The analysis of the content of the tests reveals that effort is made to acknowledge the interests of students and their parents. Out of the 128 test items examined, forty two are examples that appear to be related to the interest and knowledge of the students, parents as well as the test designers. Some examples are as follows:

1. Pictures of a *guitar*, a *bald headed male*, *cemetery*, a *spider*, and a *boy praying*;
2. Statements for instances '*Mary had to stay home because she was sick*'; and '*Next on the programme, we listened to a hilarious speech*';
3. A Cloze test called '*In a local magazine*';
4. Advertisements such as '*Compact and stylish, this new mobile fits easily into the palm of your hand*' and '*Everybody's drinking 7-up Cola this season*'.

These examples contain concepts that are of general knowledge in that they seem to target a more general audience. However, a significant number of test items appear to reflect the narrower interests of the tests; more so than some of the students and parents.

### **Items related to the cultures of the students and tests**

There are nineteen examples of test items showing notions of knowledge and interests which are shared by the tests and some students. These examples include ideas and concepts that are closely related to those of the tests, which are what the students are taught and are expected to learn at schools. Examples of these include:

1. Pictures of a *computer* and an *apostrophe*;
2. Statements, such as, '*Today we learnt a waiata*', '*I like computers until they crash*', and '*The speaker described his whakapapa*';
3. One advertisement: '*Discriminating buyers choose their products by their brand names*';
4. Text types including: two '*Traditional Fairy Tales*'; '*Directions for Playing a New Game*'; '*Computer Manual*'; '*Business Letter*' and; a '*Boy's Private Diary*'.

While the ideas conveyed in these examples might be close to students and test designers, they are far removed from most parents. For instance, fairy tales are usually European children's stories and they are different from the myths and legends from Samoa which some Samoan parents are mostly familiar with. Some Samoan families do not have computers at home, however if they do, they are there for the children and most parents mainly prefer to have their children operate them. As one of the teachers in the study mentioned;

*... perhaps computers can help students... but if parents can't be there to help, or don't know how to help, then what is the point... parents themselves need to know how to help their children... they want to help, but it's the 'know how' that's the problem...*


Although the concept of ‘brand’ is quite popular and appealing to the students, some parents may not be familiar or interested. Lastly, although te reo Māori is one of the official languages in New Zealand, most Samoan parents do not speak it, or see the need to learn it.


### Items related to the cultures of parents and tests

The STAR test papers have thirty-five test items that communicate the interests and knowledge shared by both the parents and the test designers. These examples contain themes, that are accessible to adults only, mainly the test designers and parents in this case, for instance, in the advertisements, where the products (please refer to examples below) that were promoted relate to the interests and knowledge of adults for the most part. Most Samoan students at the ages of eleven, twelve and thirteen struggle with these tests items because they do not share the same interests as the test items test. They do not have the knowledge to tap into the topics and the test items are not relevant to them as Samoan students (The inappropriateness of test items is explained further below). Examples of these test items are as follows:

1. Pictures of two cars, *one is reversing and the other has a punctured tyre; a horse; and a cow;*
2. Statements such as *‘Overtaking on the open road is one of the most dangerous manoeuvres you can take’, ‘A safe-driving course has been designed to offer new drivers real hands-on experience’, ‘The suspect had an ingenious alibi’, ‘The council agreed to the restoration of the building’;*
3. Advertisements for example *‘You can use these hot new saving coupons at any of our branch stores’, ‘The stunning new heater is the first of its kind’, ‘Become the proud owner of a new 3-bedroom home, with double lock up garage’, ‘Give baby a treat. Try our new 20 pack disposable nappies’;*
4. Text types for instance included a *‘Recipe for hamburger’* and a *‘Formal Weather Report’*.

I have categorised the pictures of a cow and a horse as relevant mostly to parents and tests because the Samoan students who participated in the fa'afaletui found these test items somewhat strange and difficult.

5.		greasing	gazing	grasping	grazing
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11.		gallon	gallant	gallery	gallop
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The students may be able to label the animals, since the test is asking for the actions (of the animals), students struggle. Although cows and horse are found in Samoa, nevertheless, as two of the teachers in the study articulated:

*...those pictures seem easy but they are not... I'm not surprised most students do not know what those animals are doing... these animals are not 'Samoan' per se, they are palagi animals... that is why they are called 'manu papalagi'... most students from the islands may see them and say ia... 'o le solofanua' (it's a horse)... but they have yet to learn more about it... they are introduced animals...*

*...these types of questions may be OK for those with knowledge of it... not necessarily the Samoans... I mean not every family in Samoa has a horse... and I am sure not all children in Samoa have seen a cow... really it's mostly rich guys that have them...*

These statements were reflected in Julie's comments as follows:

*... the hardest is cow... we don't know... even the dictionary can't tell us what the cow is doing... it only says cow.*

Rita argued as follows:

*The one with the cow is the hardest for me...cos of no prior knowledge.*

These comments highlight a distinction between the culture of the parents and the wider New Zealand culture of the standardised tests, that although they are both adults, they are quite different in terms of class. Some of the examples discussed in this analysis tend to reflect the middleclass interests and knowledge of the palagi, such as, possessions. For example, most Samoan parents living in New Zealand find owning a 3-bedroom house a far-fetched idea.

### **Items related to the culture of the tests**

The analysis reveals that 31 of the test items are of cultural ideas, knowledge and interests that are foreign and are not relevant to the Samoan students, for whom the tests are intended. These items are 'scientific', technological and adult-oriented in nature. Examples include as follows:

1. Pictures, such as, *pheasant* (a bird that is not found in Samoa and is known only to the test designers); *forceps* (which may be found in school laboratories, but most Year 7 and 8 students may not have had the chance to have experience with them by the time they sit



the tests); *and a carriage* (a part of a train, which most Samoans, have very little or no experience of at all). Therefore, most of the Samoans students, struggle with these questions.

2. Statements such as: *'Please check the patient's respiration', After many requests the animals were finally liberated', The oil slick caused the death of more than 30,000 sea birds, according to official estimates', 'Einstein, the great scientist, was totally interested in money, power and fame.* As Terry commented on the latter;

*..now this question... there... Einstein, money and 'fame' (speaker's emphasis)... what is that... what is fame? ... we don't know...*

She then went on;

*Sometimes the tests are so hard, students 'don't even care' (speaker's emphasis) ... they just rush to get it done... if the tests are so out of our world... then why bother?*

Vili spoke of the same discrepancy;

*...they should test us on what we have been taught, that way we have some knowledge of what is in the test... these questions are hard.... Like we've never seen most of the words before... the texts are difficult... because they are not the normal ones our teachers give to us in class... and ia (yes) it makes the tests unfair... for us*

3. Most of the advertisements (13/28) for example: *'For sale-Ten exclusive villas on north-facing peninsula, ready for inspection now'; 'Inspect this cosy beach cottage – close to ocean beach, golf, stores and boating facilities'; 'We will offer the winner four sun-soaked locations to choose from'.*

Whereas the advertisements contain ideas that are not just adult-oriented (they relate to both parents and tests) as discussed in the previous section and most of them are of interest to the palagi population, particularly the middle class. For example, the market driven slogans such as *'holiday in Queenstown; classy new models; New Zealand's leading restaurant, sun-soaked locations; ocean, beach, golf and boating facilities'* are strange and are not important to some Samoan students and their parents. 'Sun-soaked' is not a concept thought of as Samoan. As Samoa is naturally hot, and most Samoans are brown, there is no need to sun bathe. Samoans consider sun bathing as a palagi-only activity and anyone who engages in activities of this kind is ridiculed and is called *fiapapalagi*. A comparable concept to Samoans is 'keep out of the sun'. *Flying to Queenstown for a holiday and eating out in leading restaurants* seems to suggest selfishness for Samoans whose cultural expectation is to give to the church and care for others in the family, as

discussed in the first part of this chapter. The same financial obligations mean that the typical Samoans do not consider living next to the beach or even own a boat because such things are unnecessary and expensive.

The statements are not relevant to the knowledge and interests of some of the parents as well as their children. This mismatch means that there is no common ground on which parents and students can build discussions and meaningful conversations, so parents can support their children's understanding. Worst still, the colloquial laden, bold and audacious nature of the language of advertisement is paradoxically difficult for some Samoan students because they find the language difficult and it also contradicts the Samoan culture of humility. This mismatch of culture and knowledge makes accessing and understanding these test items difficult for some Samoan students.

4. Most of the cloze test items such as; *'Hotel on wheels'; 'At Birth'; 'In some countries of Europe'; 'Mike stumbled over'.*

#### **Items related to the knowledge, culture and interest of the tests.**

It has been noted that out of the eight cloze tests items in the paper, four are specifically related to the knowledge, culture and interest of the tests. Previous studies (Smagorinsky, 2009) have found that for the reader, inscribing oneself in a text can help construct a meaningful reading transaction and contribute to identity development. The relevance of the texts also provides a cognitive and emotional template for interpretative action and means of access to both the content and the material in order to generate the meaning as part of a reading experience. Nevertheless, the standardised reading tests require that students read and understand texts that they themselves did not choose, yet were required to read.

Examples of these test items include:

#### ***STAR B, Cloze test item***

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In some countries of ancient Europe, they developed strange ways of dealing with people who were accused \_\_\_\_\_ a crime. For instance, if a man was arrested, and charged \_\_\_\_\_ a particular crime, he was taken to a river. A rope was \_\_\_\_\_ around his waist, and he was thrown \_\_\_\_\_ the water. If he floated, the people declared that he was \_\_\_\_\_. They took him out of the \_\_\_\_\_ and punished him. However, if the man \_\_\_\_\_, the people declared him innocent. Quickly, they pulled him out of the water and released him.

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***STAR A, Cloze test item***

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Mike stumbled over the edge of the path, but saved himself just in \_\_\_\_\_. The sound of approaching hooves grew \_\_\_\_\_. He ran on wildly. Suddenly, round a sharp bend in the \_\_\_\_\_, he fell again, missed his \_\_\_\_\_ and plunged over the \_\_\_\_\_ face. He grabbed frantically, and felt his \_\_\_\_\_ closing round the branch of a \_\_\_\_\_. How long he hung there, he was unable to tell.

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Cloze test items assess students' knowledge of certain forms of 'English' and that of 'the world' (Abraham & Chapelle, 1992; J. Brown, 1993). Understanding of both is vital to enable students to read, in order to try to understand the text by building a mental image in their heads using clues available to them, before making an educated guess of the appropriate vocabulary to complete the paragraph. Applying the iloiloga o le gagana method to the two cloze tests above show themes, knowledge and interests, those are different from those of some Samoan students. The first cloze test is an item that tells of a practice in a setting outside the knowledge and interest of some Samoan students. Although the second test item is concrete, students in the fa'afaletui did not relate to it and found it farfetched and difficult to visualise. The vivid description of the events, in an intense series of simple, compound and complex sentences, and in a specific register of the English language, makes accessing the paragraph challenging for Samoan students in the fa'afaletui.

Further analysis of the test items draws on the previous studies by Abraham and Chapelle (Abraham & Chapelle, 1992) and Todd and Gu (Todd & Gu, 2007). These projects conclude that cloze test items that are more challenging for students to solve include those

that: need longer words; that usually require one correct answer; that need an inflectional morpheme; and that need more content and fewer functional words.

The table below shows an analysis of expected answers that revealed twenty functional words and twenty-eight content ones.

**Fa'avasēgaga 7.1: Analysis of answers for Cloze Tests in STAR A and B**

<b>Cloze test</b>	<b>Functional words</b>	<b>Content words</b>
<b>Example A</b>	it, has, them	bark
<b>STAR A: 1</b>	for, was, there	not, museum, hotel
<b>STAR A: 2</b>	once, on, are/get, to	reef, region/part, night
<b>STAR A: 3</b>	of, with, into	tied, guilty, water, sank
<b>Example B</b>	is, has, them	bark
<b>STAR B: 1</b>	from, that	grow, metres, where, trees
<b>STAR B: 2</b>	they, in	how, ago, this, none, matter
<b>STAR B: 3</b>		time, louder, road/way, steps, path, grip, tree

Content words give students pictures of the contents of the paragraphs. Functional words make sentences grammatically correct (Derewianka, 2002). In this case, it is not surprising that students are asked about the content words because knowing them means understanding the meaning of the text. The problem however is that the content of most of the paragraphs, such as, the ones in the examples above is not within the realm of knowledge, experience and understanding of some Samoan students. In this regard, and for the cultural reasons explained below these students stand very little chance of successfully answering test items.

The Samoan culture expects children to ‘know their place’. This notion means that children know the ‘what to do’, ‘when to do’, ‘where to do’, ‘how to do’ and not necessarily ‘why’. Children who are successful in observing these cultural requirements are obviously obedient and ‘good’ in the eyes of Samoans. The Samoan phrase ‘Tama / Teine lelei ma usita’i’ (Be a good boy/girl and obey) is used abundantly in church, community and family gatherings, in Samoa and in New Zealand, to promote and remind children of this ideology. Knowing one’s own place also refers to how much one ‘ought’ to know and speak about. A Samoan child who ‘dares’ to talk about adults or an ‘adult

oriented' topic, such as those in the advertisements in the tests will be told off and ridiculed. Samoan elders speak of 'Aua le tautalaititi, tautala i mea a tamaiti' (Do not be cheeky, speak only of children's things). Children's things include children's play, habits, likes, dislikes, in other words, anything and everything children do. If children dare to speak of adult names or adult oriented subjects in front of other adults, then the shame will fall not just on the child it will also fall on the parents. Samoan elders speak of 'Se tama a ai? Ai o mea nei e aoa'i ai fanau' (Whose child is he/she? Is this what they teach their children?). Samoans place emphasis on maintaining the good name of the family and saving face. In keeping with this tradition some parents are driven to make sure that their children know only what they 'ought' to know, speak only when they ought to speak and only speak to those they should speak to.

Because some Samoan students are conscious of the idea that many topics are off-limits to them, in terms of appropriate genre, topic and language, they find reading and learning about off-limit topics in a test unusual and uncomfortable. Despite the difficulty, students know that space in a cloze test is an invitation for a word to be put in, and it is their job as test takers to write that word in, which they do their best to do. However, these answers often turn out to be incorrect. As Vili mentioned as follows:

*...the test is trying to get you to think of words and your prior knowledge you have and of other stories... and whatever that comes up in your mind you just write it down... but was usually wrong*

This was supported by Molly as follows:

*...and the thing that makes it hard is you put a word in and it makes sense but it's still not that right one so ia (yes) like it's right 'now' (speakers emphasis) but not the one on the answer sheet... like everything would be alright but it's just that on the answer sheet it's a different word.*

### **Students' knowledge and interest**

The examination of the test papers found two test items that relate to the interest and knowledge of Samoan students;

*'See for yourself why our activity books are special'*

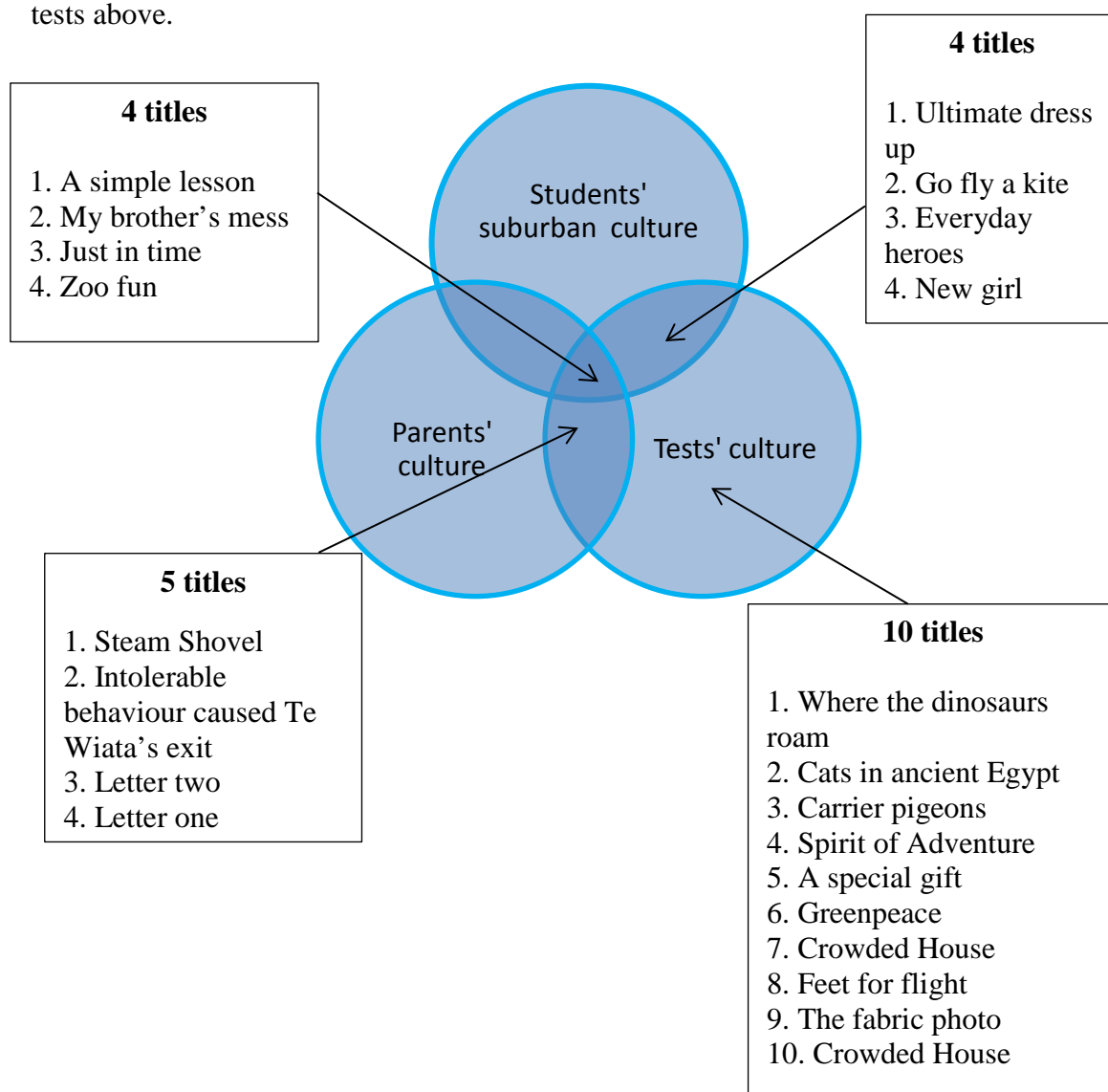
As noted, the sentence is made up of nine words that are typical of children's conversational language therefore it is within the comprehension levels of school students.

## Parents and students

The analysis of the two test papers shows that out of the 128 test items, only one is relevant to the culture, knowledge and interest of Samoan parents and students. This cloze test item 'The Palolo Story' is discussed further below in the 'Misconceptions' part of this chapter.

## Detailed analysis of the asTTle test papers

The three asTTle test papers are also analysed under the same categories as the STAR tests above.



### Ata 7.3: Analysis of asTTle reading papers

The analysis shows the located-ness of the three asTTle papers around the culture and knowledge of the tests. Out of the twenty-three texts, four (4/23) share commonalities; that is, between the tests and students. These texts are about toys (for example, kite and

electronic alien costume), concepts (heroes) and ideologies (new girl in a new school). Although, these contexts are specific to the European culture, they are experiences that most Samoan students are interested in, gain knowledge from and live through.

The interests and knowledge shared in four of the texts (4/23) are common in all of the three groups of parents, students and tests. These texts, the same as in the analysis of the STAR test discussed previously, have themes and messages, relevant for a general audience. An example of these texts is a simple lesson that is about a boy who although he does not like his change of school, is encouraged by his father through the heroic stories of his grandfather. Although his grandfather came from Mexico as a teacher, he had to work as a labourer due to his limited English. Moreover, while the story is set in a non-Samoan setting, the experiences and knowledge learned from it are relevant to both Samoan parents and students. Most of students if not all of them, have experienced a similar scenario as the boy in the story, and especially how he relates to his elder in a culturally appropriate manner.

Five of the twenty-three texts contain content, genre and language that Samoan students find inappropriate. Letters to the editor are about complaints to the council. Although some Samoan students are taught about writing letters to express feeling in schools, the act of complaining *about* and *to* the Council or government (like elders in the eyes of Samoan students) is taboo and therefore not common in terms of their family culture. 'Steam shovel' is a palagi machine, is not a common object to some Samoan students. 'Intolerable behaviour', is about the denigration of a Māori actress. The overall effect tends to disparage women which is foreign to some Samoan ideals and is unlikely to achieve the desired effect of any sort of identification by any of the Samoan students, especially the girls. 'Black Noddy' is a poem written by a Samoan author. Nevertheless, it is about a practice that Samoan men 'only' do, in Samoa, in the forest, far away from children, and far away from those sitting the asTTle tests in New Zealand. Moreover, including Samoan writers in the tests is not a quick fix. This is since some of these Samoan authors, for example, Albert Wendt (1996) are critical of fa'asamoa. Therefore, even though it is meant well, this approach is out of place and is likely to confuse and offend the students since it is culturally insensitive.

