

Te Whāriki Early Childhood Curriculum From Samoan Teachers' Perspective

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Abstract

Te Whāriki positions itself as New Zealand's first ever Early Childhood Curriculum with an unique bicultural feature honouring the Treaty of Waitangi (signed in 1840), and the partnership between tangata whenua (Māori) and the Crown (Government). The *Te Whāriki* curriculum found its origins in a need to maintain consistency with the New Zealand Curriculum Framework as a result of major changes in the Education Department in the late 1980s.

The establishment of the *Te Whāriki* involved a long consultative process from 1990 – 1996 with groups and professionals from diverse Early Childhood Education (ECE) backgrounds, with major influence from the two Māori representatives from the Kohanga Reo National Trust (Tamati and Tilly Reedy) and two European writers from Waikato University (Helen May and Margaret Carr) who led the consultation process.

One of *Te Whāriki*'s special features is embedded in its philosophy of inclusivity represented in a metaphor of a whāriki (woven mat), on which all can stand. This inclusivity broke pedagogical boundaries and established new 'norms' of equal opportunity for children, their family/whānau and the ECE community. The whāriki is made strong by the interweaving of four principles, strands and goals through its non-prescriptive nature which some find to be useful, while others see it as a hindrance to the implementation of the curriculum, particularly where there is a lack of proper training on how to put the curriculum into practice. This was found as the biggest challenge facing Samoan teachers in ECE, especially the teachers in Mainstream services with a multicultural background. In addition, the findings highlight how the dominant influence of Western theories in the curriculum caused confusion for teachers, and resulted in a programme developed out of teachers' understanding rather than the children's development and dispositions.

It is almost 20 years since the launch of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum, yet even now, in this study evidence shows that teachers are still struggling to find the balance of how *Te Whāriki* can support in-depth teaching and learning for different cultures, based on its weaving metaphor. The idea of using the whāriki metaphor for creating appropriate programmes still has not been fully implemented, as the findings from this study appear to show in agreement with some of the prior literature. This would seem to put more weight behind the debate as to whether *Te Whāriki* is relevant for all cultures and ECE services in Aotearoa, and the extent to which its openness for teachers to weave their own appropriate programmes is working.

Acknowledgements / Fa'afetai Lagolago

Psalm 121: 1-2

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help *cometh* from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.

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Psalm 103: 1- Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me, bless His Holy Name.

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List of Abbreviations

ACE	Auckland College of Education
AGDEEWR	Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
AUT	Auckland University of Technology
B.Ed	Bachelor of Education
DipECE	Diploma of Teaching, Early Childhood Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ERO	Education Review Office
MOE	Ministry of Education
NZK	New Zealand Kindergarten
NZCER	New Zealand Council for Educational Research
PGdip	Postgraduate Diploma in Education
SAASIA	Sosaiete Aoga Amata Samoa I Aotearoa
UoA	University of Auckland

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Figure 1: Detailed Breakdown of Participant Profiles.

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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 nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a University or other institution of higher learning except where due acknowledgment is made in the acknowledgements.

Signed

Date

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

It is almost 20 years since the official launch of the first ever New Zealand Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum the *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education [MOE], 1996). This ground-breaking document of government-mandated directions for the sector, drew worldwide attention, firstly due to the embracement, through its bilingual content, of the bicultural partnership established under the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) between tangata whenua (Māori), and Pākehā (European settlers) representatives of the government. The second unique feature of *Te Whāriki* to draw attention was its non-prescriptive basis that allowed, by constructing a framework of open-ended principles, for the inclusion of different views and ideas, with which to guide the identification and practice of curricula programmes and services for all children. This feature was seen in *Te Whāriki*'s early years as a platform with potential to promote Pacific cultures and languages in ECE (Mara, 1998). However, since its launch, a government-level in-depth review has not occurred, although evidence indicates the need to do so, because of a lack of proof that the curriculum is effective in guiding children's learning.

From this evidence, and my own personal experiences as an ECE teacher, the topic of research into the views of Samoan ECE teachers on the national ECE curriculum *Te Whāriki* presented itself.