In fifteen texts, we note the interests of adults rather than students. The test items reflect European cultures and scientific interests, many of which are unlikely to appeal to Pacific children. Examples include: 'Cats in ancient Egypt'; 'Carrier pigeons'; 'Spirit of

Adventure'; 'Greenpeace'; 'Crowded House'; 'A special gift'. In terms of Samoan students' experience, it is focused more on family, church and community and they are less likely than European children to be exposed to the conventional tropes of science, for example, dinosaurs, flight, ancient Egypt. Therefore, the reference points, which make these items accessible and interesting, are for the most part missing. Furthermore, the comparable fields of family, church and community are not offered.

***Text one: A special gift***

The text is about Steven Spielberg and how his talent was founded and developed. The linguistic errors and concerns about this text have been discussed in the previous chapter (Matā'upu Lona Lima). Nevertheless, this analysis reveals the mismatch between the interests of the tests and the interests of the students, as articulated by the students themselves. Mika commented as follows:

*These stories are not entertaining... there's too much informational texts... they should do something that is entertaining... like comedy... cos we sometimes fall asleep during the tests because of the boring stories... they should put in interesting stories so the kids get very interested in them... so they (students) can spend time actually reading them and enjoying them...*

He went on;

*...stories should be environmentally informative... and even if these may be true now... will they still be in the future?... stories must change with the changing times... cos if these statements are no longer true then they are kinda misleading again just like the pictures and the palolo story*

Molly and Lisa added the following:

*And if they do, write about famous movies... not the movie makers... we do not want to learn about them... maybe old people want to but not us... (Lisa)*

*We are interested in the storyline and not the director and those behind the cameras... it is the movie that we are interested in not how long it takes for it to be made... (Molly)*

*That's why people leave at the end of the movies, because they do not want to see the names of those who make them... (Molly)*

Toma explained;

*Tests are hard because they (test designers) give us tests at that level... but not at our level... we know our level...*

It is clear from students that some of the stories are boring and difficult. Toma's comments suggest his awareness of his own lack of background knowledge in terms of



the test items. He can distinguish between what he knows and that expected by the test designers in the tests. The idea of normalisation is sensed in this boy's response, that even though they know what they need to know (their reading level); it is not enough because it is what is expected of them in the tests that prevails. Molly and Lisa seem more interested in celebrities and pop culture than technology and back of the house and behind the scene information, such as, information about Steven Spielberg. Without an educational context, back of the house stories do not capture the attention of the students. They are much more interested in the content of the story in the actual movie.

### **Text two: Crowded House**



- 1 Neil Finn is simply one of the most accomplished, emotive songsmiths in the world. His evocative, textured and structurally intriguing works possess an often-breathtaking sweep that draws and holds and lingers. Deft and inventive, they set new standards for the contemporary pop song.
- 2 Young Neil became a true force to be reckoned with when he joined his big brother Tim's well-established band Split Enz in 1977 and furnished the hypnotic *I Got You*, the number one record of 1980. *One Step Ahead*, *History Never Repeats* and *Message To My Girl* documented the flowering of his songwriting skills.
- 3 Originally called the Mullanes (after Neil's middle name) that outfit became Crowded House after enduring cramped conditions in a rented Hollywood bungalow while recording their first album. A sense of fun was an integral aspect of their live performances.
- 4 Debuting with the 1986 Crowded House album, the trio stormed the US top ten with the enduring *Don't Dream It's Over* and *Something So Strong* and by 1992 were in the UK Top Ten with *Weather With You*. The third and fourth albums - *Woodface* (with Tim Finn), and *Together Alone* - both made the British top ten. This set up such a base of popularity that the 1996 hits collection *Recurring Dream* went to number one there, just as the much-loved band was bidding farewell before 150,000 fans on the steps of Sydney Opera House. A sad loss certainly, but those songs... they'll live forever. It's only natural.

Marginalised students are not recognised in the test items. The two dominant themes, respect for elders and feagaiga, are not reflected in the material. As music reportage, written in a magazine style, most Samoan students are not at all likely to be familiar with this kind of genre. With their debut songs about romantic love, the band does not resonate in the Samoan community. Moreover, the Samoan values of close knot families and togetherness in the community are absent in the text.

The text reflects the loyalty and passion the test writers have for the singer and his talent. The Samoan students in the fa'afaletui, simply due to the age difference, unfortunately do not share this enthusiasm and loyalty. Since these singers are not active in the world of students in Years 7 and 8, the faces and names are unrecognisable. While there is no question that these singers may have been famous and are interesting and worth learning about in the world of the test designers, to the twelve and thirteen-year-old Samoan students, for whom these tests are designed; they are not very interesting. Apart from the difficult language in which this text is written, as discussed in previous chapters, the names of the songs are strange to students therefore this text does not provide the chance for the students to relate and tap into their prior knowledge and experience in terms of their suburban culture.

Statements such as 'They set new standards for the contemporary pop song', and adjectival phrases such as 'well-established band', 'much-loved band' and 'sad loss' indicate the desirable relationship between the author and the band. In addition, every sentence in this text, and every question as noted below, has been purposefully crafted and delivered so students speak of the success of this band.

### ***Questions***

- 1. The first paragraph focuses on the (Answer - paying tribute to the talent of Neil Finn)*
- 2. The overall purpose of this text is to (Answer - give recognition to the success of Crowded House)*
- 3. What words are used in the text to describe the songs written by Neil Finn? (Answer - evocative and inventive)*
- 4. Describing Neil Finn as a singer / song smith rather than a song writer gives the impression that Neil Finn's music (Answer - has been crafted rather than produced)*

Students reflect on the differences between what they learn in class and what is assessed in the tests. These are in terms of the administration and content culture, knowledge and interests as discussed in this chapter, and in the nature of the tasks in the test papers. Students pick up on the fact that what teachers make them do in the classrooms during instructional reading time, is quite different from what the tests ask of them. For instance, in class, teachers maintain a routine of reading with students, scaffolding their understanding of the texts before giving them activities of almost the same kind and expectation, in order to continue with drill related to the same skills. Examples of these

activities include ‘finding the main idea of text’ and ‘explaining the author’s message(s)’. The STAR test papers are not designed in this manner and some students find this difference to be an issue. In terms of the asTTle where some of the questions are similar to the ones asked in the classrooms, the idea of choosing from multiple choices is not practised in classrooms, so it is unusual and strange to some students. These questions tend to give students fewer reasons to think hard and apply new learning (Paxton, 2000) and more reasons to guess and cheat (Currie & Chiramanee, 2010).

The data shows the concentration of knowledge and interests is somehow far removed from the world of students, as sons and daughters of New Zealand Samoan parents and the world of New Zealand Samoan suburban teenagers. The students’ own knowledge that they have learned from their parents and peers, and gained from experiences, is utilised within their local environment. This knowledge is not learned in a formal education setting or in isolation. It is gained from the natural environment through communal activities, such as, at the school playground, the park, at church, weddings, and funerals, from multimedia and in the street. This knowledge is derived from multiple sources within the environment, developed through the process of trial and error and is holistic and inclusive. This knowledge is not assessed in the asTTle and STAR tests.

## Misconceptions

The palolo story below is a cloze test item taken from the STAR test paper (answers are included, *italicised*). The students are given two minutes and forty seconds to read and complete the cloze test. This test item is an essentialist idea to use a context that is relevant to Pasifika students. However, applying the iloilogā o le gagana to the test item reveals that the paragraph contains misconceptions about the palolo that differ significantly from some Samoan students’ own knowledge. While it is acknowledged that it is with all good intentions, and that the aim is, attempting to include multicultural students in mainstream testing, the irony is that it does not suit the purpose, as explained further below.

In Samoa, the palolo fish rise only *once* a year. Early in October, depending *on* the winds and the moon, the thread-like palolo worms *are/get* blown from their holes in the coral *reef*, to spawn in the shallow *part/region* of the lagoon. Then, all along the coast, catchers go out during the *night* to entice the palolo fish *to* them, with their buckets, their torches, and their garlands of white flowers.

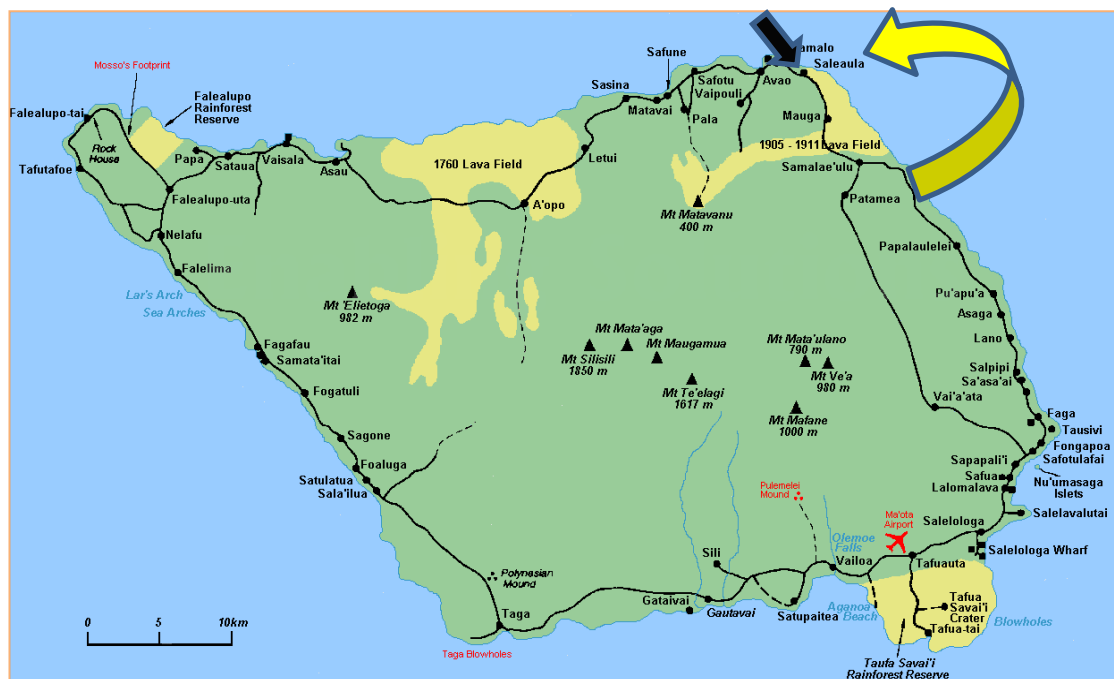
Page 7, STAR Years 7-9 Form A Test Booklet (Elley, 2001).

Firstly, the palolo rise twice each year, first in October and then in November not ‘once’ as the test item so assertively says (Burrows, 1995). Although some sightings of the fish

are at a low level to almost imperceptible, it is impossible to have only one visit by the palolo in a year. Usually, at the time the October rising is low, then the second one in November is expected to be much stronger and more plentiful.

Secondly, Samoans have their own way of predicting the arrival of this marine delicacy. The literature (Le Tagaloa, 2003; Lefale, 2010) suggests three days after the new moon in October or November or a little after the last quarter of the first full moon in October. However, a 77 year-old Samoan mother (interviewed 29 January 2010) contended that it is common practice (and knowledge) to count seven nights after the full moon in both months, which does not necessarily lead to a date in early October.

Thirdly, the palolo rises only in *some* coastal villages of Samoa. Since the palolo fish live in the coral reef, they can only be found and harvested in the lagoon of the villages where the coral reefs are much closer to the shore. For example, in the central north coast of Savaii in the Matāutu district, Avao is the only village with a coral reef a few meters into the sea. People from the neighbouring villages of Patamea, Samale'ulu, Mauga, Sale'aula, Sāfa'i, Sato'alepai, Fagamalo and Lelepa would walk miles at night to arrive in time to fish the palolo, as indicated in the yellow arrow on the map below. In Manase village, just north of Avao, the palolo does not rise in their lagoon. Manase villagers choose either to go further north to Safotu to catch the palolo, or walk south to Avao. It is misleading and inaccurate to write 'all along the coast', since in this example, it is only at Avao (as indicated in the black arrow on the map below) and Safotu where the 'catchers go out to entice' and catch the palolo. The map of Savaii below illustrates this misconception.



**Ata 7.4: Map of Savai'i, Samoa**

It is concerning to read the term 'blown' as it is used to describe the way the palolo fish move or is moved from their natural habitat to spawn in the lagoon. The word 'blown' indicates movement aided by the wind, which is impossible in the case of the palolo since it lives in the holes in the coral reef. These competing ideas can be confusing to students who despite having the knowledge of the palolo fish may not have sufficient English vocabulary to support their understanding in terms of this test item. Moreover, the inaccuracy of the script is likely to be confusing and distracting to some Samoan students while they are engaged in the task of reading to find the correct answer.

Traditionally, Samoans use afei'ato, which is a sieve made of old mosquito netting sewn to a basket, instead of buckets to place the palolo into. This is because the palolo tends to melt and turns into a slimy ball of palolo if left in the container with seawater. Since harvesting palolo is an annual celebrative community event, Samoans put effort into the preparation, which is indeed a celebration in and of itself. This is seen in the way families, friends and distinguishing groups like 'aumaga and aualuma come together to make equipment to catch palolo. These gatherings involve all of the participants in collecting materials; making equipment; singing; sharing food, experiences, ideas; learning from each other; and having fun doing so. In fact, the presence of buckets in a tāgapalolo, usually amongst young ones and tourists, tends to demonstrate a negative and arrogant connotation of ill-preparedness that suggests disrespect for the fish and the occasion.

The use of different terminology to name and describe the palolo as ‘palolo fish’ and ‘thread like palolo worms’ is misleading to students. To the Samoans, the palolo is a type of fish. Although it is elongated and ‘thread like’ in shape, it is never regarded as a worm. The palolo, in terms of its prediction, arrival, harvesting and distribution holds a significant place in the Samoan culture and traditions. For example, as palolo time draws closer, while the catchers, usually in the rural areas, are gearing up for the event, so too do the families in town and in areas where the palolo does not rise. The collected palolo is divided and distributed. The distribution of palolo (tufagā palolo) strengthens the reciprocity of the Samoan culture, since the palolo is given as fa'amomoli, in return for other form of meaālofa.

Furthermore, the bold definition of garlands of flowers as ‘white’ is misleading. This is because the sweet-fragranced yellow moso'oi, the coumarine scented green laumaile, and the musky scented brown laga'ali are the lei-making materials used for palolo harvesting. Samoans believe it is the sweet scents of the garlands (and not the colour), that attract the palolo.

The test itself requires little or no knowledge of the palolo. It is a selective deletion ‘cloze’ to investigate students’ knowledge of the patterns of written English discourse (Todd & Gu, 2007). Students are expected to activate conceptual and linguistic knowledge. Such engagement is predominantly dependent on students' prior knowledge of the written language (Gibbons, 1996; McNaughton, 2002; Todd & Gu, 2007). Even so, the analysis reveals some errors of fact which highlight a paradox given that this piece is intended to cater for the background and knowledge of Samoan and Pasifika students. The very students with the most authentic background knowledge of palolo subject matter will routinely miss this particular test item and get it marked wrong. This is because of the serious divergence between the knowledge assumed in this text and that of some students whose literacy it is being used to test.

With the errors and misconceptions in the test item discussed above, Samoan students’ pre-existing knowledge of the palolo is occluded, displaced and replaced. Such assumed currency of ‘truth’ has an impact on the ability of the students, or otherwise, to identify themselves in the text, along with their associated traditional Samoan knowledge, practices, beliefs, values and integrity (Albright, 2006; Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). The bold assumptions of the palolo STAR test item prompt a definition that is different and a truth that is inaccurate to the students who are Samoans. This ‘forged’

text, marginalises the Samoan students' own cultural knowledge, and exerts pressure to constrain the accessibility of their authenticity (Ball, 2010). With this power, the reasoning of the students is led and influenced by the way the text is presented. Unfortunately, it is at the expense of their own knowledge and trust, urged by their determination to achieve a passing mark. The dilemma Samoan students face is either 'to be truthful to oneself' or 'to game the test in order to pass'.

The palolo story as a language test item is not neutral (Pennycook, 2001). Embodied in the material is an underlying bias in terms of the language, culture and values. Since language is regarded as a cultural symbol, language affects how people think and behave. This is because every word has an underlying message about our beliefs, values and prejudices. The paragraph analysed and evaluated above tends to suggest stereotyped and prejudicial ideas, such as, that Samoans (note other Pacific people also harvest palolo) are inconsiderate and that they harvest the fish as it tries to reproduce. This may link to thoughts such that the palolo may be in danger of becoming extinct. Whatever messages readers derive from this text, it shows the power vested in the text to influence and affect (Besley, 2005; Janks, 2010).

### **Normalisation of knowledge**

Foucault's work on how discourse links knowledge and power gives attention to subjugated knowledge(s) that have been omitted from official discourses, such as, those of the education system (McHoul & Grace, 1998). Foucault shows how dominant knowledge is set to be the 'standard', 'normal' and the 'truth', the standard by which every other knowledge is measured. In doing so, Foucault looks at methods and practices by which the dominant discourse domineers and normalises the thinking of others (Foucault, 1980a).

A standardised test is a technique designed to normalise and standardise the measurement of students' achievements. Normalisation is evident in the construct of the test papers, the framing of the tests tasks, the linguistic codes and conventions and the specificity of the knowledge and interests of the tests. The results of the reading tests, in particular, decide whether or not the students have mastered the following: knowledge of the English language; knowledge of the New Zealand mainstream culture and interests; ability to engage in a successful process of reading; and amplify these differences. This amplification occurs in two contrasting forms: one that is positive, such as, the rewards

of praises and certificates from teachers; high STAR stanines<sup>18</sup> ; high asTTle achievement levels; if students can demonstrate they have the knowledge that is *normal*. The other is negative, if students fail to demonstrate the required skills and know the required knowledge. In this case, students are awarded low stanines; low reading levels; put into low reading groups and; receive disapproval remarks from teachers. As Vili, Molly and Terry recalled;

*Our teacher gets sad when the result comes back... yep all the time... cos so many of us fail to get most answers correctly... (Vili)*

*She says, last term you were up here, now down here, it's no good... (Vili)*

*Our teachers growl at us when we do not do well in these tests, especially when after we go over the test in class, we still do not get it right... (Molly)*

These students' stories shared during the fa'afaletui highlight the power of examination to reveal students' reading comprehension to the teachers and spell out to the students what 'normal knowledge' the system expects them to learn. As the students articulated;

*The main problem with the tests is that they mainly have the palagi stuff and we live in New Zealand. And maybe we get a bit of Māori stuff in the test... which may give some of us an advantage... and Pacific Islanders'.... It's giving us a disadvantage as there is almost nothing about Pasifika in the tests... because there are no questions about the Pacific Islands so it is not giving us a really good advantage... some questions about the Samoan history or something... (Fala)*

*....maybe if the tests were based around Pacific islanders and Māori, but mainly the tests is mainly based around the palagi people and European... good if it was referring to something like the church and that.... but... nah... (Josh)*

*The tests have nothing to with the fa'asamoa ... everything is English yea... (Julie)*

*No they do not have anything that is Samoan ... nothing to do with the language... nothing about what we know... mostly about other people... so something in the paper it's all got to do with others... like palagi... (Terry)*

*...like the palagi, they use different words from the islanders... like they use fancy words... (Sina)*

*This one is hard for me... cos I have never seen a hotel on wheels... (Sala)*

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<sup>18</sup> STAR scores are normed into stanines. The top 4% of outstanding readers, nationwide are in the highest stanine 9. Students in stanine 5 are average are in the middle 20% of pupils nationwide, while those in stanine 1 are the lowest 4%, while those in stanine 2 are in the next 7%.