This chapter presents a brief outline of the origins and content of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum. This is followed by a brief review of the status of the Pacific population in New Zealand, including the extent to which their right to appropriate and adequate educational resources has been met. I introduce my motivation for and approach to undertaking this study. This includes the significance of the study, and its relevance to the

Pacific and specifically Samoan communities, and I note some current gaps in relevant research. The objectives and the research processes are outlined, and a brief review is provided of some of the challenging and enabling features of *Te Whāriki*, which contribute to my research questions and approach.

The *Te Whāriki* Curriculum

The *Te Whāriki* bicultural curriculum was launched in 1996. It was developed under the New Zealand National Curriculum Framework, in response to the government's introduction of a systematic assessment process for children of primary school years, with the aim of maintaining continuity of quality education (Te One, 2013). The curriculum was established intentionally to provide guidance for early childhood education programmes for children from 0 - 6 years, as divided into three overlapping age groups, namely, infant, toddler and young child (Hedges, 2007; MOE, 1996).

The development of *Te Whāriki* involved a lengthy process of consultation between Government agents, academics and educators from various private and community groups in the years 1990 to 1996 (ERO, 2013; May, 2002; Te One, 2013). The consultation highlighted the importance for the writers, comprising a team of two Pākehā academics from Waikato University and two Māori representatives from the Te Kohanga Reo National Trust, of having an inclusive curriculum that took account of the bicultural context, as well as the perspectives of other minority groups.

The Pacific Language Nests were the only ethnically based ECE group, sufficiently established at the time to consult and negotiate statements with the writers (Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014; Te One, 2013). The Pacific ECE Language Nests group chose Iole Tagoilelagi, a member of the Samoan Language Nest movement (Aoga Amata) as their representative for the consultation process (Te One, 2013). As reported, the inclusion of different ECE groups would have provided a platform to “negotiate from a

position of power” (May, as cited in Te One, 2013, p.14). However, the process did not escape political agenda as noticed in the first draft released for a trial. May and Carr (as cited in Te One, 2013) reported that Lockwood Smith the Minister of Education would not allow the draft to be called a curriculum, “because it looked so different to the national school curriculum documents” (Te One, 2013, p. 63).

A multicultural and more specifically Pacific perspective was clearly visible in this first draft of the curriculum released to ECE services and other professional agencies for a trial in 1993 (May, as cited in Te One, 2013). Unfortunately, this visibility did not survive the transition to the final version of *Te Whāriki* released to the public in 1996, with the then Prime Minister Jim Bolger’s stamp of approval (May, 2002; Te One, 2013). This reduced, if not completely eliminated, visibility in the final output did not go unnoticed, even though the launch of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum was embraced by the ECE sector overall; concerns were raised by some professionals over the missing Pacific, Special Needs and Māori elements (amongst others).

The introduction of *Te Whāriki* into all early childhood centres was seen to be a huge success for the sector and for the nation because it reflected the very nature of Aotearoa New Zealand’s biculturalism and honoured the Treaty of Waitangi (Alvestad, Duncan & Berge, 2009). It was hailed as a curriculum that broke boundaries because it was the first of its kind to include the voice of the indigenous people (Māori) and acknowledge their pedagogical perspective in the education of children (Blaiklock, 2012; Hedges, 2007; Te One, 2013). Not only that, but it broke barriers in regards to the mainstream education system in which teaching and learning had been dominated by Western ideologies (Anaru, 2011; Smith, 1999). The curriculum presented a new way of teaching and learning in New Zealand with its unique philosophical approach, where every child is included and has equal opportunity in a learning environment, in which

consideration is given to their own cultural values, and in partnership with their whānau (Alvestad et al., 2009; May, 2002, 2012; Te One, 2013).

It is not by chance the curriculum was given whāriki (woven mat) as a name and as a metaphor for early childhood services to guide their work with children and community. The name is of Māori origin and it means a mat for all to stand on (May, 2012; MOE, 1996; Te One, 2013). As such, *Te Whāriki* was seen to symbolise the contribution and participation of many cultures and perspectives to the enrichment of early childhood services in Aotearoa (May, 2012; Te One, 2013). The metaphor also provided educators with an open platform to interpret the principles and strands to suit their learning community, which indicated the writers' consideration of cultural diversity and unique features of the New Zealand ECE sector (MOE, 1996). The openness of this metaphor (woven mat) did not take long to get the attention of international academics, as reflected in subsequent international literature (see Alvestad et al., 2009; Brostrom, 2003; Fler, 2003).