The data also shows the governmentalizing power of the test subjecting students into self-regulatory docile bodies of these standardised tests, to study, to learn, to get good marks, to be successful and be *normal*. As Vili explained;

*Tests are important to us as Samoan students because some people, they see us as a stereotype ... they see you as just the Pacific Islander ... that they think you're not good for things... so the tests will show them that we can do things*

This was supported by Toe and Rita;

*...yeah, like show what we can... (Toe)*

*...or the younger siblings can look up to us as good role models... and in our class others may see us as inspirational, they may want to be like us... they may be stuck and they ask us for help... (Rita)*

Tony, Toma and Mika noted;

*... like we can be a Prime Minister and have good jobs... (Tony)*

*To see the kinds of schools and higher group we can get to... (Toma)*

*Depends on what marks you get... actually if it's a good mark then you're upbeat about it... but if it's not a good mark then you feel depressed about it... but then it makes you wanna work harder so you can get more marks the next time you do it... (Mika)*

The STAR and asTTle tests are standardised in both knowledge to be tested and how they are tested. Testing methods, such as, pen and paper do not match the oral face-to-face communication Samoan students are used to in their homes. The normalising individualistic mode of testing is a direct mismatch to Samoan students' communal way of working and learning. The emphasis of standardised tests on the end product is vastly different from that of Samoans, where procedures and processes are more important. While standardised tests accentuate time as a determining factor of success, Samoans emphasise the quality of the work, and the relationships built and maintained whilst engaged in their group work.

The normalising nature of the tests is evident in the kinds of questions intended about the learners and their educational needs. The normalisation subjects students, teachers and schools to further surveillance. This is to ensure the English language, knowledge and culture is thoroughly learned and applied for the benefit of themselves as citizens and of the state (Ministry of Education, 2007). The schools' job is to develop students to be effective oral, written, and visual communicators who are able to think critically and in-depth. The students' job is to understand the English language and how it works to enrich

and shape their own lives. As almost all learning areas are communicated using the English language as a medium of instruction, English is therefore fundamental to success across all areas in the New Zealand Curriculum.

Normalisation is evident in the test papers analysed in this research project. And since 82% of the answers to the tests are predetermined by the test designers, this does not allow any room for students to negotiate any meaning of the texts except to show their understanding by thinking like the test designers or by 'guessing what the test designers are thinking'. This was clearly articulated in Vili's assertion;

*I think they want us to start to think like them... in the test they give us things to get us to start thinking about them*

Standardising the knowledge makes it possible to accumulate student marks, organise them, rank them, classify them, form categories, determine averages and norms (Foucault, 1977). Students noted;

*Teacher keeps saying oh there is no high group or low group, but we know... we know which group is higher cos the people with high marks are there... all in one group... (Simi)*

*Our teachers put us in the right reading groups... according to the marks we get from the test... (Lisa)*

*It's embarrassing to be in the lowest group... so I get angry... (Tony)*

*Some of us with low marks go to special classes and its humiliating... cos people laugh when you get called out... (Molly)*

Students' comments reflect the pathological effect of standardised tests on students, similar to the Samoans who struggle to maintain good marks. They are deficit driven and exercise the power of the teachers and school specialists to turn students into a case; objects of study; to analyse; calculate and describe; put under surveillance; and to be remediated (Foucault, 1977). In these activities, teachers are provided with a rich, pseudo-scientific vocabulary of classification and justification for the inevitability of differences between students. It is unfortunate and worst still that these practices inform and reinforce the notions that Samoans like other working class families are culturally deprived, deficient and abnormal.

Educators and scholars, such as, Rata, O'Brien, Murray, Mara, Gray and Rawlinson (Rata et al., 2001), as mentioned earlier in this thesis (Matā'upu Muamua) argue that text topics and types broaden students' horizons and engage with new ideas beyond

parameters of their current world. If this was really the case, a startling inequality of opportunities is obvious as 98 % of the texts are based on the tests palagi knowledge, and interest and culture and is presented to *subject* the Samoan and other non-palagi students to the test palagi thinking, knowledge and truth. This is vastly different as compared to only one test item, out of the 151, that is about Samoa, which could broaden the horizons of those who are not Samoan.

### **Concluding comment**

Standardised tests such as the asTTle and STAR are underpinned by a notion that all students should have the same chance to compete for rankings resulting from these tests. Such standardisation seems unfair, as the analysis of language in this chapter, as well as students' stories during the fa'afaletui have highlighted the divergence between their knowledge and culture and those of the tests. These differences include the language of the test, the individualistic nature in which the tests are administered and text themes and topics, which are mainly middle class palagi adult, oriented. These differences make comprehending the tests difficult for some students. These differences seem to suggest an overall assumption that all students are exposed to the same culture, speak, and understand the same level of the English language of the mainstream population.

Samoan students living in Zealand are living a combination of three hybridised suburban identities. These identities include a 'New Zealand Samoan child'; 'New Zealand Samoan student'; and a New Zealand 'suburban teenager'. These identities are derivatives of the roles they play as children of New Zealand Samoan parents and Samoan students attending New Zealand school and as teenagers. However, very little of these separate identities, knowledge, worldviews and interests are reflected in the tests. The serious mismatch in culture as revealed in this analysis has proven what Solano-Flores (2014) contended earlier in this thesis (Mataupu Muamua) that localising test items is needed to bring testing closer to practice.

The analysis in this chapter has demonstrated an overall notion of the power and knowledge enmeshed in the culture and discourse of the assessments. In particular, in ways the knowledge of assessment is constituted as the truth and subjectifying students to adhere to this knowledge without questioning it. The power of assessment discourse governs much more than just the way of thinking and producing meaning, it takes into account the bodies of students, educators and parents, all of whom are the subjects of assessment it seeks to govern.

The next chapter (Matā'upu Lona Fitu) presents an analysis of the language of assessment tools and practices in terms of gender discourse. The chapter reveals the role language plays in transmitting norms that shape gender relations not only in schools also within society. As mentioned earlier in Matā'upu Lona Fā and in the Abstract, this chapter is important because it: (1) reveals a mismatch between the culture and expectations of the Samoan culture of the feagaiga and the assumptions presented in the tests and; (2) exposes a non-recognition of the fa'afafine to whom the Samoans refer to as the 'third gender'.

## Matā'upu Lona Fitu: Sīliga-Gender Discourse

But first she would have to *speak*, start speaking, stop saying that she has nothing to say! Stop learning in school that women are created to listen, to believe, to make no discoveries. Dare to speak her piece about giving, the possibility of giving that doesn't take away, but *gives*. Speak of her pleasure and, God knows, she has something to say about that...(Cixous & Kuhn, 1981, pp. 50-51)

### Introduction

Assumptions about gender are not universal. Samoan views on gender can be seen as a case study of different perceptions, which cause specific problems for Samoan students in schools (and tests). In this chapter, I explain the results of the analysis of language of the test items using the iloiloga o le gagana method. In particular, I describe, with examples from the asTTle and STAR tests, how the Samoan students are disadvantaged by the content of the tests materials analysed for this thesis. This situation is brought about as a result of the mismatch between the knowledge, understandings and values promoted in the test papers and those of the Samoan students. I will argue that first; the Samoan value of feagaiga is undervalued in the contents of the test materials analysed. Second, I will contend that the absence of test materials related to the Samoan fa'afafine in the test materials is problematic as this non-recognition deprives the Samoan students who are fa'afafine of chances to relate to the material and apply their experiences in an effort to respond correctly to the questions.

If we believe that in order for tests to be equitable and fair, and students should be able to recognise the context and relevance of the tests, then the gender component of texts *is* relevant. In this chapter, we explore how the girls are underrepresented and queer students, such as the Samoan fa'afafine are not represented at all in the standardised tests. This unfortunate misrecognition ironically underserves the state's official policy (Ministry of Education, 2007) that requires the curriculum to comply with the following objectives:

- be non-sexist and non-discriminatory (p. 9);
- value diversity in cultures and equity through fairness and social justice (p. 10);
- promote that students develop respect for themselves and human rights (p. 10);
- encourage students to actively seek, use and create knowledge drawing on their own personal knowledge and intuitions (p. 12);

- support and encourage all students to learn to achieve personal excellence, regardless of their individual circumstances (p. 9); and
- expect students to participate and contribute in communities and have a sense of belonging and confidence to participate in new contexts (p. 13).

The Ministry of Education's standpoint is that students learn best when they feel *accepted*, and are active and *visible* members of the learning community within caring, *inclusive* and *non-discriminatory* environments (p. 34). The Ministry of Education (2007) requires that inclusion and fair representation should be evident in the schools' philosophy, structures, classroom, and relationships and in the teaching, learning and assessments (p. 10). Hence, as a logical consequence, the gay students, such as, fa'afafine should be reflected in any account of the school community. This means that for assessments to be valid, fair and inclusive, all girls, boys and fa'afafine should be reflected in the topics presented in the test materials. This is especially important since the data gathered from these tests is utilised by teachers to draw their overall teacher judgements about students in line with the National Standards (Education Review Office, 2012; Mitchell & Poskitt, 2010)<sup>19</sup>.

In the next section, a philosophical understanding about gender follows. I draw on Michele Foucault's (Foucault, 1970) notion of discourse; and Jacques Derrida's idea of gender binaries and metaphysics to understand and explain about girls, boys and gays, such as, the 'Samoan fa'afafine'.

## **Philosophical understandings of gender**

Foucault's (Foucault, 1970) *archaeology* of the human sciences outlines how language has been used to construct truths in forms, such as, binaries, hierarchies, categories and complex classification schemes that are said to reflect an innate, intrinsic order in the world. While these orders are extremely stable and strongly linked to the exercise of power they become a 'reason' thus make it impossible to think and act outside of them (Hook, 2001, p. 525). Panoptical and totalizing, these orders form the disciplines that organise individuals into subjects of the various discourses within their own society. For example, in the discourse of gender, a person's own desire and sexuality changes him or her into a type of person and a medical identity, which becomes seen as different and

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<sup>19</sup> Further readings on Overall Teacher Judgement can be found on <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Overall-teacher-judgment/Making-an-overall-teacher-judgment>

naturally occurring (Nilsson & Wallenstein, 2013). Sexuality (for instance homosexuals) then becomes a 'species' (Foucault, 1978, p. 43): 'legitimate'; and 'natural'; and demanding to be 'acknowledged' (Foucault, 1978, p. 101). A very recent example of this 'demand' by a transgender prisoner at Rimutaka prison (New Zealand), to be transferred to a women's facility, was acceded to be granted on 27 August 2015<sup>20</sup>.

## Gender Binary

In regard to Jacques Derrida's understanding of metaphysics, to fully understand gender binary, Derrida defines metaphysics as the science of presence or that which *is* (Derrida, 1982). His references to the metaphysics of presence is influenced heavily by the work of Heidegger who claims that Western philosophy has consistently privileged that which *is*, or that which appears, regardless of the condition which has made the appearance possible. In other words, presence itself is privileged, rather than that which allows presence to be possible at all, and/or impossible (Reynolds, 2015).

Metaphysical thought prioritises presence and purity at the expense of the contingent and the complicated, which are considered to be merely aberrations that are not important for philosophical analysis (ibid). This means that metaphysical thoughts about gender uphold the extreme notions of males and females as pure forms of gender and sexuality thus implying an absence of a continuum between these two, into which the gay individuals fall. *Queer* is a huge 'umbrella' term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual-identifications' (Jagose, 1996, p. 3). Included in this term are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, transvestite and others who do not fit in with the heterosexual binary.

Metaphysics creates dualistic oppositions (or binaries) that install a hierarchy that privileges one term of each dichotomy and subordinates the other (Derrida, 1982). Examples of these dichotomies and binaries include presence before absence, speech before writing, good before evil, positive before negative, pure before impure, simple before complex, essential before accidental, rational before irrational, civilized before uncivilised, subject before object and men over women (hence masculine before feminine). Derrida defined these binary oppositions as 'violent hierarchy' as one of the two terms governs and assumes a role of dominance over the other (Hogue, 2008, p. 45).

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.3news.co.nz/nznews/transfer-approved-for-transgender-prisoner-2015082714#axzz3kbqFnH3k>

For instance, in the male over female binary, the first term which often happens to be ‘male’, is privileged and the second term, female, is disadvantaged.

Gender binary describes how society splits its members, males and females, into gender roles, gender identities and attributes. Gender roles shape a person’s life experiences. Gender roles alter people’s understanding of who they are; impacting aspects of self-expressions, such as, in one’s choice of clothing, physical appearance and lifestyle (Butler, 2004). Binary distinction of the sexes provides a deep-rooted categorization system within human languages and cultures. Although these divisions may differ culturally, assumptions of material differences between genders are so widespread that they tend to assume a universal nature. Elizabeth St Pierre (St Pierre, 2000) argues that these very real material structures of the world brutalize disadvantaged groups, such as, women as they (women) are usually on the wrong side of binaries and at the bottom of hierarchies (p. 481).

## **Deconstruction**

To uncover and expose (and destabilize) the various binary oppositions, Derrida developed ‘deconstruction’, which constitutes a criticism of the customary Western philosophical metaphysics practice; that existence is structured in terms of oppositions (Lawlor, 2014 ). The deconstructive strategy unmask these *too-sedimented* ways of thinking, by (1) reversing dichotomies and; (2) attempting to corrupt the dichotomies themselves. Deconstruction is the rigorous analysis of texts to expose and subvert the various opposing binary oppositions. It does not only unpack and reveal the literal meaning of a text, it also attempts to find meanings within meanings. The latter can be achieved by identifying internal problems that actually point towards alternative meanings, which are sometimes embedded at the neglected corners of the text (Reynolds, 2015). These alternative and usually repressed meanings either reside at least partly outside of the metaphysical tradition, or oscillate between the dual binary demands (Derrida, 1996).

Derrida’s deconstruction of binary opposition allows for exceptions to the order of binaries. His analysis shows there are shades of grey in between the extreme ends of the black and white dichotomies. In the case of gender binaries, this grey area runs along a continuum between the dichotomy of ‘men and women’ or ‘males and females’. Gay individuals who are outside conventional gender norms, as mentioned earlier in the previous section occupy this continuum. Gay people obviously break the gender binary.



They do not directly translate to masculine and feminine. Moreover, these individuals have challenged normality and have opened up new fields of possibilities, by attaining certain modes of being as both subjects and agents of their actions (Reynolds, 2015). Samoan fa'afafine (as explained further below) challenge the New Zealand European concept of normality and open fields of possibility as respected members of the Samoan community with their agentic capabilities.

### **Individuals as subjects of discourse**

Foucault suggests that the individual is created through and by discourse. Discourse is created by systems of power in the form of knowledge. The pervasive power of discourse positions the individual to act in order to discipline *themselves* as subjects committed to certain ways of being. This is biopower. This 'biopower' subjugates bodies into normative frameworks (Foucault, 1978). Once a discourse becomes normal and natural, it is difficult for individuals to think and act outside it. Fairclough, Graham, Lemke and Wodak wrote that:

People organize and act through particular discourses... These representations and discourses are therefore an irreducible part of ways of acting and organizing – discourses simultaneously sustain, legitimize, and change them. This becomes clearer as the reflexive character of human life continues to change, and contemporary social life is characterized by a continually enhanced reflexivity that amplifies the weight and power of discourse in social life (Fairclough, Graham, Lemke, & Wodak, 2004, p. 2).

Foucault's idea is that the body and sexuality are cultural constructs rather than natural phenomena. As an example, I draw on Butler's argument that gender is a 'performance', a child learns, performs and develops in time through a stylized repetition of acts (Butler, 2004). According to Butler, this *repetition* is simply a re-enactment and a re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established but which eventually becomes an identity (ibid). Obviously, this understanding of gender is constructed around social norms and individuals act accordingly as they are always judged against that which is normal. Butler's theory of gender as a 'series of gender acts' describes the 'socially established' repeated roles for fa'afafine as will be explained further below in this chapter.

Foucault (Foucault, 1978, p. 58) traced how sexuality became medicalized in Western culture and became understood as a matter of science rather than of pleasure; and was controlled by various loci of power, such as, the fields of biology, psychology and medicine. He went on to explain the notion of 'reverse discourse', that is, once people have internalized a discourse, and have accepted a label this would then lead to the

creation of self-identities (Foucault, 1978). In this reverse discourse, the gay individuals, such as, gays and lesbians are able to label themselves, through the power of the 'coming-out' rhetoric.

Within the rules of discourse, only certain things can be said and done, and other statements and ways of thinking remain unintelligible and outside the realm of possibility' (St Pierre, 2000, p. 485). Whilst 'gay' people fall outside the 'normality' discourse of society, as discussed earlier, individuals who are transgendered are excluded and stigmatized. This is evident in a report by Murray Riches of the University of Waikato (Riches, 2011) that 'the overwhelming difficulty experienced by gay youth in our country (of New Zealand) has a pervasive assumption of heterosexuality (p. 3). Foucault's theory of discourse illustrates that resistance to discourses of domination is possible when people think of different things to say hence utilise a different and alternative discourse. For gay individuals, such as, the Samoan fa'afafine, this contestation may well be an indication of: (1) coming in conflict with both the missionary discourses and New Zealand contemporary culture and (2) reflecting on the existing new contemporary culture to expand their freedom and explore new power-knowledge relationships and networks.

Within the Samoan community, there are gay males called fa'afafine and gay females are called fa'afatama. The fa'afafine community in Samoa and in New Zealand is well established and respected. They are regarded as the 'third gender' hence their 'exclusion' in tests is not consistent with the Samoan culture (as will be explained below). However, this chapter is not a critique of tests as they relate to a person's sexual identity, whether lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, transvestite, and fa'afatama. Such a critique is beyond the topic of this thesis. This chapter highlights issues about tests for girls, boys and fa'afafine.

### **Old Samoa discourse on fa'afafine**

Narrators of the history of Samoa such as Mead (1943) are adamant that fa'afafine have existed in Samoa for a very long time. Margaret Mead's description of Sasi in the 1920s clearly affirms the historical presence of fa'afafine (Mead, 1943). Back then, this existence was part of the old Samoa discourse during the time fa'afafine was part of Samoa's systems of thought and actions. These individuals, who occupy the role and category of fa'afafine were (and are still) recognized as the third gender (Besnier & Alexeyeff, 2014). Although most fa'afafine tend to be effeminate, they range from

extremely feminine to unremarkably masculine, although instances of the latter are very rare (ibid).

Fa'afafine are Samoan males who are gay and act in feminine-gendered ways. In Samoa, a boy's tendency towards becoming a fa'afafine is usually recognised at an early age. These behaviours and preferences include dressing as a woman, dancing the women's traditional Samoan siva and fulfilling feminine roles within the family. In their families and communities, fa'afafine are unique as they have both the feminine flair to perform the 'discourse' well in everyday activities, for example, sewing, decorating family homes and church and the muscles to fulfil men's roles, such as, working the plantation, getting tattooed with the tatau and presenting a lauga in a malae during important occasions.

### **New Samoa discourse on fa'afafine**

The missionaries in Samoa promoted a number of gender-related changes, which reflected attitudes prevalent to Western enlightened and Christian cultures. Fa'afafine nowadays are regarded as sinful and evil by many churches in contemporary Samoan society. Even so, there has been resistance by the 'sinful' brigade, and Samoans have 'Samoanized some changes to suit themselves' (Meleisea, 1987, p. 67). Families continue to appoint and respect fa'afafine despite the missionaries' understandings and teachings. Samoa's practices of respect constitute an alternative discourse. On 1 May 2013, Samoa's Crimes Act 2012 was passed so that it is no longer criminal for a fa'afafine to impersonate a female in Samoa (Buchanan, 2013).

Nevertheless, fa'afafine are often marginalised because of the Samoan culture's strong affiliation to the Christian church (as mentioned in the previous paragraph). Further stigmatisation is exacerbated by the fear in relation to sexual related diseases. People tend to use the fa'afafine's own particularities against them; to remind fa'afafine of who they are (or are not) as a way to put them in their place. The derogatory phrase 'Lou mea fa'afafine' (You fa'afafine thing) is often said to shame and belittle fa'afafine. However, fa'afafine are becoming resilient in their approach against prejudice and stigmatisation. In Samoa, fa'afafine have established support organisations for networking. They run annual beauty pageants, which draw on the tradition of gaining social recognition through entertainment, while also providing a platform for performing femininity. There are strong fa'afafine in Samoa and New Zealand who are influential in the work they do for the Samoan community.

The next section is a discussion of the pervasive power of the binaries as a discourse for students in schools including how the girls are expected to be girls, boys are to be boys and how the fa'afafine are totally excluded in schools, as they do not fall into the normality of the gender binary.

### **Boys, girls, and fa'afafine in schools**

Schools encourage the *normal* socialization patterns of young children as 'male (*first*) and female (*second*)'. The male/female binary then becomes a disciplinary mechanism and an example of everyday 'panopticism' (Foucault, 1979). Not only are students taught explicitly and implicitly of these expectations, the binary itself becomes an efficient self-disciplinary technology that controls the behaviour and fixes students under its gaze, and does not allow any of them (even the fa'afafine) to circulate in 'unpredictable ways' (Goodson & Dowbiggin, 2012). This normality is highlighted in Cixous and Kuhn (1981) in the epigraph above, of the way the male/female binary subjectifies girls into docile bodies of the dominated, the nice, the passive and submissive and boys into aggressiveness, overpowering-ness and domination (also A. Jones, 1993, p. 162; Lafrance, 1991). Boys who *do not* possess these characteristics are said to be weak (Bailey, 1992) and girls who *do* are real bitches (Reay, 2001), weird and not 'ok' (A. Jones, 1993, p. 162). Obviously, these binary oppositions are 'value-laden and ethnocentric' (Goody, 1977, p. 36) and lead directly to distorted perceptions of gender roles (St Pierre, 2000, pp. 491-492); and may cause damage to girls more than boys.