Principles, Strands and Goals of the *Te Whāriki*

The *Te Whāriki* curriculum is based on four principles as foundational blocks for early childhood education. "These principles cannot be completely separated as they are interlinked" (Drewery & Bird, 2004, p.30). Each of these embodies, is consistent with and fundamental to the Māori worldview. These are:

- Whakamana (Empowerment),
- Kotahitanga (Holistic Development),
- Whānau tangata (Family and Community), and
- Ngā Hononga (Relationships) (MOE, 1996).

Briefly, the *Whakamana* or Empowerment principle focuses on enhancing children's "sense of themselves as capable and competent learners" (MOE, 1996, p.30).

The *Kotahitanga*/Holistic principle emphasizes the importance of the whole person's development. This principle refers to the child as a person with interconnected areas of development in which one affects others, such as emotional needs affecting the way he/she behaves and thinks (Drewery & Bird, 2004).

Whānau tangata/Family and Community highlights the importance of whānau support in the learning and development of a child. In this principle, the child is viewed as embedded within the parents, family and community 'system', rather than as an individual (Drewery & Bird, 2004; MOE, 1996).

The *Ngā Hononga*/Relationship principle views the child as an existing member of a family, ECE service, community and others. The principle supports the right of a child to actively participate in relationship with those who work in ECE services, family and community (MOE, 1996).

Each principle overlaps, which means the five strands, which were developed under the four principles, are also interconnected and intertwined and are constructs for children's learning (MOE, 2004a). The strands provide suggestions for educators on how to put the principles into practice in their daily work with children, based on different areas of their learning and development (MOE, 1996). Each strand is comprised of goals for learning which "identify how the principle and strands can be incorporated into programmes at practical level" to support the outcome of the development of children's "knowledge, skills and attitudes" (MOE, 1996, p.44).

Te Whāriki undoubtedly stands as the pivotal vision of what is important in learning for ECE and teaching in New Zealand's bicultural society. At the same time, it has not escaped criticism. For example, anecdotal reports have questioned its non-prescriptive approach, commenting that *Te Whāriki* would be a more effective teaching tool if more practical examples and suggestions were given to guide and support teachers

in their actioning of the principles outlined, in contrast with what is currently available under the strands and their associated goals. This view is also voiced in current literature and academic debate (see Blaiklock, 2010a, 2012, 2013; Cullen, 1996; Dalli, 2011; Nuttall, 2002). Another concern noted is that too much leeway has been given for teachers to weave their own programmes, which may work well in services where there are experienced and knowledgeable teachers in the implementation of the curriculum, but not so well in ECE services with less qualified or experienced staff (Luafutu-Simpson, 2011; Nuttall, 2003; Te One, 2003).

A second view is that more guidance in programme planning for children from different cultures (e.g. Samoan children) would have been welcomed. In other words, the curriculum could have outlined more clearly prescribed methods for weaving and delivering learning experiences aligning with cultural values and practices, to take account of New Zealand's increasing cultural diversity in addition to the bicultural beliefs and values (ERO, 2013; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

A third view is that while the *Te Whāriki* is underpinned by a bicultural vision, teachers are not implementing bicultural programmes in their services due to a lack of knowledge in te reo and tikanga Māori (Duhn, 2008; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). It was found that teachers rely on Western teaching approaches with lesser attention to Māori (indigenous) pedagogy, in spite of the fact that, in accord with the *Te Whāriki*, teachers are expected to go “beyond their experience as monocultural teachers” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p.10), regardless of their level of competence. As a result, there is a danger that “Māori content in the curriculum document can easily be marginalised” (Nuttall, 2003, p. 91).

The focus of other questioning, which became the starting point for this research, has been on the effectiveness and appropriateness of a biculturally-focussed curriculum

for the education of other ethnic groups, for example, Pacific communities, which have made New Zealand their home. This includes questions of how Pacific ECE educators view and value *Te Whāriki* (for example: do they feel a sense of ownership in *Te Whāriki* - because they had participated in the framing of these principles?), and whether/how Pacific teachers are translating *Te Whāriki* into their daily teaching practice.

Pacific Peoples

The words Pacific and Pasifika are descriptive terms for people from the Pacific Islands such as Samoa, Tuvalu, Tonga, Niue, Cook Islands, Fiji and Tokelau who either migrated to or were born and raised in New Zealand (Kesi, 2014; Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014). Each one of these ethnic groups is uniquely different in their cultural values and ways of life.

The latest 2013 census data shows Pacific peoples comprise 7.4% (295,944) of the total New Zealand population (4,242,048), and this number is expected to increase to 0.49 million (9.44% of the then total population) in 2028 and to 0.59 million (10.89% of the then total population) in 2038 (Department of Statistics, 2013: Census 2013 – National ethnic population projections by age & sex, 2013 (base) - 2038).

The Pacific population is youthful; the median age is amongst the lowest of all ethnic groups in the country, with 35.7 % under 15 years of age, 54.9 % under 25, and 18,705 are in the under 5 (ECE) age group (rising to 56,400 in 2028). Clearly, there is a tremendous demand for ECE for the growing population of Pacific children, and consequently from Pacific ECE centres for Pacific teachers. This is highlighted in the ‘Pasifika Education Plan (2013-2017)’ (MOE, 2013) targeting an increased number of children for Pacific Language ECE services by 2016, as well as a 20% increase for Pacific teachers by 2017. A little under half (46.1%) are under 20 years old compared with 27.4% for New Zealand’s total population (Department of Statistics, 2013).

As is well documented, education has always been important to Pacific peoples and continues to be a key factor in their migration journeys to New Zealand (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1984; McCaffery & McFall-McCaffery, 2010). Success for children in school was not only success for parents and families; it was the key to better employment and a better quality of life (Chu, Abella & Paurini, 2010). In earlier years especially, most Pacific migrants believed that educational success would be achieved through learning English and following Palagi ways (Amituanai-Toloa, 2010; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1984). School learning was mostly according to Western curriculum and pedagogies, which at the time felt right, after all New Zealand was the new home away from home, and Pacific immigrants believed they needed to adapt to New Zealand's way of doing things. The Palagi way was more attractive; English was 'superior' and it represented power and success for the future in New Zealand (Amituanai-Toloa, 2010; McCaffery & McFall-McCaffery, 2010). In the early years, there was little thought or understanding of the importance of our Pacific languages and cultures, not only to the sense of belonging and identity, but as the necessary foundation to further learning.

Despite these migratory goals of education for a better life, the literature has shown that Pacific students in New Zealand are not achieving as well educationally as they could (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). An Education Review Office [ERO] (2002-2003) report highlighted the achievement gap between Pacific learners and Palagi students. Views are that this underachievement was largely an outcome of different social and economic factors within our society (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006).

The research literature identifies explanations for this gap, such as the unrecognised individuality of learners and their cultural diversities with respect to the learning process (Bishop, 2003). Other factors identified include cultural differences, low numbers of Pacific teachers who speak their first language, teaching methods diverse

from cultural norms, lack of the inclusion of children's own language, and the mainly monolingual approach in classroom teaching; these are all seen to contribute to low educational achievement amongst Pacific learners in formal education (Ferguson, Gorinski, Wendt-Samu & Mara, 2008; Gorinski & Fraser, 2006).

While affirmative opportunities have been provided for Pacific children in New Zealand in the last few decades, there is significant concern for the survival of Pacific vernacular languages and cultures within the school system (Burgess, 1988). Many have come to understand that the future of their own language and culture can only practicably be maintained through the development of new opportunities within the prevailing education system. A useful outworking of this concern is collaborative work within their own community to strengthen the growth of Pacific Language ECE services, such as that of Aoga Amata Language Nests (Ete, 2013). An example of this is how in 1986, Pacific Island communities established their first Language Nests for early childhood education (Burgess, 1988; Ete, 2013; Mara, 1998). This was the result of a long process of political consultation and academic research on the importance of investing into Pacific-focused early childhood education (Leavasa-Tautolo, n.d.). Pacific local churches were the main umbrella under which the fledgling ECE Language Nests movement in New Zealand was hatched (Burgess, 1988; Ete, 2013).