The implication of gender binaries may be deeper in schools where dominant ideologies may be legitimated by some teachers' unthinking use of terms, which may lead some students into thinking that embracing the dominant order can be for their own good. Normalising and naturalising potentially discriminatory ideologies, such as, these male/female binaries may render them detrimental and disadvantaging to the female students. Foucault viewed normalisation as a process that not only serves to mark out the majority from the minority of 'them' it also exists to support the power relations of society (Leitch & Motion, 2007). Common classroom examples of these power relations are the boys getting the 'lion's share' of the teacher's time, energy, attention, and talent because 'boys will be boys' (Chapman, 2009, p. 4). Boys are usually encouraged to think independently, be active and speak up, and exerting power over girls is sometimes, seen as expected and appropriate (Bailey, 1992). Girls on the other hand are often praised for being neat, quiet, and calm. Adults including teachers (Reay, 2001) often view assertive behaviour from girls negatively. Today, girls and boys are receiving separate and unequal

educations due to the gender socialization and the sexist hidden curriculum students are faced with every day (Carpenter, 2001; Williams & Sheehan, 2001). Gender bias therefore is embedded in all aspects of teacher interactions with students, lessons and in assessment items, which may be disadvantaging the girls.

The binaries discussed above may have further detrimental implications for the gay and fa'afafine students, especially if there is very little (if there is any) provisions for them in schools. The binaries assume it is normal to be *either* a boy or a girl. Since the gays and fa'afafine students do not see themselves as belonging to either, some may feel left out. Some fa'afafine may struggle to cope with the normalised panoptic of everyday life in schools since their existence does not matter. In my experience of working in intermediate schools, I see that there are no toilets for fa'afafine. Fa'afafine who do identify themselves as 'girls' are not allowed to go to the girls' toilet, but force themselves to the boys' ones where they feel uncomfortable and ridiculed. There is hardly any education for other students about 'being gay' so they understand what it is like to be gay. 'Being gay' is not viewed as a topic worth studying at school (unlike 'dinosaurs' and 'the solar system'). There are hardly any books and reading materials in schools on 'being gay' that students can read and learn from. Most schools are being run strictly as a binary of boys and girls ignorant of the gay individuals occupying the continuum in between.

### **Boys, girls, fa'afafine (and queer) in assessment**

Assessment, especially when it is in the form of standardised testing, is the most powerful tool that those who control the schools use to assert their power. It is their power that is perpetuated as the mechanism of maintaining the status quo (Auerbach, 1995, p. 11). In a male-dominated patriarchal society such as New Zealand, assessments accentuate gender inequalities in academic achievement by controlling and manipulating what counts as knowledge (Chilisa, 2000). It is the knowledge, life experience, language and discourses of the white and mostly male English speaking middle class that is valued in educational institutions. Such knowledge can be defined in terms of subject, ability required to achieve, the context, and the format of the task. The analysis contained in the latter part of this chapter, demonstrates that it is through *this* form of knowledge that is currently judged and equated with achievement.

Drawing on Foucault's theory of discourse, this chapter illustrates how language gathers itself together according to socially constructed rules and regularities that allow certain statements to be made and not others. This is evident in the vast imbalance between males,

females and fa'afafine in terms of how much and how little of their representation is, within the testing tools analysed. Foucault (1972) declared that ideology is circulated and reproduced through the choice of grammar, style, wording and every other aspect of language (cited in Johnstone, 2002, p. 40). So every grammatical choice of word is strategic, and every utterance has an epistemological agenda, created for the reader by its author (ibid). As the frequency of words gives a sociological profile of a given word (P. Baker, 2006), the much higher number of male related labels, male related pronouns, male related interests and male related pictorial items seems to suggest that more value and importance has been given to men.

For this analysis, all test materials including the texts students have to read, statements, instructions, pictures, questions and answers were analysed for signs and notions of gender discrimination. This analysis has the capacity to detect bias in test papers and practices in terms of gender representativeness.

The analysis highlights the bias present in the 'top to bottom' power of the patriarchal discourse, which is filtered through the schooling system and is reflected in the content of texts and tests. The texts expose and confirm societal expectations for women to be subordinate to men and be docile bodies of this domineering discourse. The analysis shows the overwhelming disproportionate presence of masculine or male-preferred assessment modes. The analysis also reveals an absolute absence of texts related to gays and fa'afafine, or of diversity with respect to gender position. Of all the visuals and the verbal texts examined in this project, nothing was found to indicate any relation to the gay culture and gay identities of the gay population in Aotearoa New Zealand. These gay identities include the Māori whakawahine, tangata ira tane and takatāpui, the Samoan fa'afafine, the Tongan fakaleiti, the Cook Island 'akava'ine, the Fijian vaka sa lewa lewa and the Niuean fiafifine (Schmidt, 2015; Schoeffe, 2014).

If representation of minorities is important in assessment, whether for reasons of 'social justice' or simply gathering accurate data then all variations of people have to be represented in standardised tests. However, due to the complete absence of gay and fa'afafine related materials in the test papers, the rest of the analysis in this chapter is about the representation of male and female genders in the asTTle and STAR test papers. The chapter is presented in five sub sections. Each sub section presents an issue and quotes examples from the test materials that explain why such identified bias may be

problematic to Samoan students. This section includes a discussion of gender relations from a Samoan perspective.

## Gender representation

Gender representation is defined as the extent to which an item could be characterised as referring to or showing a male or female. In regard to the assessment tools examined for this project, gender representation is examined in terms of what the texts are about, and if they are female or male oriented. The texts examined for this particular section are the stories the students are supposed to read and understand, and the assessment questions based on these stories. Second, the tests were also analysed in terms of verbal items, such as names, labels as well as pronouns in the tests papers. Pictorial items are also scrutinised to ascertain if males and females are equally represented in the pictures. The instructions are not included in this analysis.

The majority of texts that students are expected to read and respond to, are about males. Of the nine texts student must read in asTTle Levels 3/4, five are about males, two are about females. With the seven texts in asTTle Level 4, two are male oriented, and one is female oriented. Levels 4/ 5 of the asTTle consist of five texts. Three are about males, and none is about females. Whilst STAR A has an item related to males and one to females, STAR B has four out of seven male oriented items and no items related to females.

### Fa'avasēgaga 6.1: Male and Female thematic analysis of texts in the tests

	Male related texts	Female related texts
asTTle Level 3/4	Ultimate Dress Up	Letter One
	Just in time	New Girl
	Letter Two	
	A Simple Lesson	
	Crowded House	
asTTle Level 4	My Brother's Mess	Intolerable Behavior Sent Ti Wiata
	The Fabric Photo	
asTTle Level 4/5	A Special Gift	
	Greenpeace	
	Crowded House	
STAR A	In some countries (cloze test)	Dear Dorothy
STAR B	In a local magazine (cloze test)	
	Mike Stumbled (cloze test)	
	Business Letter	
	A Boy's Private Diary	

The table below shows the analysis of labels and names that illustrate the overall male bias in regard to the five assessment tools examined.

#### **Fa'avasēgaga 6.2: Number of Male and Female related labels in the tests**

<b>Test papers</b>	<b>male oriented labels</b>	<b>female oriented labels</b>
asTTle Level 3/3	73	28
asTTle Level 4	94	51
asTTle Level 4/5	45	5
STAR A	8	15
STAR B	18	13
Totals	238	112

The table above shows that 68% of the total number of gender referenced labels, are either male names, or are widely identified with particular men. These labels include, ‘Marc’, ‘Max’, ‘Felipe’, ‘Spielberg’, ‘Dustin Hoffman’, ‘Wiremu’, ‘Neil Finn’, ‘Jack’ and ‘Professor Ranginui Walker’. They also include labels referencing the male gender, for example, ‘poet’, ‘grandfather’, ‘soldiers’, ‘actors’, ‘king’, ‘hero’, ‘m’ijo<sup>21</sup>, ‘son’ and ‘brother’. Female oriented labels on the other hand amount to 32%, which include names of women and girls such as ‘Gretchen’, ‘Rima Te Wiata’, ‘Wendy’, ‘Makerita’ and ‘Dorothy’, and female related labels such as ‘mother’, ‘sister’, ‘lady’ (in Colonel’s Lady, in asTTle Level 4) and ‘grandma’.

As noted, six male names: ‘Charles Malam’; ‘Michael L. May’; ‘Jim Bannister’; ‘Mr Wiremu Davis’ and ‘Jack Parat’ are presented as authors of some of the texts read by students across the five papers examined. In contrast, only four female names are presented as authors of texts. They are ‘Makerita Vaai Nauru’, ‘Jody Cook’, ‘Bronwyn Sell’, and ‘Hannah’, whose draft writing on Stephen Spielberg is one of the texts students for students who are at asTTle Level 4/5.

In terms of revealing the pronominal functions of words, after a thorough review of the tests they show the following.

#### **Fa'avasēgaga 6.3: Number of Male and Female pronouns in the tests**

<b>Test papers</b>	<b>male related pronouns</b>	<b>female related pronouns</b>
asTTle Level 3/3	33	11
asTTle Level 4	78	21
asTTle Level 4/5	23	0

<sup>21</sup> In Spanish, m’ijo (mē’hō) is the colloquial form of mi hijo, meaning ‘my son’



STAR A	17	7
STAR B	23	9
Totals	174	48

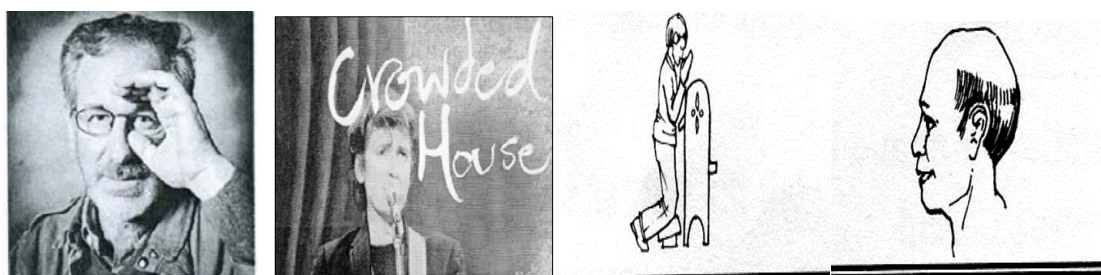
The chart above illustrates the heavy tendency of all test papers towards male oriented texts. This is evident in the dominant use of male referenced pronouns in 77% of the text, such as, ‘he’, ‘his’ and ‘him’, compared to the 23% of pronouns, such as ‘she’ and ‘her’ and ‘herself’.

The analysis of pictorial items presented in the five selected test papers shows more pictures and illustrations representing the interests of males, as shown in the table below.

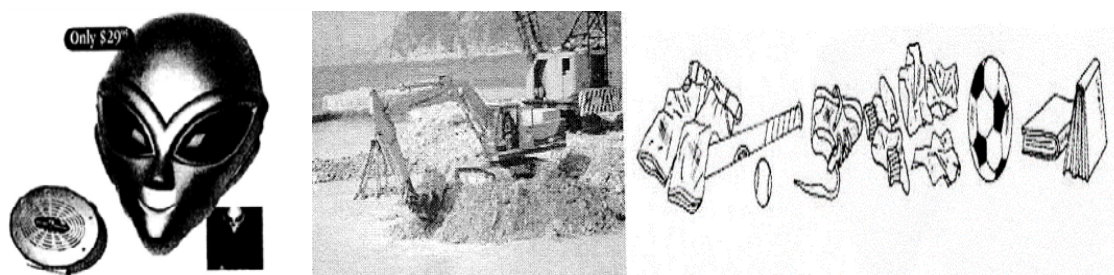
**Fa'avasēgaga 6.4: Number of Male and Female related images in the tests**

Test papers	total number of pictorial items	male related	female related
asTTle Level 3/4	7	4	2
asTTle Level 4	6	3	1
asTTle Level 4/5	4	3	0
STAR A	13	5	1
STAR B	13	5	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>7</b>

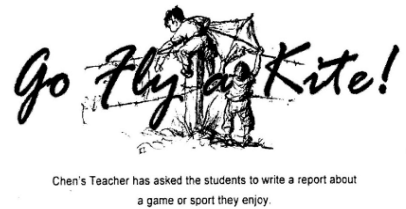
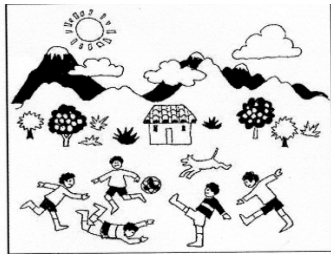
Below are examples of the pictorial items included in the test papers. First, the photographs and drawings of men as shown below:



and of male oriented toys as shown below:



and male oriented sports and interests as shown below:



Second, the small representation of female pictures and illustrations are a picture of an Egyptian goddess (asTTle level 4) and a woman's face representing 'fright' as in the STAR A as shown below:



The pictures below illustrate women in relation to other items. For each picture, I have explained what it shows below the picture and what it seems to suggest.



The poem where the first picture, of the dinosaur and the little girl is from, relates to dinosaurs as 'Gentle Giants', 'Tyrant Kings', 'Horned Heads' and 'Spiny Beasts', with 'terrific claws', characteristics that have been clearly captured in the drawing. The dinosaur's direct stare suggests contempt eyeing the viewer from a superior position. The little girl, being guarded by a ferocious animal tends to suggest the fragility of women who need somebody or something, even a ferocious dinosaur to look out for them. It also suggests that women are too trusting, that this little girl is carelessly unaware of the danger, such as, those related to dinosaurs. Both present stereotypical notions of women in society (Baxter, 2007).

The second picture of 'Everyday Heroes' in popular television shows clearly illustrates an imbalance in the representation of gender. There are five males and one female in the picture. Students in the study are able to name the characters in order from the left as The

Flash (male), Superman (male), Wonder-woman (female), The Hulk (male), Batman (male) and Spiderman (male). The word hero is indicative of men (a male hero). Its bold inclusion in this picture seems to suggest that the one female heroine in the picture cannot warrant the correct grammatical labels for the picture (such as Everyday Heroes and Heroine). Instead, the title heroes is adopted, referencing males as the linguistically implied generic to gender itself, making females and women a second class (Chilisa, 2000; Faulkner, 2001). The next section addresses the denigration of women, by the use of labels and written texts.

## **Denigration in portrayal of girls and women**

As the pictures in the previous section show, the analysis of test papers also reveals the consistent belittling portrayal of women and girls. This section is concerned with the negative depiction of girls and women. The written examples from the five test papers examined convey disrespect for girls.

### ***Examples of demeaning texts in the STAR A and B***

#### **1. Practice example**

The following text (Traditional Fairy Tale) is presented as a practice question for the students and the test administrators to work on together before the students engage with the real test on their own. The same practice questions appear in Subtest 6 in both test papers A and B.

#### **EXAMPLE Traditional Fairy Tale.**

Once upon a time there lived a beautiful princess called Beatrice. She dwelt in a magnificent palace, owned many fine clothes and had *lots of close buddies . many dear friends . numerous close associates*. She should have been very happy *but, no way . but no such luck . but alas, this was not so*. While her father, the King, was ever wise and generous, her *ill-tempered mother . nasty old Mum . wicked female parent* made her life a misery.

The text shows the father, the king, in positive terms. The mother on the other hand, has been described as ill-tempered, nasty and wicked. The text also displays the princess as vulnerable and disadvantaged because of her mother's lack of compassion. Either way, the girl is implicated as selfish and unappreciative from a Samoan point of view. Samoan children are taught to respect their parents no matter what.

## **2. Examples from the STAR test papers**

The table below further shows how the men (and boys) and girls (and women) are presented in the STAR A and B test papers.

### **Fa'avasēgaga 6.5: Statements in the STAR tests related to Males and Females**

<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>
Maria had to stay away from school because she was sick.	My dad's an expert in the kitchen, his chocolate muffins are delicious.
The girl who fell off the bicycle was badly hurt.	As Johnny improved his bowling skill, he also grew in confidence.
Joe was keen to take part in the play but Teresa was reluctant.	Joe was keen to take part in the play but Teresa was reluctant .
Sally's face was a picture of misery (unhappiness).	Einstein, the great scientist, was totally disinterested in money, power and fame.
Grandma entered my room and was confronted with a scene of utter chaos.	Bob Charles was the first Kiwi golfer to establish himself on the international circuit.

The men and women in these ten sentences are exhibited in two contrasting languages, one being positive, and the other negative. While men are portrayed as being successful in activities they are involved in, on the other hand, the women are displayed as weak, prone to accidents, unenthusiastic, and unhappy.

## **3. Examples from the three asTTle papers**

### ***Test item 1: Everyday Heroes (asTTle Levels 3-4)***

**Max made this chart about some of the *Everyday Heroes* shows.**

<b><u>Date of Show</u></b>	<b><u>Hero</u></b>	<b><u>What the Hero Does</u></b>
January 3	Annie, a brave dog	Helps rescue swimmers
February 7	Tim Eaton, a 12-year-old boy	Collects clothing for homeless families
March 7	Shanta Hill, a 16-year-old girl	Sings to people in hospitals

This test item expects students to read the chart and think about the function of the chart and how it can help Max in writing his letter. Moreover, 'Annie', one of the few female names in the test papers, is the name of a dog.

### ***Test item 2: 'Intolerable behaviour' caused Te Wiata's exit (asTTle level 4)***

This text is a newspaper article, taken straight out of a newspaper, written by a female palagi writer. It is the only text in the three asTTle tests analysed for this research, which focuses on a non-European person. The analysis herein discusses how the main character, Rima Te Wiata, a woman, is presented. The text is analysed according to the effort of the writer and the space allocated to each player in the text, to fulfil their intended purpose, revealing their own ideologies in the situation. These players include the characters in the article as well as the test writers who have given this article its position in the test.

**Read the newspaper article and answer questions 07 to 10.**

## “Intolerable” behaviour caused Te Wiata’s exit

By BRONWYN SELL

Actor Rima Te Wiata walked off the stage in the middle of the play *Woman Far Walking* in frustration, after three cellphones rang and two pagers beeped in the audience.

Anna Robertshawe, business manager for the theatre company said, “The last straw was when Te Wiata was distracted by a man in the second row eating sweets.”

The response to her sudden departure was mixed.

Te Wiata was criticised by an audience member, Ron Wilson, who said she **demand**ed that the man leave and swore loudly before leaving the stage.

In support of the actress, the theatre company said the disruptions had become intolerable for Te Wiata and she was unable to proceed with the Witi Ihimaera play. Anna Robertshawe said the venue, Auckland’s Herald

Theatre, was intimate and disruptions were magnified by the audience being close to the stage. She apologised for “this unexpected and very unfortunate incident” and said tickets for that Monday’s performance would be refunded.

Another audience member, retired Maori Professor Ranginui Walker said Te Wiata’s actions were justified because she was being insulted spiritually and professionally. Professor Walker said Te Wiata had been performing an emotional scene about influenza deaths in the Maori community in 1918 and she was “quite right in doing what she did. The behaviour was crass. You’re not at a movie. When you’re at a play it’s a live performance. But worse still, it’s also wairua – spiritual. When Maori are performing a thing like that they are actually with their ancestors, performing on behalf of their ancestors, the past and the

present are one.”

“They’re giving it their all, the emotional output is just draining and to see some crass individual at the front, eating sweets, is just intolerable.”

He said audience members were stunned and some sitting near him were “**tut-tutting**” that the “spell was broken by this unseemly behaviour.”

Veteran actor Raymond Hawthorne said last night it was very hard for an actor when disruptions occurred but walking out was a last resort. “My natural inclination is just to plough on regardless, but this problem of cellphones ringing and pagers going in theatres is a dreadful thing.”

*New Zealand Herald,*  
22 June 2000

The text explains an incident that sent a Māori actress off the stage in frustration. Rima Te Wiata walked off in the middle of the play ‘Woman far walking’ after three cell phones rang, two pagers beeped, and distraction by a man munching on sweets at the second row of the theatre. Bronwyn Sell, who is the writer, sums up the incident well, in one sentence that makes up the first paragraph. The seven remaining paragraphs, made up of sixteen sentences, are all about the reaction of three men and one woman, to Te Wiata’s departure. This text is the only representation of Māori women in the tests and she is ‘presented through the eyes of’ European men as weak and unseemingly, although strongly defended

by the sole Māori man. To the credit of the reporter, more space was given to the Māori man's defence. Te Wiata was not interviewed.

The three men chosen for the interview are members of the audience, two of whom criticise Te Wiata heavily. One complains that Te Wiata is rude, demanding and unreasonable. The other, a 'veteran actor', thinks 'it was still OK to plough on in spite of the noise as walking out was the last resort'. While the former gave Te Wiata insulting labels, the latter's opinion, given his position as a veteran and expert in the field of acting, implied that she was a quitter, weak and selfish and inconsiderate of the audience. On the other hand, Professor Ranginui Walker strongly justifies Te Wiata's reaction. Arguing from a cultural perspective, Professor Ranginui Walker insists that wairua and respect for the ancestors are key elements in the actor's decision. His opinions are stated in eight sentences, which comprise half of the article and outline his effort to set Te Wiata's actions into a cultural frame. Europeans Wilson and Hawthorne, evidently expected Te Wiata to continue despite the interruptions.

The following analysis includes the four questions and answers about the text. While the answers have been italicised, other possible answers have been underlined, based on the negative presentation of Te Wiata in the text.

**Question 1:** Professor Ranginui Walker said some of the people in the audience were tut-tutting. This means that some of the audience

- a. *thought Te Wiata's behaviour was appropriate*
- b. *laughed and talked during the performance*
- c. *were opposed to those eating sweets, in a noisy manner, forcing Te Wiata to depart the stage*
- d. disapproved of Wiata's actions

**Question 2:** The main purpose of this article is to

- a. criticise the performance of Te Wiata in the play Woman Far Walking
- b. *report the event surrounding a performance by Te Wiata*
- c. *give the author's opinion of the behaviour of the audience*
- d. *draw attention to the problem of influenza in the Māori community*

**Question 3:** What is the best word to describe how Te Wiata felt when she left the stage?

- a. *Insulted*

- b. Spiritual
- c. Distracted
- d. Insecure

**Question 4:** How would you describe the style of writing in this newspaper article?

- a. Technical
- b. Comical
- c. *Critical*
- d. Instructional

It seems that the questions have been designed to position test takers in an overpowering gaze which echoes the position of the European male commentators. Professor Ranginui Walker says Te Wiata felt insulted (Question 3), but she was also distracted and insecure in the way she was presented in the text. The writers argue that the main purpose of the article is to report the event surrounding a performance by Te Wiata (Question 2), but implicitly, it is also to criticise her performance (and choice) to leave in the middle of the play. The writers argue that the tut-tutting was because the audience thought Te Wiata's behaviour was appropriate (Question 1), but they could also have done so because they disapproved of Te Waita's action. In sum, it seems that all questions and answers focus on the negative portrayal and criticism of Te Wiata.

Further analysis of the article reveals the abundant use of language that carries negative connotations. These include: walked off (in the middle); in frustration; the last straw, distracted; response was mixed; criticised, (she) demanded; swore loudly; disruptions; intolerable; unable to proceed; disruptions (were magnified); apologised; unexpected; very unfortunate; incident; insulted; crass; not (at a movie); worse still; crass; intolerable; stunned; tut-tutting; spell was broken; unseemly behaviour; very hard; disruptions; last resort; plough on regardless; problem; dreadful thing. Altogether, there are thirty words and phrases that relay damaging implications of the scenario; most of them pointing at Te Wiata; and only three labels (crass [behaviour], intolerable, crass [individual]) are directed at the man who instigated the incident.

The analysis seems to suggest pre-determined truths about women as subjects to be in a certain place and speaking certain ideas. The power enmeshed within this discourse does not allow the subjects like Te Wiata in this case to think, act, or speak out of the discourse, or she runs the risk of being seen as abnormal and mad (Foucault, 1970; 1971). As

subjects of this discourse, women are refrained by the power of the discourse, from expressing themselves.

## Superior representation of boys and men

Some of the texts students are expected to read in the test papers have writing about both males and females together either in one text or in separate competing texts. The analysis shows that in parallel to the denigrating exposure of girls, as discussed above, there is a consistent display of boys as superior. This superiority includes notions such as boys are heroes, talented and clever. This section includes analyses of three texts from the asTTle tests that express this perspective and point of view.

### *Example 1: A special gift (asTTle Level 4/5)*

It is noted from the analysis of this text, the competing ideological tensions between the male and female characters. The following list of descriptions of the characters is extracted from the text.

#### **Fa'avasēgaga 6.6: Male and Female related words in the text (A special gift)**

Male characters	Female characters
father, son, Steven Spielberg, Spielberg, soldiers, actors, Spielberg, Spielberg's father, Spielberg, Dennis Hoffman, Spielberg, Spielberg, Steven Spielberg, influential American, famous movie director and producer, talented teenager, young filmmaker, famous, talented, most respected, highly praised, earned an Oscar	Hannah, sister, mother, (his) mother

The list of descriptions shows the vast differences between the identities related to men, such as, father, son, actors and soldiers and those of females, which are only four. The listed attributes highlight the higher status and superiority of males, with words, such as, 'influential', 'famous', 'talented', 'most respected' and 'highly praised'. No such descriptions are found in relation to females, who are also Steven Spielberg's sister and mother. The frequent use of the names 'Stephen' and 'Spielberg' in the text seems to show how much regard the author holds for this man. Even the association of Steven Spielberg to other powerful names in the entertainment industry, such as Dennis Hoffman, adds prestige, importance and predominance to how they, the males are exposed in the text. This elitism is also spotted in the paragraph three of the text, as shown below.



(10) Three years later Spielberg wrote and directed a 140-minute movie he called *Firelight*. (11) Spielberg's father rented out a local theatre and ran the movie for one night. (12) Spielberg's sisters and mother sold popcorn and sodas and the talented teenager made his first small profit of \$100. (13) In this film, scientists investigate some mysterious lights in the sky.

This analysis describes a world in which boys and men, such as the men in this story, as bright, curious, brave, inventive, and powerful, and girls and women as silent, passive and invisible (Lafrance, 1991). With Steven Spielberg's mother and sister portrayed as the silent spectators of his success, they have been 'incorporated precisely for and through their traditional functions of nurturing, personalising and ameliorating' (Eagleton, 1998). As Eagleton (1998) noted:

These women are not speaking their bodies but are involved in the damaging process of ventriloquism and impersonation; in a strategy that is doomed to failure, they try to remake themselves in the terms the institution will understand (p. 345).

This text displays the power of the discourse that regulates the actions of both men and women as a means of a self-governing tool and of normalisation to behave exactly in the ways expected and promoted by the discourse.

***Example 2: Letters to the Editor (asTTle Level 3/4)***

Read these letters to the Editor and answer questions 21 to 23

#### LETTER ONE

Dear Editor

What's going on with the Council? I am a horse owner and have always enjoyed riding through the regional parks. The new regulations saying that horses are not permitted in regional parks mean that I virtually have nowhere to ride my horse. It's crazy! Regional parks should be for everyone to enjoy.

Without horses **meandering** over the trails, these tracks would hardly be used. It's time councils put the needs of people first.

*Jody Cook*

#### LETTER TWO

Dear Editor

I write in response to the recent letters criticising the ban on horse riding in regional parks. There seems to be a myth that parks are there for the sole purpose of being 'used' for recreation. These beautiful areas have been turned into regional parks so that they can be preserved and protected; not 'used' in any way people see fit.

Horses damage the walking tracks. If the tracks are damaged the vegetation in the area will suffer.

Horse manure in the park causes a spread of seeds and foreign vegetation which are harmful to the local ecosystem.

It is true that regional parks are for people to enjoy. Our responsibility is to secure the future of these parks that people both now, and their grandchildren in the years to come, are able to enjoy these unique places.

*Jim Bannister*

In this text, two letters; 'Letter One' and 'Letter Two' are presented as one item although written by two different people, one a female (Jody Cook) and the other, a male (Jim Bannister).

In the first letter, Jody Cook is portrayed as arrogant (What's going on with the Council), proud (I am a horse owner and I enjoy...), selfish (I virtually have nowhere to ride my horse), rude (It's crazy), demanding (...parks should be for everyone to enjoy), opinionated (Without horses meandering over the trails...) and cynical (It's time councils put the needs of people first). The arguments seem to show Jody Cook as a self-centred individual, who pays little or no attention to anything and no one else except herself and what she wants. Her arguments are superficial and not at all well thought out, as evidenced in the trivial justification of the letter that 'without horses meandering over the trails, these tracks would hardly be used.'

In contrast, Jim Bannister in the second letter sounds philosophical in his approach of the matter. Unlike Jody Cook, he is polite in his opening statement. He obviously knows a

lot about conservation and the environment and is clear about the matter at hand. He has picked up on Jody Cook's superficiality and thoughtlessness and has attempted to correct a myth about the use of parks. He has been careful in his choice of words so that his arguments are precise and informative. He sounds like a good citizen, who is caring about the future of the environment as well as of people. The technical language in his letter makes him sound scientifically oriented, well educated, and an ambassador advocating for the wellbeing of the environment.

**Example 3: 'New Girl' and 'A Simple Lesson' (asTTle Level 3/4)**



These two very different texts share a common theme of 'adjusting to new situations' and similar to the letters to the editor (in the example 2 above), they appear together in the test, one after the other. 'The New Girl' is a poem written by a new girl to describe her anxiety about being new. The poem discloses what she sees as vital in a successful initiation into the new community. These include wearing the right clothes, having the right hairstyle, walking gracefully, talking smartly and having the right looks and smile. The list of material necessities identifies this girl's anxiety well.

In contrast, in the story that followed immediately afterwards (A simple lesson), the main character, David Lorenzo, is an innocent boy. While David Lorenzo is also struggling to come to terms with the change of school, his insecurity changed with encouragement from his father. In this story, the three male characters, David Lorenzo, his father and grandfather, are made to sound like good people. For example, David Lorenzo is made to

sound enthusiastic about baseball, the best pitcher on the team and caring and polite. His politeness is emphasised in his response to his father's account about his grandfather as shown in the text below.

I looked down at my feet, ashamed at my behaviour. "No. That must have been hard," I said sheepishly.

In the text, David Lorenzo's father is made to sound compassionate (for his son), attentive (to and about his son's anxiety) and well-grounded in his own culture. The same is said about his grandfather. According to the text, his grandfather, David Lorenzo (senior) is a great man.

"He was the first in the family to come to this country and all that," I answered.

"That is only partly correct. Your grandfather was a very great man. In Mexico he had been a teacher. When he came to America he could only get manual labour jobs because he didn't speak the language. It took him two years before he spoke English well enough to be allowed to teach here, but he did it. He never complained because he knew change could be difficult. Did he ever tell you that?" my father asked.

"Your grandfather taught your uncles, aunt, and me that if you let people see your talent they will accept you for who you are. I remembered that lesson when I went off to college. When you were born I wanted my son to never forget that great man. I want you to always remember what my father taught me, even if it takes a few years for people to see who you are," said Papa.

It is not hard for students to find the competing ideologies presenting males as positive, and females, negative, given the way the texts have been strategically placed to counter each other. The texts articulating females and their views have been intentionally positioned first so students are able to make the usual transition from negative to positive, as they usually do from left to right, old to new, weak to strong and so forth. Even so, the decision to place the texts in these positions to support the understanding of students has turned out to ironically add to the trivialising of females. The diminishing of girls in test materials is problematic for Samoan students. Samoa has a different outlook on gender in relation to the accepted morals of palagi world.

Parents in Samoa and those living abroad teach their children about the sacred covenant or feagaiga sisters and brothers hold for each other, which is a different way of thinking about gender. While the European and Samoan cultures are both obviously gendered, there are different expectations. Samoan sons are taught to hold high regard for their

sisters. For Samoans living abroad, the same teaching is accentuated in their homes as well as in their churches. Many other Samoan sayings teach, encourage and foster this ideology, for instance, 'O le tuafafine o le feagaiga a le tuagane' (A brother is his sister's sacred covenant), 'O le mea uliuli i le mata o le tuagane lona tuafafine' (The pupil in the eye of the brother is his sister). These aspirations for the sisters are observed in different ways, for example, by making sure, she is physically and emotionally safe and that she is also respected by others.

The sisters too are aware of their positions in the family. The outcome of their work as sisters and girls determines their family's pride and reputation in the community (Tui Atua, 2005). The Samoan saying 'E au le ina'ilau a tamaita'i' reflects women's positive contributions to their families (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1991). These commitments are emphasised in several other Samoan expressions such as: 'E iloa gofie aiga e i ai teine' (You can tell there are girls in the family); 'O le tama'itai o le auli o le pae', 'O le tama'itai o le malu o aiga (Sisters maintain peace between families). A girl who fails to uphold her expectations can said to be 'E le pei o se teine' (She is not ladylike). In Samoa, a child's embarrassment is also involved with the whole family and saving face is paramount.

For a Samoan family living in New Zealand, the teenage brothers' own experiences of their teenage sisters are of them 'being the home carers in the absence of their mothers'. The sister is the head baby sitter who makes sure her siblings are fed, bathed and tucked warmly in bed; nurses anyone who is sick; tells and shows others what to do and how; and takes over the responsibility of being the 'single parent' while mum and dad are either working long shift work hours or attending to family fa'alavelave. In regard to sisters, their brothers' presence in the family means: physical safety against intruders; an extra pair of hands to bring the washing in; a helper to attend to granddad whilst she helps others with the homework and so forth. Given the individualistic nature of the New Zealand culture in which families live and look after their own, feagaiga becomes even more important, and therefore is actively maintained and sustained, as sisters and brothers are needed to look out for each other.

While Samoan and European cultures are equally gendered, there are different expectations. While the European culture emphasises the importance of marriage, the Samoan culture emphasises the feagaiga between the brothers and sisters and the importance of the family. This sacred covenant between Samoan boys and girls is reflected in the absence of any derogatory comments about comments during the

fa'afaletui. Although, when students were asked about the kinds of stories they would prefer to read in reading tests, it was noticeable that responses seemed to mirror their own individual (and gendered) interests, in other words, boys insisted on famous male singers and actors and famous rugby sports players.

*... write something not biographies on people you don't know... like children our age watch movies. There could be Michael Jackson or it could be Justin Bieber... or it could even be a rugby player cos we know a lot about them... but these people we don't know a lot about them... with people we know a lot about... we'll do well* (Mika)

*... but some like animals, so it is good to have questions about animals because they like those...* (Vili)

On the other hand, girls chose female oriented stories.

*...stories about famous people and how they became known... people that students like and watch... like Rachel Ray and Tyra Banks...* (Molly)

*Activities like read a story of a girl and find out what she wants* (Terry)

There seemed to be several reasons for the fact that students did not pick up on the insulting of women in the written texts. First, the texts are so difficult that students cannot read more deeply into the implications. Second, the students cannot make the connection between the texts and themselves, girls as girls and boys as brothers of their own sisters. Third, the students cannot understand that the denigration of women is considered negative and disrespectful. Fourth, the denigration is taken for granted as the truth. It is also possible that students in the fa'afaletui are simply trained to accept the printed text as the truth and that it is not subjected to critique. The last possibility hinges on the notion that children are subjected to and by and within the social order. In other words, they may not necessarily be *passively* shaped by others into their appropriate gender roles rather they position themselves in them (Tui Atua, 2003). These choices seem to follow the often negative social and material positioning available to non-conforming women that results in some of them choosing between 'being liberated and being oppressed'. This decision when translated into the language of teenage girls, who participated in the study, became 'choosing between being 'okay' or 'normal' and being 'weird'. Whatever the reason, the absence of gender negativity in the fa'afaletui seems to suggest the strong presence of the feagaiga between Samoan boys and girls. Alternatively, perhaps, the feagaiga protects the boys and girls against the depredations related to the European

notions in terms of the appropriate roles and behaviours of women and girls, and men and boys.

It seems the overall roles of men shown in the tests relate generally to outstanding achievement, displaying their individualistic personalities rather than demonstrating dedication to 'service' and co-operation, that are the distinguishing characteristics of men in a collective society such as in Samoa.

### **Male oriented assessment mode**

The analysis of the types of questions and answers reveals the kinds of assessment modes that focus mostly on the outcome, as in multiple choices and not on the process. Multiple choices tasks promote competitiveness and not co-operation. They assume the absolute truth has been pre-determined in the tests rather than on the knowledge negotiated by the students. They emphasize rationality and objectivity.

The analysis of skill required of the students in Matā'upu Lona Ono: Fa'ataumatau-Cultural Discourse (Chapter Six) stipulated that 82% of the total number of test items across the five tests papers analysed for this thesis were multiple choices, and 18% were of the students own constructed response/s. Further analysis of the constructed response/s specified that 91% of those that were cloze tests items required students to respond using single words and 9% expected students to make up answers to show their understanding of the texts. Objective types of questions and assessment techniques, such as, multiple choices tend to coincide with the preferences of male students (Chilisa, 2000; Elwood, 2013, p. 210).

The female students, on the other hand, who tend to do well in verbal ability test items and language usage are disadvantaged because of the very few chances (4/239 or 2%) offered for them to do so in the five tests analysed. Furthermore, and especially for Samoan girls who grow up in communities where the sharing of ideas and working together in processes is more important than the end result, they are disadvantaged by the individualistic nature of these assessment modes.

In the context of assessment, research has shown that language affects the cognitive processing of assessment tasks. It has been found that reaction time from stimulus to correct response is longer for subjects responding to a task where the masculine generic was applied to a female picture than where it was applied to a male picture. A study of memory by Crawford and English in 1984 found that females' recall of essays was better

when they were written in an unbiased form (Chilisa, 2000, p. 67). Gendered examination materials have implications for girls' and boys' performance as well as for their socialisation. Gender-biased language may delay the processing of assessment tasks, resulting in low performance for the group affected. Examination materials also convey messages that may ultimately influence the way boys and girls perceive themselves. As Arnot noted:

It must be remembered that access to education can be liberating even within a class-controlled system, since it is not only at the level of class relations that oppression occurs . . . patriarchal oppression has its own dynamics and its own 'stakes' in gender struggles, and one of the most important ones has been access to, and achievement in, education as a source of liberation (Arnot, 2002, p. 113).

In sum, the reading passages examined in this chapter are demeaning to women and girls and may be offensive to gender-sensitive examinees. Offensive materials may cause delays in the processing of the task, ultimately affecting their performance in the whole test.

### **Concluding comment**

The chapter has demonstrated the negative and unpleasant presentation of women across the five test papers which seem to coincide with a feminist's observation of the patriarchal predominant nature of society (Tupuola, 2009). The frequent negative portrayal of woman in the tests as weak and irrational tends to suggest that the tests are written from the point of view of men, who are also probably the test designers. The absence of conceptual materials about gays and fa'afafine in the test papers seem to suggest: (1) society's ignorance and disapproval of these individuals; and (2) that fa'afafine may not be a suitable topic for school children.

This analysis has shown that language testing is not neutral; rather it is a product and agent of cultural, social, political, educational and ideological agendas that shape the lives of individual participants. Students taking these standardised tests are political subjects caught up in a form of hegemonic ideological struggle; forcing them to mentally battle with what they know as Samoans; against the foreign-centric bias against girls. The absence of gender disrespect in the Samoan student stories seems to corroborate with the knowledge, truth and aspirations taught in their homes. This similarity means that the severely disrespectful inferences to be drawn about girls in these tests are a mismatch in regard to the background experiences of the Samoan students. Because of these



differences, the students cannot apply what they know and experience themselves as girls and as sisters to an understanding of the texts. The lack of understanding deeply affects their performance directly leading to poor achievement. As fairness in assessment is judged by the knowledge assessed, which is equated with achievement, it is important that males, females and fa'afafine are equally and positively represented to promote fairness for all students. This way, students at school may no longer be learning that girls are 'created to listen and make no discoveries, and are given the chance to speak and be heard, because they do have things to say' (Cixous & Kuhn, 1981, pp. 50-51).

The next and final chapter, the conclusion of the thesis presents reviews regarding that which has been articulated in the discursive analysis and developing arguments that have been introduced previously in the chapters. In particular, it discusses and brings together the theoretical threads that have become visible during the process of the research study.

## **Matā'upu Lona Valu: Filimānaia-Conclusion**

Pasifika students living in Aotearoa deserve our love and support. 'Disadvantaged' in ethnic terms manifests itself in many different ways. Understanding the systemic and personal disadvantages of our Pacific young people requires listening to them, taking them seriously, hearing the complexities of their living conditions and knowing how to reach them, to speak to them and guide them (Tui Atua, 2009c, p. 139).

This final chapter in the thesis aims to consolidate the analysis that has been developed over the previous chapters, and then consider the possible implications and opportunities for continuing the inquiry that this thesis initiates.

### **Tofā'a'anolasi: Critical Samoan approach**

I used the Tofā'a'anolasi critical Samoan approach as the lens by which I engaged with the topic of this research. Tofā'a'anolasi is based on Foucault's analytical tool box to counter read texts to expose the power of, and within the discourse, that governs and normalises the actions and thinking of others. As regards this particular project, Tofā'a'anolasi interrogates the assumptions that underpin the assessment structures and practices. Tofā'a'anolasi explores the relationship between the power and the knowledge within the assessment discourse, highlighting these power relations and making them more visible. This research framework aims to expose the way in which the assessment practices are engaged and utilised as technologies of governmentality.

Tofā'a'anolasi values the collective knowledge and relationships between the researcher, research participants and the research. The Tofā'a'anolasi research framework questions assumptions presented as the truth in standardised tests, by comparing, contrasting and critiquing these assumptions against the Samoan views, solutions and ways of knowing. This process in turn, empowers the Samoan voice, processes and knowledge and ensures that the Samoan ways of knowing, doing and understanding the world are considered valid in their own right. Tofā'a'anolasi addresses issues of injustice in the current testing system and seeks to assert the need to mitigate negative experiences that disadvantage Samoan students in New Zealand primary schools.

Tofā'a'anolasi draws on the collective perspectives of those at the top of the mountain, those at the top of the tree, and those in the canoe who are close to the school of fish. Given the aim of this study, to examine the issues that are not acknowledged in the design of the standardised reading tests, the three perspectives shared were of the subjects of assessments. These are the mountain-top views of the tests experts, the tree-top views of

the tests administrators and the close-up view of the tests takers. The fa'afaletui focus group method of collecting data was utilised to gather the experiences of students and teachers. The iloiloga o le gagana was carried out through group interrogation of written test items during the fa'afaletui.

### **Assessment purposes**

Assessment at one level is to find out what students know so teachers can make informed decisions about what to teach. However, politically motivated, assessments such as standardised tests are meant to identify national shortcomings and achievements in education in order to improve national standing in a global context, as well as to direct teacher attention to areas of poor performance. For the students and parents it has little direct payoff except to tell them, what they probably already know, how the child is performing relative to their peers on a national and international basis.

### **Foucauldian lens on assessment**

Assessment as a mode of thought has its own rules and systems of thought that influence the behaviour of its participants. As a system, assessment is constructed according to people's view of reality and serves to construct that view of reality for others. Whilst assessment is largely accepted as the truth, it is actually reflecting politically constructed ideas of the world that are invested with power/knowledge. Inherent in assessment is the disciplinary power to regulate the bodies of its subjects to adhere to certain conformity and through causing particular behaviours create governable individuals. This disciplinary power works through techniques comprised of hierarchical observations, norms and micro-penalties and rewards to subtly guide the behaviours of students towards the desired aims and goals of the school system and the state. For students, disciplinary power works externally through norms (defined in the New Zealand National Standards) and internally through self-discipline. In this case, disciplinary power is driven mainly by normal (pass) and abnormal (failure), where students work hard to avoid abnormality and failure and, as such, the results defy the expectations and norms of society. Assessment assumes a normalising gaze and surveillance and an invisible power making it possible to qualify (some to certificates, and others to remedial classes). Assessments classify some of the students as achievers and other students as non- achievers. Assessments tend to be exclusionary. While some students are accepted to higher education and better jobs, other students are not. Finally, assessments tend to reward some of the students and punish, stigmatise and abuse others.

## **The unquestioned power of assessments**

Ideally, assessment as pedagogy is part of quality teaching practice and plays a key role in improving education and educational outcomes for the students. Assessment provides an avenue for teachers and schools to understand the specific learning needs of their students. Whilst it provides evidence by which parents can be informed of the progress of their children, teachers can also ascertain and judge the best way to tailor their teaching programmes to address the various strengths and weaknesses of class members. Assessments provide a base from which qualifications are awarded to individuals who have acquired the skills and knowledge to fulfil certain tasks. It helps to shape students to become competent and contributing citizens in New Zealand society. Hence, assessment is more than simply taking tests or collecting and analysing data, it assumes an obligation to examine how a child is progressing and how much a child is learning in terms of the pre-determined disciplinary knowledge of the curriculum. It implies a necessary judgement of which information and knowledge is valued through decisions about what it is that is assessed and how the assessment is carried out.

The predominantly multiple-choice technique used in the tests tends to suggest an unquestioned power inherent in the tests to guard and guide how students think and respond to test questions. There are no provisions for students to negotiate and or apply their own knowledge and understandings of topics and of the world. Students will have to prove that they know the pre-set 'knowledge' to which achievement is measured against. This aspect of the multi-choice technique and tests supports a theoretical perspective mentioned earlier in this thesis that standardised tests measure and see whether one student has more or less of certain knowledge and skill (Olssen, 1988).

According to one assessment expert consulted for this project, the asTTle and STAR tests were designed by teachers, university lecturers and facilitators of professional developments in reading (A. Gilmore, personal communication, 17 January, 2013). So there is a tendency that the tests reflect the 'palagi' 'adult' 'professional' 'mainstream New Zealand' world views of these test designers which is far removed from the 'Samoan child' 'Samoan teenager' 'Samoan student' culture and knowledge of the students. As demonstrated in the analyses, some Samoan and non-palagi students will not achieve as high as their palagi counter-parts. The varying test scores lead to the existence of the pre-determined top, middle and bottom of this particular group of students hence the actuality of the Bell Curve (Scharton, 1996), as mentioned earlier in

the thesis. The ‘top’ proportion consists mostly of the students with similar language, culture and knowledge as those assumed in the asTTle and STAR tests. The ‘bottom’ are mostly Samoans and others without; which in turn tends to demonstrate Popham’s interpretation of the Bell Curve that the result of the tests is a consequence of differences in human capacity (Olssen, 1988, p. 50).

## **Cultural considerations**

So far, New Zealand education assessment policies and practices have been applied to all students uniformly with little recognition of the inherent differences and diversity that existed amongst these students (Mahuika & Bishop, 2013). This inequity is manifested in the mismatch of what is normal to students, such as their own cultures, languages, knowledges and worldviews and those that are assumed in the tests. As the palagi culture is taken for granted as the norm and the only form of knowledge, many educators do not see how this normality impacts on tests and test procedures in the New Zealand school system.

The extent of the normalising power of assessment practices is revealed in this research, through a critical analysis of the language and a discourse of the assessment tools utilised by the schools to gather achievement data for the purposes of the Ministry of Education. These serve as the authoritative establishments of the state. These assessment tools constitute a set of social practices, that is a group of rules that occur in an enunciative field (of assessment) in which they have a place and a status (Foucault, 1972). This status is that they are used to standardise the disciplinary knowledge and linguistic skills of Years 7 and 8 students in New Zealand primary schools. They are markers of who is normal and who is not.

This study has enabled an understanding of how the language of testing is not neutral. The analysis of the test items using the Tofā'a'anolasi research framework has demonstrated how lexical and grammatical features of tests are manoeuvred in order to fulfil their purpose, to regulate and define what students should know thereby often subjugating students’ own knowledge, interests, world views and culture. This research has shown that standardised tests are products and agents of cultural, social, political, educational and ideological agendas that shape the lives of those who take part in assessments. Hence, in a political context, test designers, test administrators and test takers are political subjects and subjects of the assessment discourse.

For most Samoan students, whose stronger language is not English, more time is needed to internalise the information. This process involves: reading the test; translating the test into Samoan in their heads (so they are able to internalise the information); work out their answers in Samoan; translating the answers back into English; comparing theirs to the list of answers on the paper; and locating the right answer. The total absence of timing allocation for this unique learning approach in the current assessment practice regime suggests (1) an assumption that all students are the same and (2) lack of recognition regarding the diversity of languages students bring into the testing context.

The investigation exposes the inherent bias of standardised tests as it relates to linguistic, gender and cultural predispositions that are consequently underserving minority students or any students who differ from the assumed norm. The small number of test items that attempt to provide for a multicultural student population is symbolic of the divergence between the test setting and the background knowledge, culture and experience of the contemporary student population. This research project has revealed that assessment practices are geared mainly towards the language and culture of the New Zealand mainstream population. This phenomenon not only advantages the mainstream student population, it assures the imposition of the self-conformity of Pasifika and other non-European students to these norms. Hence, with the marginalising of students' culture and knowledge in the standardised tests they are disadvantaged as some Samoan students can drive themselves towards advantage by becoming less Samoan. So long as the students remain Samoan, they cannot succeed in this system.

## **Stories are told**

The opening quotation to this chapter from Samoa's Head of State, Tui Atua Tamasese 'Efi, speaks of the current disadvantaged situation of Pasifika students and of the need for educators to be more understanding of the complexities of their lives as children of Samoan parents thriving in the New Zealand education system, with their own suburban interests and culture. His plea emphasises one of the aims of the study, to bring to the fore the voice of Samoan students, which is, indeed, a noise to discourse that retains a capacity to truth. Student voice allows educator experts, such as teachers, principals, researchers and test designers who have the framework of knowledge and qualifications to listen, with a learned and discerning ear, to those elements of truthfulness within their (students') speech (Foucault, 1981). As participants in the assessment process, the input from the students has contributed enormously to the recommendations (as explained further below)

in this thesis for the designs and management of data obtained from future assessment tools.

### **Samoan students: Cultural differences and its effect on test performance**

Samoan students are born with ‘built in’ responsibilities as the future earners of ‘money’, ‘fame’ and ‘respect’ for their families and their communities. These students carry their parents’ dreams for good grades, university scholarships, well-paid jobs and brighter futures. Samoan parents want their children to have what they themselves never had. This is a better education, more money and an easier life. For the children of parents who have migrated to New Zealand, the onus becomes intensified as the parents’ decisions are hugely affected by their accountability to family and church obligations here in New Zealand and in Samoa. These responsibilities, dreams and decisions not only have an impact on the most Samoan students, they become a knowledge base students bring to the school setting.

The students’ stories seem to convey negative experiences in terms of assessments. These encounters are preserved and perpetuated through: first, the labelling of students who have not mastered the language, knowledge, worldviews and culture of the tests; secondly, public rewarding of those who have and; thirdly, the consistent self- policing to work hard in order to be included in the triumphant of being *normal*. Students seem to be well aware of their subjectivity to the ‘culturalism hegemony’ of school (Rata, 2012). Although students are sensitive of the mismatch between the cognitive socialisation and associated practices of their home to that which is expected at school, they understand the role teachers play in reproducing disciplinary knowledge and the advanced literacy essential for generating good marks. Even so, students are unaware of their own subjectivity to the pre-determined knowledge, cultures, languages, knowledge and worldviews of standardised tests, which often are in contrast to those of their own. This mismatch makes standardised levels and conclusions drawn from these tests *false* and *inaccurate*. Samoan students are ignorant of the fact that it is this ‘inequitable’ comparison, which directly leads to some of their prolonged stigmatisation as failures in the country’s overall achievement data. Most students are unaware that assessment reveals how much they have been normalised to be future agents for the good of the state (Ministry of Education, 2007); and that it is indeed their own self determination to succeed in assessment that gives assessment the ultimate power to governmentalize them.

Students are oblivious of the special moral and gate keeping power of literacy in English as a technique (Foucault, 1972) to shape them into disciplined young citizens.

## **Future Implications**

This study has shown that New Zealand still has a long way to go to achieve effectiveness and equity in its assessment systems. Concerns, such as, the mismatch of knowledge, culture, linguistic skills, interests and prior experience, as have been discussed in this thesis have been supported by examples of test items from the current standardised assessment tools along with direct quotes from students who have taken the tests. Nevertheless, the dilemma goes beyond the assessment methodology to communicating across cultures, knowledge and interest to addressing the more fundamental issue of power over decision-making about assessments and the question regarding those whose voices get to be heard and those whose do not. In terms of equity and fairness in assessment there is no doubt they are complicated issues. Tests are influenced by the worldviews and perspective of the test designers, so there will never be a test without a bias.

## **Recommendations**

1. I recommend a complete rethink about the need for any high stakes testing at all. For this to happen, we need to understand the role of schooling and its inter-relationship with politics and economics and the constitution of all of its participants as subjects. We need to understand that assessing students is a political means of maintaining, modifying and appropriating discourses for the purposes of the state. These include accountability and the distribution of resources. The state needs to check if participants are actualizing the discourse, in other words, are test designers designing, teachers teaching and, students learning. The student pass rate is one way to measure the success of the discourse.

2. I suggest that if we are going to have standardised assessments, we have to understand that standardised assessments will always reflect socio economic and cultural contours in student population; and that there is more in the assessment design that can be done to remove obvious and inadvertent 'excess unfairness'. We need to acknowledge the inescapable biases in the tests, that what serves one group of students may not serve other groups. We need to be well aware of the choice of tests we use, the timing of the tests and how we use the data and conclusions drawn from these tests. It is only through this



awareness that we may come to realise and appreciate that while some students could not reach the pre-determined part of that which is considered 'normal', it is not because the students have failed, but is due to the tension between what they bring into the classroom, and that of the test. This realisation may:

- firstly, draw close attention to debatable conclusions drawn about students' achievements with regards to individuals and to minority groups;
- secondly, lead Pasifika students to celebrate their identity as New Zealand Pacific people, and to respect the varied traditions they are heir to and which form their own educational inheritance as well as their achievement in the New Zealand school system and;
- Thirdly, urge the need to develop a more robust and sophisticated assessment regime to honour a rising plane of educational accomplishment.

As part of the realisation mentioned above, I recommend the education of teachers for social justice in their classrooms to focus on fairness in their classrooms, rather than on the inherently unfair results of standardised tests. Teachers as well as school leaders need to develop their knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about how to use tests in their schools.

3. I recommend an emphasis on non-standardized classroom testing. Non-standardized classroom testing enables a diagnosis of the gaps between 'what has been learned' and 'what needs to be learned'. High stakes national testing loses the purpose for testing, that is to find out what the students need to learn and what the teacher needs to do to address the learning needs of the students. Some of the students are disadvantaged since their learning needs are not accurately identified, or they are not identified at all.

4. I recommend further work on other ethnic minority groups living in New Zealand, in regard to particular issues relating national testing. Further investigation is also recommended to be carried out on girls and gay students and how they see themselves reflected in test materials. These studies may reveal what the effects are, in terms of the current assessment system, on these students in regard to their assessments and how they view them.

5. I recommend that educators and others working with students should know about how students feel about the various standardised tests they are put through. I recommend that the empirical work gathered for this research project is built upon as conversation starters

for better understandings of what it is like to be an assessment taker in a mainstream context. Student stories have the potential to provide insights for teachers and assessment designers alike, and to inform practice. That way, instead of determining how much Vili, Sina, Toe, Rita, Anna, Tony, Molly, Lisa, Mika, Terry, Toma, Simi, Sala, Julie, Fala and Josh, students who have participated in this study have achieved in the asTTle test, for example, we can inquire about how much they could see of themselves, their culture, their knowledge and interests as young New Zealand Samoan suburban teenagers, in the tests. Instead of using a grade to measure the Samoanised version of the English language which students write in in response to the assessment questions, we can look more closely and listen more attentively to their stories, their interpretations and their understandings. This is possible in classroom based testing environment, but not in standardized contexts.

6. I recommend that the perspectives of the parents on assessment procedures are explored and shared. It will also be worthwhile to investigate the impact of gender stereotypes on Samoan students and their academic performance and attitudes towards women since this aspect was not mentioned at all in the fa'afaletui.

7. I would like to suggest a critical analysis of the language and discourse of other assessment papers that Samoan students receive assessments on, from which the national and international achievement data is drawn.

8. I recommend that all educators take responsibility for all the issues raised in this thesis. I suggest that tests designers take notice of the students' stories as they have shared their experiences of dismay and confusion of the test materials. I suggest those researchers, experts and other states agencies drawing conclusions about the achievement of students take notice of the mismatch of the culture and language of the test materials and those of some of the students. I suggest that Teacher Education Institutions are made aware of the issues raised in this research. I encourage principals and teachers to have the confidence to question the tests supplied for the schools to use on students. With that confidence, principals and teachers will be able to critique the normal way of doing things. Principals and teachers can challenge how the current testing tools and system are inadequate to measure the cultural, social and academic skills and knowledge students learn in and out of school. I suggest that teachers and principals are critical of the commercial production of testing materials. This confidence and critique may lead principals and teachers to new alternative ways of assessing

students' achievement, which may either be creating their own assessment tools or rewriting questions to suit their own contexts.

Teachers need to be taught how to write tests that will show:

- What students know;
- What students need to know;
- What techniques they need to be taught.

Teachers need to develop more culturally supportive forms of assessments that should be informative and appropriate for their own students. Such tests may include constructed response forms such as portfolios in which students have the opportunity to bring their own knowledge to the fore.

### **Limitations of the study**

This research is limited in several ways. First, the sample of only sixteen students and three teachers was small and therefore this sample was no way representative of the Samoan students and teachers in New Zealand. Second, since the sample was selected from Auckland, the demographics of the sample may restrict the applicability of the findings. Whether the findings can be generalised to other educational settings needs to be explored with further research.

Third, there are also limitations due to the availability of participants and or key informants for topic of research. Since the fa'afaletui participants needed to be the ones with the knowledge and expertise in asTTle and STAR tests, locating participants was challenging. As fa'afaletui participants needed to be in one place for the focus group conversations, arranging such meetings was difficult. During a fa'afaletui, it was noted that certain students were louder and seemed more domineering than others, which could have influenced others' thoughts and how they participated in conversations. Moreover, language difficulties and students' confidence may have contributed to how much or little they contributed to the conversations. Although students may have had the knowledge and experience of what it was like to sit the tests, their ability to express their thoughts and ideas orally may have influenced the findings. The students' decision not to use the post-it stickers and blank charts provided could also mean they lacked the confidence to write. For future studies, constructive and effective support is needed so participants feel confident and safe to share their stories.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I have used Tofā'a'anolasi, a Samoan critical to analyse the practices of assessment in New Zealand primary schools. The purpose has been to interrogate the practice of assessment, to open up the space to examine how it is made possible in discourse and the effect it has politically. The aim has been to make the current construction of standardised testing practice in New Zealand visible to understand, what has made its production and maintenance possible, as well as what it makes it possible to think about, speak about and do.

The two guiding questions for this project were:

1. How do Samoan students understand their experiences of taking the asTTle and STAR tests in schools?
2. What patterns of discourse and language found in the asTTle and STAR relevant to Samoan students' culture and language?

The original questions centred on the students, reveal my belief that due to their failures in the tests, it is necessary to 'fix' the students. Notwithstanding, as discussed in the previous chapters, the research findings reveal a number of serious faults with the tests rather than with the students. These faults include firstly, due to their normalising nature, there are inherent biases in the standardised tests, which work against the Samoan student population living in New Zealand. Secondly, the pervasive power of standardised tests normalises the knowledge of students, which consequently disadvantages them. These shortfalls demonstrate the assumed uniformity in both the students' prior knowledge and experiences and in the language they speak and operate in on a daily basis. These revelations have resulted in a shift in my perspective. The system requires fixing. It is not the students.

Through this analysis, I have concluded the following. There are biases in the New Zealand primary school standardised reading test papers. These biases are not considered in the conclusions about the students' achievement. Moreover, these biases contribute to the students' negative experiences of tests.

While these arguments may not be conclusions, in the sense of endpoints, they are the results of a particular form of inquiry, which highlights and make certain observations visible and might open up other lines of inquiry.

Filimānaia: this particular fa'afaletui has come to an end. The tautua I set out to perform for the education of Samoan students in New Zealand has been fulfilled. The issues that have not been acknowledged have been highlighted. The stories have been told. The understandings have been shared. Filimānaia, as the title of this thesis, metaphorically asserts that all students, including Samoans, deserve the best teaching and learning, in terms of the best assessment practices. This is not to reject Western education, which is vital to our children's future – but to refine it so that it is more congenial and offers greater and more opportunities for success. Soifua.

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## Lisi o upu, fuai'upu ma fa'aliliuga / Glossary

'afei'ato	basket made specifically for containing the palolo fish
'ai o mea nei e a'oai ai fanau	These must be the things they teach their children
alofa	love
amana'ia	to care
amio lelei	good behaviour
Aoga Amata Fa'asamoa	Samoa Language Early Childhood Education
ata	figure
'aua le tautalaititi	do not be cheeky
aualuma	village daughters
'aumaga	village sons
'ava	welcoming ceremony
Avao, Manase, Matautu, Safotu	villages of the Le Itu o Tane district in Savaii
E au le 'inailau a tamaitai	Women work well to complete good work
elegi	herring
E le pei o se teine	She is not lady like
E malaia le tuagane i le tuafafine	Ill treatment of a sister is a curse on a brother
E sui faiga ae le suia fa'avae	Practices change but principles do not
Iloiloga o le gagana	Examining of language
fa'afafine	gay male
fa'afaletui	the meeting of the wise
fa'afatama	gay female
fa'afetai agalelei	thank you for your kindness
fa'afetai tele	thank you
fa'alagilagia o fa'alupega	reciting honorifics
fa'alavelave	occasions like funerals, weddings and fund raising
fa'amalo fa'afetai	thank you
fa'amalo fa'asoa	thank you for sharing
fa'amaoni	honesty
fa'amomoli	gift mainly in the form of food and fine mats
fa'asamoa	Samoa way of doing things
fa'asoa	to share
fa'ataumatau	levelling of two canoes
fa'avasegaga	table
fagameme'i	sling shot
fale	house
fao fale Tui	The Tui brothers have gathered inside a house
feagaiga	sacred covenant
fiapapalagi	want to be white person (European)
filiga	weaving, choosing
filimānaia	weave, select or choose the best
igagatō	gift
iloiloga o le gagana	examining of language
laga'ali	garland plant (Scientific name - Aglaia samoensis)



laumaile	garland plant (Scientific name - Alyxia stellate)
Lisi o itulau fa'apipii	List of appendices
Lou mea fa'afafine	You fa'afafine thing
malae	outside meeting place
manu papalagi	animals imported into Samoa from overseas
matai	chief or orator titles bestowed on men and women
Matā'upu Lona Fa	Chapter Four
Mataupu Lona Fitu	Chapter Seven
Matā'upu Lona Lima	Chapter Five
Matā'upu Lona Lua	Chapter Two
Matā'upu Lona Ono	Chapter Six
Matā'upu Lona Tolu	Chapter Three
Matā'upu Lona Valu	Chapter Eight
Matā'upu Muamua	Chapter One
meaalofa	gift
moso'oi	perfume tree flower (ylang-ylang) used for Samoan oil and lei making
O le mea uliuli i le mata o le tuagane lona tuafafine	The black pupil in the brother's eye is his sister
o le solofanua	the horse
O tama'itai o le auli o le pae	Sisters are conflict solvers
O tama'itai o le malu o aiga	Sisters are protectors of their families
O le tuafafine o le feagaiga a le tuagane	The sister is the brother's sacred convent
O se tama a ai?	Whose child is she/he?
palagi	white person (European)
palolo	fish
Pasifika	name given to Pacific Islanders living in New Zealand
povi	cow
Siliga	excellence
tāga palolo	catching the palolo fish
Tama lelei ma usitai	Be a good boy and obey
tautai	wise fisherman
Tautala i mea a tamaiti	Speak only of children's things
tautua	to serve with respect
Teine lelei ma usitai	Be a good girl and obey
to'aga e fai le aoga	Persevere in your school work
Tofāanolasi	wisdom to identify and make meaning of text
tofāloto	wisdom to think deep
tofāmamao	wisdom to envision
tofāsaili	wisdom to search
tofātatala	wisdom to share
tofā'a'anolasi	wisdom to identify and critique texts
tomatau	references
a malie le loto	the soul is fulfilled
va fealoai	space between individuals
Vaivase	village in Upolu, Samoa

va tapu'ia	sacred respect
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## Lisi o Itulau Fa'apipi'i-List of Appendices

Itulau Faapipi'i A	Ethics Approval
Itulau Faapipi'i E	Letter to the Board of Trustees and principal
Itulau Faapipi'i I	Participants' Information for Parents and Guardians - Samoan
Itulau Faapipi'i O	Participants' Information for Parents and Guardians - English
Itulau Faapipi'i U	Parent/Guardian Consent Form - Samoan
Itulau Faapipi'i F	Parent/Guardian Consent Form - English
Itulau Faapipi'i G	Information Sheet for Students - Samoan
Itulau Faapipi'i L	Information Sheet for Students - English
Itulau Faapipi'i M	Assent Form to take part in the research - Samoan
Itulau Faapipi'i N	Assent Form to take part in the research - English
Itulau Faapipi'i P	Assent Form to take part in the fa'afaletui- English
Itulau Faapipi'i S	Assent and Release Form For the use of video tape - English
Itulau Faapipi'i T	Participants' Information for Teachers - English
Itulau Faapipi'i V	Consent Forms for Teachers
Itulau Faapipi'i H	Invitation Letter for Parents - Samoan
Itulau Faapipi'i K	Invitation Letter for Parents - English
Itulau Faapipi'i R	Flyer created for parents – English and Samoan



## MEMORANDUM

### Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

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To: Nesta Devine  
From: **Dr Rosemary Godbold** Executive Secretary, AUTEC  
Date: 24 April 2012  
Subject: Ethics Application Number 11/324 **A Samoan perspective on current assessment practices in New Zealand.**

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Dear Nesta

Thank you for your request for approval of amendments to your ethics application, which was approved by Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 6 March 2012. I am pleased to advise that I have approved minor amendments to your ethics application allowing additional interviews. This delegated approval is made in accordance with section 5.3.2 of AUTEC's *Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures* and is subject to endorsement at AUTEC's meeting on 14 May 2012.

I remind you that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 6 March 2015;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 6 March 2015 or on completion of the project, whichever comes sooner;

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are reminded that, as applicant, you are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

Please note that AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to make the arrangements necessary to obtain this. Also, if your research is undertaken within a jurisdiction outside New Zealand, you will need to make the arrangements necessary to meet the legal and ethical requirements that apply within that jurisdiction.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, we ask that you use the application number and study title in all written and verbal correspondence with us. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact me by email at [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz) or

by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 6902. Alternatively you may contact your AUTECH Faculty Representative (a list with contact details may be found in the Ethics Knowledge Base at <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics>).

On behalf of AUTECH and myself, I wish you success with your research and look forward to reading about it in your reports.

Yours sincerely

Dr Rosemary Godbold  
**Executive Secretary**  
**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

Cc: Akata Sisigafu'a Galuvao [miwtep@vodafone.co.nz](mailto:miwtep@vodafone.co.nz)



60 A Robertson Road,  
Mangere

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman  
Board of Trustees  
\_\_\_\_\_ School

Title: A Samoan perspective on current literacy assessment practices in New Zealand primary schools.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a postgraduate student at The Auckland University of Technology. I am conducting a research to investigate the language and its interpretations in reading assessment papers used to test the reading skills and knowledge of Years 7 and 8 students in New Zealand.

The purpose of this letter is to seek approval for me to carry out my research at your school which will focus on gathering student voice on

- their understanding of assessment practices in schools
- their experiences of assessment practices and achievement
- the link between their cultural background and experience and assessment

The research will involve three half hour long 'fa'afaletui'<sup>22</sup> sessions where a video tape will record students' conversations. Students will be given different topics to talk about in these 'fa'afaletui'. Students will have the chance to view the video recordings after every focus group so they can add, modify or delete any of the information they have given. If students choose to delete information, then relevant information including images and transcripts, or parts thereof, will not be used.

Students' identities will remain confidential and the information gathered will be used only for the purpose of fulfilling the above stated aims. Participation in this research is voluntary and students can withdraw at any time and the information collected from them can be withdrawn as well. Transcripts and consent forms will be stored separately and securely for up to six years. The data collected will be stored electronically in a password-protected document at the Faculty of Education at Auckland University of Technology.

In case students in this study feel uncomfortable talking openly about their experiences of assessments, I am providing paper and pens for them to write on for analysis. Other concerns regarding the nature of this project would be notified in the first instance to the project supervisor, Associate Professor Nesta Devine by telephone +64 9 921 9999

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<sup>22</sup> A Samoan word given to process where participants meet to talk and weave their knowledge together.

extension 7361 or via email at [nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz](mailto:nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz). Concerns regarding the conduct of the research, should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Dr Rosemary Godbold, at [rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz](mailto:rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz) or on telephone number +64 9 921 9999 extension 6902.

At the completion of the study, participants will choose to either receive a summary of the main findings, or attend a sharing evening to be held at the AUT Manukau Campus, or both. Information about this evening will be given out closer to the day. The final report will be submitted for assessment for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education from the Auckland University of Technology and the copy of the thesis will be accessible at the Auckland University of Technology Library. If you would like further information about this proposed research, please phone me on 2754332, extension 209 or email me at [agaluvao@bader.school.nz](mailto:agaluvao@bader.school.nz)

My Supervisor is Associate Professor Nesta Devine,  
School of Education  
Auckland University of Technology  
Phone: +64 9 921 9999 extension 7361  
Email: [nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz](mailto:nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz)  
Physical Address:  
AR207, School of Education, North Shore Campus

Kind regards,  
Akata Galuvao

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 March, 2012, AUTEK Reference number 11/324**



Aso: \_\_\_\_\_

**Autu : Se taofi i su'ega ma auala oloo faataunuu ai su'ega  
i aoga tulaga lua i totonu o Niu Sila.**

Mo matua o \_\_\_\_\_,

Talofa lava. O a'u o Akata Galuvao ma o lo'o a'oa'oina au i le Univesite mo Matata'ese'ese o Aukilani. O lo'o fia faia sa'u su'esu'ega i le gagana ma lona faaagaina i totonu o pepa su'ega o le mataupu o le Faitautusi i le Gagana Peretania mo vasega 7 ma le 8 i totonu o Niu Sila. O lenei su'esu'ega o loo vaaia ma faatulagaina e lo'u faiaoga, le Tamaitai Porofesa o Nesta Devine.

O le tusi atu e fesiligia so oulua finagalo pe mafai ona auai lo oulua alo i ni talatalanoaga e va'ili'ili ai

- Le iloa e tamaiti o auala o loo faatino ai suega i totonu o aoga
- Lagona o tamaiti faatatau i suega ma faaiuga o suega
- Feso'ota'iga o le gagana, aganuu, masaniga ma olaga o tamaiti ma mataupu o loo su'esu'eina

E tolu ni fa'afalatalanoaga e ta'i itula i le talanoaga e tasi ma o le 'a pu'eina uma i le video recorder. E tolu le talanoaga ma le autu. E maua le avanoa e toe vaai ai lo oulua alo i le video recorder ma filifili pe talia, toe sui, pe tape uma fa'amaumaga e pei ona i ai. Afai e toe tape ese fa'amaumaga, ona ta'atia ese lea o nei fa'amaumaga e le fa'aaogaina.

E fia fa'a'iloa atu e le fa'a'iloaina le igoa o lou alo, po'o le aoga, i fa'amaumaga mo le su'esu'ega. E le fa'aaogaina foi fa'amaumaga i nisi tulaga e ese mai ai ma le autu e pei ona fa'a'iloaina atu i luga.

O le auai o lou alo i le su'esu'ega e tu'u atu lava i le faitalia. O lona uiga e mafai ona fa'amatu'u ese lona igoa pe'a loto iai, pe ave'ese foi ni fa'amatalaga na te faia i talanoaga. O fa'amaumaga uma o talanoaga o le 'a teuina malu mo le 6 tausaga i le Ofisa o Matā'upu Tau i A'oa'ga, e pei o tulafono a le Univesite.

Ua saunia ni auala e fesoasoani ai i sui auai e lagona le le fia talanoa i tulaga e pei ona faatulagaina i le su'esu'ega. Ua saunia ni pepa ma ni peni e tusitusi ai o latou lagona, ua tuuina mai lea mo a'u fa'amaumaga. O nisi fa'afitauli e tulai mai, e fa'afeso'otai sao lava le faiaoga olo'o

vaaia le su'esu'ega lenei. O ia lea o Professor Nesta Devine i le telefoni +64 9 921 9999 extension 7361 po'o le imeli [nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz](mailto:nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz). O nisi fa'afitauli e mafai ona fa'afeso'otai le Failautusi Sili o le AUTC. O ia lea o Dr Rosemary Godbold, i le imeli [rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz](mailto:rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz) poo le telefoni +64 9 921 9999 extension 6902.

A mae'a le su'esu'ega, o le maua atu se lipoti o manatu autu o le a fa'aalia mo lou silafia. A finagalo e maua atu se lipoti i le uma ai o le su'esu'ega, ona faailoa ai i le pepa saina ua saunia. E faia foi le feiloa'iga i le AUT Manukau Campus, mo e uma e fia auai atu e fa'afofoga i le fa'aaloaina o le su'esu'ega. E fa'aaloa atu mulimuli fa'amatalaga au'ili'ili mo lea fa'amoemoe pe a lata i le aso atofaina. Fa'amolemole fa'aaloa mai lou fia au ai atu i lea afiafi.

O le lipoti mulimuli o le su'esu'ega o le a saunia lea ma tuuina atu mo le faamaoniga o le faailoga o le Doctor o Philosophy in Education i le Univesite o Mata'ese'ese o Aukilani.

E momoli atu le fa'afetai tele mo le fa'aavanoaina o lou taimi, ma lau fesoasoani i le fa'ataunuuina o lenei su'esu'ega. A i ai nisi fesili, fa'amolemole fa'afeso'otai mai a'u i le telefoni 2754332 laina 209, po'o le imeli [agaluvao@bader.school.nz](mailto:agaluvao@bader.school.nz)

O lo'u faiaoga oloo vaaia au o  
Associate Professor Nesta Devine  
School of Education  
Auckland University of Technology  
Phone: +64 9 921 9999 extension 7361  
Email: [nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz](mailto:nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz)  
Physical Address:  
AR207, School of Education, North Shore Campus

Fa'afetai lagolago mai, ma ia saga fa'amanuia le Atua.

Soifua,

Akata Galuvao

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics  
Committee on 6 March, 2012 AUTC Reference number 11/324**

## **Itulau Fa'apipi'ii O- Participants' Information for Parents and Guardians - English**



Date Information Sheet Produced: \_\_\_\_\_

**Project Title: A Samoan perspective on current literacy assessment practices in New Zealand primary schools.**

### **An Invitation**

Talofa lava. Malo le soifua laulelei i lo outou mamalu. My name is Akata Galuvao. I am a postgraduate student at The Auckland University of Technology. I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this Information Sheet. I would like to invite your son/daughter to take part in my research. Your child's participation in this research is voluntary and he/she can withdraw at any time and the information collected from him/her can be withdrawn as well.

### **What is the purpose of this research?**

This research investigates the language used and how it is used in standardised reading tests and explores its impact on Samoan students and their achievement.

### **How was my child identified and why is he/she being invited to participate in this research?**

Your child's school has agreed to use their enrolment system to identify all Samoan Year 7 and 8 students for this project. This means that all Samoan students have been invited to participate in this research. They will be given an Information Sheet outlining key points of this research. They will also be given three Assent Forms to sign giving their agreement to: (1) participate in this project; (2) to be part of a focus group; (3) to be videotaped. The specific part of the study I would like to invite your child to participate in is in a 'focus group' designed to allow them to talk about their experiences and understanding of reading assessments.

### **What will happen in this research?**

The research will involve three one-hour long focus groups in a form of a 'fa'afaletui' in your child's school during school time. Light lunches will be provided for all participants at every 'fa'afaletui'.

At every 'fa'afaletui' a video recorder will be set up to capture the interactions and conversations using guiding questions to guide discussions. The use of the video recorder will help capture the essence of students' stories, where I am able to see the participants talking and follow their conversations through. It is vital to the research that students' experiences are noted. These video recordings will be seen only by the researcher and perhaps the supervisor and not the general public. I would like to assure you that NO image of your child will be used in any publications or presentations.



After every 'fa'afaletui', participants will have the chance to view the video, add, modify or delete any of the recordings if they choose to. If your child decides to delete information given at any time during the 'fa'afaletui' then all the relevant information including images and transcripts, or parts thereof, will not be used.

These recordings will be taken away for analysis. The processing of this information, including transcribing, translating, analysing for patterns and themes will take place at my home.

### **What are the discomforts and risks?**

It is with anticipation that your child may feel shy and uncomfortable to discuss his/her experiences of assessment with others. Sharing of experiences may cause your child fear of being ridiculed or even sadness from past traumatic memories of tests and test results.

### **How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

All our 'fa'afaletui' will start with a brief discussion of expectations so that your child is reminded of his/her role in the research. I will also emphasise the importance of respect for each other and what each participant brings into the conversations. Participants will be reminded consistently of the purpose of the project and how important their individual voice is to the research.

For participants who may choose not to participate in the conversations at any time, 'post its' stickers will be provided for them to record certain ideas, feelings, knowledge and post them on blank A2 paper. After every 'fa'afaletui', your child will have the chance to view the recordings and make changes if they want before the recordings are taken away to be transcribed.

I would also like to remind you that your child's participation is voluntary and he/she can withdraw at any time throughout the research. If your child withdraws from the research, all the information provided by him/her will also be removed without being disadvantaged in any way.

### **What are the benefits?**

Your child will have the opportunity to explore and explain his/her own understanding of assessments. She/he will learn through sharing, reaffirming or resolving any issues and concerns about assessments. The results of this research will provide knowledge for teachers and others working with Samoan students of the impact of language and how it is used in tests on students' achievement. This research may also help generate insights for those in charge of designing tests of any standardised aspects of assessments. The results of this research will be written up and presented to the AUT Doctoral Board with the hope to gain my Doctor of Philosophy in Education degree.

### **How will my privacy be protected?**

I would like to assure you that your child's identity will remain confidential and the information gathered will be used only for the purpose of fulfilling the above stated aims. This means that your child's name and the name of his/her school will not be associated with the information collected. Information obtained from your child will

be stored electronically in a password-protected document at the Faculty of Education at Auckland University of Technology.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

Your child will be expected to be involved in 3 one-hour long focus group ‘fa’afaletui’ sessions.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

It is anticipated that the focus groups ‘fa’afaletui’ sessions will start on 25 April 2012. If you agree for your child to participate in this research, could you please sign and return the form to your child’s school by Monday, 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 2012.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

A Parents and Guardian Consent Form is enclosed for you to sign. Could you please fill in the form, sign it and send it back with your child to school for teachers to collect.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

All participants are given the right to request an English written report of the research. Please tick the box in the Parents and Guardians Consent Form if you wish to have a written report. In addition, there will be an evening to share the results with participants and parents at the AUT Manukau Campus. This sharing will be in Samoan. You will be given more information about this gathering closer to the date.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Associate Professor Nesta Devine by telephone +64 9 921 9999 extension 7361 or via email at [nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz](mailto:nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz).

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEK, Dr Rosemary Godbold, [rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz](mailto:rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 6902.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

Researcher Contact Details:

Akata Galuvao  
Sir Douglas Bader Intermediate School  
Telephone: 2754332 ext 209  
Email: [agaluvao@bader.school.nz](mailto:agaluvao@bader.school.nz)

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

My Supervisor is Associate Professor Nesta Devine,  
School of Education  
Auckland University of Technology  
Phone: +64 9 921 9999 extension 7361  
Email: [nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz](mailto:nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz)

Physical  
AR207, School of Education, North Shore Campus

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 March,  
2012, AUTEK Reference number 11/324**

**Itulau Fa'apipi'i U- Parent/Guardian Consent Form - Samoan**



**Autu : Se taofi i su'ega ma auala oloo faataunuu ai su'ega i aoga tulaga lua i totonu o Niu Sila**

**Va'aia ma fa'atulagaina e: Associate Professor Nesta Devine**

**O le e faia le su'esu'ega : Akata Galuvao**

- ☐ Ua ou faitau ma malamalama i fa'amatalaga o le su'esu'ega na saunia i le aso 6 Mati 2012.
- ☐ Na ua maua le avanoa e fesili ai ma ua maea taliina a'u fesili.
- ☐ Ua ou malamalama e faaoga le meapu'eata faitifaga, tusitusi uma fa'amatalaga e faia i talanoaga, ma fa'amaumau mea uma e tutupu i le su'esu'ega.
- ☐ Ou te malamalama e mafai na ave'ese lau tama, ni ata na pu'eina ai ia, ma ave'ese uma fa'amatalaga e uiga ia te ia i so'o se taimi lava oute manao ai, tusa lava pe lei uma le galuega, e aunoa ma se fa'asea pe faa'esea.
- ☐ A ave'ese lau tama e fa'aleaogaina uma ata ma ni fa'amatalaga na ia faia
- ☐ Ou te malie atu e auai la'u tama i le su'esu'ega.
- ☐ Ou te manaomia se kopi o se lipoti mulimuli o le suesuega lenei.  
(fa'amolemole fa'aailoa mai ): IOE ☐ LEAI ☐
- ☐ Ou te fia auai i le fa'asoaina o le su'esu'ega i le AUT Manukau Campus.  
(fa'amolemole fa'aailoa mai ): IOE ☐ LEAI ☐

Igoa o le tamaititi / tamaiti :

.....

Fa'amolemole saina mai i'i:

.....

- O lou suafa:

.....

- Ma lou tuatusi:

.....

.....

- Aso: .....

**Ioeina e le Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee i le aso 6  
Mati, 2012, AUTEK Numera o fa'amaumauga 11/324**

*Fa'amolemole taofi lau kopi*

**Itulau Fa'apipi'i F- Parent/Guardian Consent Form - English**



**Project title: A Samoan perspective on current literacy assessment practices in New Zealand primary schools.**

**Project Supervisor: Associate Professor Nesta Devine**

**Researcher: Akata Galuvao**

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 20 February 2012.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the focus group 'fa'afaletui' and that my child/children will also be video-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw my child/children or any information that we have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If my child/children withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☐ I agree to my child/children taking part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a written copy of the report from the research (please tick one):  
Yes ☐ No ☐
- ☐ I wish to attend the evening to hear the research results delivered in Samoan Yes ☐ No ☐

Child/children's name/s :

Parent/Guardian's signature:

Parent/Guardian's name:

Parent/Guardian's Contact Details (if appropriate):

Date: .....

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 March, 2012, AUTEK Reference number 11/324**

*The Participant should retain a copy of this form.*



**SE TAOFI I SU'EGA MA AUALA OLOO FA'ATAUNU'U AI SU'EGA I AOGA  
TULAGA LUA I TOTONU O NIU SILA**

*E teuina mo le 6 tausaga*

**O lou vala'aulia.**

Talofa. O a'u o Akata Galuvao ma ou te aoga i le Univesite mo Matata'ese'ese i Aukilani. Ou te valaaulia oe ete i ai i le su'esu'ega o loo fia faia i le tou aoga.

**O le a le aoga o le su'esu'ega?**

O loo fia iloa pe fa'apei su'ega i Niu Sila ma lona fa'atinoina aemaise lava i le su'ega o le faitautusi i le Gagana Fa'aperetania.

**O lea le aoga o lenei su'esu'ega?**

Ou te fia avatu ia te oe le avanoa e te talanoa ai ma fa'ailoa ou lagona, ma lou iloa i suega o loo su'esu'eina ai outou i totonu o aoga.

**Na fa'apefea ona iloa au mo lenei galuega?**

Sa e fa'ailoa i pepa fa'atumu i le amataga o oe o le Samoa.

**O le a lau mea e fai?**

O le'a e 'auai i ni fa'afaletui ma tamaiti mai i le tou aoga. Tou te talanoa fa'atatau i su'ega. E tolu ni fa'afaletui o le a fai i le kuata lona lua o le tausaga. E itula le umi o le fa'afaletui e tasi. E pule lava oe pe 'ete auai. E pule foi oe pe 'ete alu ese mai i le su'esu'ega ae lei uma. E saunia mea'ai mo e uma e iai i le su'esu'ega.

**O a auala e fa'aaogaina?**

O le a pu'eina talanoaga uma i le videorecorder ina ia sa'o lelei fa'amaumauga o fa'amatalaga. E mafai foi ona tusitusi manatu, lagona ma iloa fa'atatau i suega i luga o post-its ma faapipii i siata ua saunia..

**O lea le mea e tupu i fa'amaumauga?**

E toe fa'aali uma le video mo le iloa pe 'a uma fa'afaletui. O le avanoa lea mo oe e fa'aopopo, to'ese, sui pe tape ese ai ni fa'amaumauga pe a 'e manao ai. A e manao e tape fa'amaumauga ona le fa'aaogaina lea i le su'esu'ega. E pule lava oe. E leai foi se afaina o oe pe a tape uma fa'amaumauga.

A ma'ea fa'afaletui ona ave uma lea o fa'amaumauga e tusitusi ma fa'auiga e a'u i lou fale.

**O ai uma e vaai i faamaumauga?**

Na o a'u lava e iloa ma vaai i fa'amaumauga sei vagana ua manaomia le fia vaai i ai lo'u faiaoga.

**Ae fa'apefea pea fa'afaigata?**

A fa'afaigata ona e talanoa ma isi i se taimi, e mafai ona: taofi aua le toe talanoa; tusi ou oe lava manatu i post its ma fa'amau i le siata; fa'atali se'i maea talanoaga ona toe va'ai lea i le video ma toe fesuia'i pe tape foi ni fa'amatalaga. E le afaina soo se faauiga ete faia.

### **O a ni lelei o lenei su'esu'ega?**

E maua le avanoa e fefa'asoa'ai ai ma isi i ou manatu, lagona ma le malamalama. O le su'esu'ega lenei e fesoasoani e maua ai lou faailoga o loo tau sue i le Univesite.

### **E malu puipuia lo'u tagata?**

Ioe, e le fa'aילוaina lou igoa, ou ata, le igoa o le aoga i fa'amatalaga poo ni tusitusiga e maua mai i le su'esu'ega lenei.

### **E fa'aapefa ona ou ioe i le su'esu'ega?**

Fa'amolemole fa'atumu mai le pepa "Ioega e auai i le su'esu'ega" ma fa'afoi mai i le ofisa i se taimi fa'avave

Ia e manatua o loo e IOE e te:

1. Auai i le su'esu'ega
2. Talanoa i le fa'afaletui
3. I ai i le video e pu'eina

### **E maua sau kopi o le su'esu'ega?**

Ioe e maua. E vala'aulia foi oe ma lou aiga i le fa'asoaina o le su'esu'ega e faia i le AUT Manukau Campus i se aso o muamua. O le a toe logo atu nisi fa'amatalaga fa'ataua i lea fa'amoemoe i se aso o muamua.

### **O le se mea e fai pea ou popole i le suesuega?**

Afai ete popole, le mautonu, ona e tauina lea ma talanoa i ou matua.

E mafai foi ona logoina lo'u faiaoga. O Porofesa Nesta Devine i le telefoni +64 9 921 9999 laina 7361 poo le imeli [nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz](mailto:nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz).

O nisi lava fa'afitauli i le faiga o le su'esu'ega fa'afesootai le Executive Secretary, AUTC, Dr Rosemary Godbold, [rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz](mailto:rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz). i le telefoni 921 9999 laina 6902.

### **O ai e maua ai nisi fa'amatalaga i lenei suesuega?**

A iai nisi fesili e fia malamalama ai fa'amolemole fa'afesootai mai au.

Akata Galuvao

Sir Douglas Bader Intermediate School

Telefoni: 2754332 laina 209

Poo le imeli : [agaluvao@bader.school.nz](mailto:agaluvao@bader.school.nz)

Ia fa'amanuia pea le Atua,

Akata Galuvao



#### A IAI SE POPOLEA I LE SU'ESU'EGA.

E mafai foi ona logoina lo'u faiaoga. O Porofesa Nesta Devine i le telefoni +64 9 921 9999 laina 7361 poo le imeli [nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz](mailto:nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz).

O nisi lava fa'afitauli i le faiga o le su'esu'ega fa'afeso'otai Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Dr Rosemary Godbold, [rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz](mailto:rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz). i le telefoni 921 9999 laina 6902.

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 March, 2012, AUTECH Reference number 11/324.**





**A SAMOAN PERSPECTIVE ON CURRENT LITERACY ASSESSMENT  
PRACTICES IN NEW ZEALAND PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

*This form will be kept for a period of 6 years*

**An invitation**

Hello, my name is Akata Galuvao and I am a student at the Auckland University of Technology. I would like to invite you to take part in my research.

**What is the purpose of this research?**

I want to find out from you what your experiences are of reading tests you sit in school.

**Why is this research important?**

I want to give you the chance to explain your experiences of tests and talk about what makes tests easy or what makes them hard. I want to help educators like teachers and principals understand how you, the test takers feel and understand about tests.

**How was I identified to be invited?**

You identified yourself as a Samoan in the school enrolment form.

**What am I expected to do?**

You will take part in three focus group discussions in school, during lunch time, during Term 2. You will talk with others about tests. I will provide guiding questions for discussions. Light lunches will be provided for you at every focus group fa'afaletui.

**How will the conversations be recorded?**

I will use the video recorder to accurately record your experiences and stories. You may write notes on post-it stickers and post them on blank charts on the wall.

**What happens to the information collected from me?**

You will have the chance at the end of every focus group fa'afaletui to view the video recordings. You can choose to leave the recording as it is, add, modify or even delete. If you choose to delete the information, then it will not be used in the research.

After every focus group fa'afaletui, I will take the information home to transcribe and study.

**Who else will see the information?**

My supervisor may ask to see the video recordings. Otherwise I will be the only one that sees your images and all information collected.

**What if I feel uncomfortable?**

If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the conversations, you can choose to: (1) stop talking; (2) write notes on post-its and post on charts; (3) wait to see the recordings at the end so you can either change the information you have given or delete

it altogether. Whatever you may choose to do, you will not be disadvantaged in any way at all.

**What are the benefits of this research?**

You will have the chance to discuss feelings, experiences and knowledge of tests. This research will qualify me for a Doctor of Philosophy in Education qualification.

**How will my privacy protected?**

Your name, your school's name and video recordings will not be mentioned or seen in any presentation or publications

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

Please fill in the three Assent Forms attached, and return them to the school office tomorrow.

1. To agree to take part
2. To take part in the focus group
3. To be videotaped.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

You, your parents and your family are invited to attend a sharing evening at the AUT Manukau Campus. The actual date and time will be given to you closer to the day

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

If you are unsure or worried about anything, talk to your parents.

You can also contact my supervisor Associate Professor Nesta Devine by telephone +64 9 921 9999 extension 7361 or via email at [nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz](mailto:nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz).

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Dr Rosemary Godbold, [rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz](mailto:rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz). Or telephone 921 9999 ext 6902.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

If you have any other question about this research please contact me

Akata Galuvao

Sir Douglas Bader Intermediate School

Telephone: 2754332 ext 209

Email: [agaluvao@bader.school.nz](mailto:agaluvao@bader.school.nz)

I hope we can do this together.

Akata Galuvao



### WHAT DO I DO IF I HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT THIS RESEARCH?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *enter name, email address, and a work phone number*.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Dr Rosemary Godbold, *rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz*, 921 9999 ext 6902.

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 March, 2012, AUTECH Reference number 11/324.**

**Itulau Fa'apipi'i M- Assent Form to take part in the research - Samoan**



**Autu :** Se taofi i su'ega ma auala oloo fa'ataunu'u ai su'ega i aoga tulaga lua i totonu o Niu Sila

**Va'aia ma fa'atulagaina e:** Associate Professor Nesta Devine

**O le e faia le su'esu'ega :** Akata Galuvao

- ☐ Ua ou fa'alogu ma faitauina ma malamalama i fa'amatalaga o mea o le a tutupu i lenei su'esu'ega.
- ☐ Na mafai ona ou fesili ma ua ou malie i tali na tu'uina mai.
- ☐ Ua ou malamalama e pu'e ni ata video ma tusitusia fa'amatalaga e fai.
- ☐ Ua ou malamalamama taliaina le talatalanoa ma isi i se fa'afaletui.
- ☐ Ou te malamalama e mafai lava ona ou alu ese ma i le su'esu'ega pe'a ou manao ai.
- ☐ A ou manao oute alu ese, ona ave'ese uma lea o 'ou ata, tusitusiga fa'atatau i a te au, ma fa'amatalaga uma na ou faia e aunoa ma sou afaina.
- ☐ Ua ou malie ou te 'auai i le su'esu'ega.

O lau saini:

.....

...

O lo'u ioga atoa:

.....

...

O lo'u tuatusi ma le telefoni:

.....

...

.....

...

.....

Aso:.....

**Ioeina e le Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee i le aso 6  
Mati, 2012. AUTEK Numera o faamaumauga 11/324**

*Fa'amolemole taofi lau kopi*

**To take part in the research project**



**Project title:** A Samoan perspective on current literacy assessment practices in New Zealand primary schools.

**Project Supervisor:** Associate Professor Nesta Devine

**Researcher:** Akata Galuvao

- ☐ I have read and understood the sheet telling me what will happen in this study and why it is important.
- ☐ I have been able to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the fa'afaletui and that I will also be video-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that while the information is being collected, I can stop being part of this study whenever I want and that it is perfectly ok for me to do this.
- ☐ If I stop being part of the study, I understand that all information about me, including the recordings or any part of them that include me, will be destroyed.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.

Participant's signature:

.....

...

Participant's name:

.....

...

Participant Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

.....

.....

Date: .....

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 March, 2012, AUTEK Reference number 11/324**

*The Participant should retain a copy of this form.*

**Itulau Fa'apipi'i P- Assent Form to take part in the fa'afaletui- English**



**Project title:** A Samoan perspective on current literacy assessment practices in New Zealand primary schools

**Project Supervisor:** Associate Professor Nesta Devine

**Researcher:** Akata Galuvao

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 20 February 2012.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that identity of other students and our discussions in the focus group 'fa'afaletui' is confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the discussion and that it will also be video-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand I can see the notes and video tape after every session and can ask to delete or modify information about me or provided by me
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the focus group discussion of which I was part, the relevant information about myself including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will not be used.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.

Participant's signature:

.....

Participant's name:

.....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....  
.....  
.....

Date: .....

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 March, 2012 AUTEK Reference number 11/324**

*The Participant should retain a copy of this form.*

**Itulau Fa'apipi'i S- Assent and Release Form For the  
use of video tape - English**



**Project title:** A Samoan perspective on current literacy assessment practices in  
New Zealand primary schools.

**Project Supervisor:** Associate Professor Nesta Devine

**Researcher:** Akata Galuvao

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 20 of February 2012.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself, my image, or any other information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information will not be used in the research.
- ☐ I understand that the photographs will be used for academic purposes only will not be published in any form outside of this project without my written permission.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.

Participant's signature

.....

Participant's name:

.....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

.....

Date: .....

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 March,  
2012, AUTEK Reference number 11/324**

*The Participant should retain a copy of this for*



6 March 2012

**Project Title**

A Samoan perspective on current educational literacy assessment practices in New Zealand primary schools.

**An Invitation**

Talofa lava. Malo le soifua laulelei i lo outou mamalu. My name is Akata Galuvao. I am a postgraduate student at The Auckland University of Technology. I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this Information Sheet. I would like to invite you to take part in my research. Your participation in this research is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time and the information collected from you can be withdrawn as well.

**What is the purpose of this research?**

This research investigates the language used and how it is used in standardised reading tests and explores its impact on Samoan students and their achievement.

**How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?**

You are a Samoan and a teacher working with Samoan students in your school.

**What will happen in this research?**

Students will be involved in one half hour long focus groups in a form of a 'fa'afaletui' in school during school time. Light lunches will be provided for all participants at every 'fa'afaletui'. Their fa'afaletui will be recorded for analysis. These recordings will be taken away for analysis. The processing of this information, including transcribing, translating, analysing for patterns and themes will take place at my home.

You as the teacher will also get a chance to talk about assessments. Your sharing will be recorded for analysis.

**What are the benefits?** You will have the opportunity to explore and explain your own understanding and concerns of assessments. You will learn through sharing, reaffirming or resolving any issues and concerns about assessments. The results of this research will provide knowledge for teachers and others working with Samoan students of the impact of language and how it is used in tests on students' achievement. This research may also help generate insights for those in charge of designing tests of any standardised aspects of assessments.

The results of this research will be written up and presented to the AUT Doctoral Board with the hope to gain my Doctor of Philosophy in Education degree.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

I would like to assure your identity will remain confidential and the information gathered will be used only for the purpose of fulfilling the above stated aims. This means that your name and the name of the school will not be associated with the information collected. Information obtained from you will be stored electronically in a password-protected document at the Faculty of Education at Auckland University of Technology.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

It is anticipated that the focus groups ‘fa’afaletui’ sessions will start in June 2012. If you agree to participate in this research, could you please sign and return the form to the office before then.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

A Teachers Consent Form is enclosed for you to sign.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

All participants are given the right to request an English written report of the research. Please tick the box in the Teacher Consent Form if you wish to have a written report. In addition, there will an evening to share the results with participants and parents at the AUT Manukau Campus. This sharing will be in Samoan. You will be given more information about this gathering closer to the date.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, , Associate Professor Nesta Devine by telephone +64 9 921 9999 extension 7361 or via email at [nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz](mailto:nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz).

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEK, Dr Rosemary Godbold, [rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz](mailto:rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz) , 921 9999 ext 6902.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

Researcher Contact Details:

Akata Galuvao  
Sir Douglas Bader Intermediate School  
Telephone: 2754332 ext 209  
Email: [agaluvao@bader.school.nz](mailto:agaluvao@bader.school.nz)

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

My Supervisor is Associate Professor Nesta Devine,  
School of Education  
Auckland University of Technology

Phone: +64 9 921 9999 extension 7361

Email: [nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz](mailto:nesta.devine@aut.ac.nz)

Physical

AR207, School of Education, North Shore Campus

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 March, 2012, AUTEK Reference number 11/324**

## Itulau Fa'apipi'i V- Teacher Consent Form



**Project title:** A Samoan perspective on current assessment literacy assessment practices in New Zealand primary schools.

**Project Supervisor:** Associate Professor Nesta Devine

**Researcher:** Akata Galuvao

☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 6 March 2012.

☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

☐ I understand that notes will be taken of conversation I have with the researcher

☐ I understand that I may ask to have any information I have provided at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.

☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information will be destroyed.

☐ I agree to take part in this research.

☐ I wish to receive a written copy of the report from the research (please tick one):  
Yes ☐ No ☐

☐ I wish to attend the evening to hear the research results delivered in Samoan  
Yes ☐ No ☐

My name:

.....

My signature: .....

My contact details (optional):

.....

.....

Date: .....

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6 March, 2012, AUTEK Reference number 11/324**

*The Participant should retain a copy of this form*

## Itulau Fa'apipi'i H- Invitation Letter for Parents - Samoan



Mo Tua'a o \_\_\_\_\_,

Talofa lava. Malo le soifua manuia.

O lo'u igoa o Akata Galuvao. O loo fia maua se feso'ota'iga mo so oulua finagalo e uiga i se su'esu'ega olo'o fia faia i totonu o le aoga. O le autu o le galuega su'esu'e o le sailia lea o tulaga e uiga i su'ega o le Faitautusi olo'o su'esu'eina ai alo ma fanau a Samoa i totonu o Niu Sila.

E vala'au atu ai ma le fa'aaloalo tele fa'amolemole afifio ma i le fono o le a faia i le afiafi o le aso Tofi, aso 22 Mati 2012 i le 6 i le afiafi i le Hall a le aoga. O le a tele nisi faamatalaga ma ni faamalamalamaga e mafai ona maua atu ai i lea fono. O le a saunia foi se iputi mama mo le afiafi.

Tatalo e taitai atu e le Atua lo outou soifua ma lo'u ola i lea aso, tatou feiloai a i le manuia.

Ma lo'u faaaloalo tele,

Akata Galuvao

## Itulau Fa'apipi'i K – Invitation Letter for Parents - English



Dear Parents and Guardians of \_\_\_\_\_,

Talofa lava. My name is Akata Galuvao. I am planning to carry out a research on reading assessments at your child's school.

I would like to invite you to attend an information meeting on Thursday 22 of March, 2012 at 6pm in the school hall. You will have a chance to ask questions in regards to this proposed investigation and have them answered. The meeting will be in two languages, English and Samoan. Light supper will be provided.

I look forward to meeting you all,

Ma lo'u faaloalo lava,

Akata Galuvao.

Isn't it about time your child has a say in the school testing system?

*'A Samoan perspective on current literacy assessment practices in New Zealand'*

*Is a research that gives our children a chance 'to be heard' on issues related to testing...  
Interested?*

Write your name below and return this flyer to school. You will be given more information about the research.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's name & class \_\_\_\_\_

Or contact Akata Galuvao on 2754332 or email [agaluvao@bader.school.nz](mailto:agaluvao@bader.school.nz)

Pe le'i talafeagai ona 'a'ami lagona o tamaiti faatatau i su'ega oloo su'esu'eina ai i le aoga?

*'A Samoan perspective on current literacy assessment practices in New Zealand'*

*O se su'esu'ega e mafai ai ona talanoa ma fefa'asoa'a'i manatu o tamaiti e uiga i suega o loo su'eina i le aoga.*

A mo'omia nisi faamatalaga, fa'atumu le avanoa oi lalo ma fa'afo'i mai le pepa i le aoga.

Suafa: \_\_\_\_\_

Lou alo & vasega \_\_\_\_\_

Pe fa'afeso'ota'i mai a'u (Akata Galuvao) i le telefoni 2754332, po'o le imeli [agaluvao@bader.school.nz](mailto:agaluvao@bader.school.nz)