One of the first Pacific early childhood services to be established was the Aoga Amata (Samoan early childhood service), with centres started in Auckland, Tokoroa, and Porirua in the 1980s. The aim of the Aoga Amata was to provide children with a learning environment where education was facilitated in the Samoan language, and support given for cultural maintenance for New Zealand born and raised Samoan children (Burgess, 1988). The establishment of Aoga Amata provided a window of opportunity for the

maintenance of the Samoan language and culture in New Zealand, so beginning a journey that has now benefited the Samoan community in New Zealand.

Educating young children in their first language in early years, is one of the greatest achievements of our Pacific leaders and academics in New Zealand. In short, children are getting a good start in life educationally. This foundation of learning in their own language and culture establishes a solid platform for later learning (Lameta-Tufuga, 1994).

My ECE Journey

I have been involved in ECE in New Zealand for 23 years, first as the mother of two children, before being involved as a teacher. I was immersed for 10 of those years in Playcentre, and another 10 years in three different early childhood services, in which I worked as a qualified teacher in a range of positions, before moving to teaching ECE full time at tertiary level just over three years ago. Teaching in the early childhood field allowed me to see first-hand how important education was to Pacific parents and families, through information sharing and talanoa (talk, dialogue).

My journey into ECE started at a local South Auckland Playcentre where parents and whānau learned together with their children. These parents were mostly migrants from the Pacific Islands, with New Zealand born children. My observation of and conclusion about the way these parents supported their children, was that it reflected a genuine desire to see their children succeed in what they learned. The highlight for me at Playcentre was seeing Pacific children being guided using their own cultural medium of learning, such as the parent demonstrating to the child how to do a task and using their own language. The knowledge gained about education and ways Pacific parents responded to their children's learning, played a major part in the next chapter of my journey as a parent, enrolling in tertiary study to gain a teaching qualification in ECE.

In the early years of my training with the New Zealand Playcentre Federation, as a parent/educator, cultural identity was central in the training provided in regards to the Treaty of Waitangi. It was during this time that I became interested in learning more about my own place as a Pacific learner in New Zealand's education system. Playcentre early childhood practices provided opportunities for Pacific families to contribute freely from their own cultural perspectives, to the daily operation of their local service and association. It was here that I discovered and explored personal learning and professional values of education with respect to different cultural worldviews. However, the practice of cultural and family contribution to children's learning was later found to be unique to Playcentre, and not present in other mainstream early childhood services where I worked. On reflection, however, it may be said that the contextual structure and operations of the services are quite different, which may affect the levels of contribution and involvement of families.

Playcentre experience encouraged me to go further to study for a qualification in ECE. My first job as a student teacher was in the Eastern suburbs of Auckland where children were mainly Pākehā/European and newly-migrated South African families, frequently from business backgrounds. Education was very important to these parents, and there was always the expectation for teachers to provide programmes which were based on literacy and numeracy skills. Children were expected by parents to know how to write and spell their names, write their numbers and read at least basic words before going to school. The centre philosophy however, was based on the *Te Whāriki* curriculum's values of having children learn through exploration of resources and activities they chose, rather than focused subject content such as writing, or having children participate in structured activity led by teachers. With the demand of parents to change the programme, the manager felt pressured to do so, and after meeting with the

centre community and teachers, the 4 year olds' programme was changed to transition learning, focusing on literacy, numeracy and science experiences during the morning sessions, and facilitated by rostered teachers.

This same issue of structured learning based on writing and numeracy skills arose many times in the early childhood centres I worked with in South Auckland as well, where the children were mainly from Pacific families. More recently as, a visiting lecturer, these experiences and more informal observations and discussions with teachers in a variety of different ECE services, highlighted a gap between the aspirations of parents/whānau for their children, and the learning programme provided by teachers based on the *Te Whāriki* curriculum. The common factor observed was that most parents and families wish to see their children successfully develop skills they need for formal education before the age of five, so that they have a 'good foundation' for learning throughout their school life.

My tertiary study took me to another level of experience during a class debate in 2004. The debate was about *Te Whāriki* and how it could provide for Pacific children in ECE. The question was: 'Does *Te Whāriki* provide for Pacific children in ECE?' This workshop opened my eyes into another new world that I did not know existed, which was critical reflection on and review of ECE policies and practices. The opinions voiced by some students at the debate helped me identify different perspectives of *Te Whāriki* such as that of cultural, social and spiritual values and beliefs of children and their families. Another aspect I became aware of was how the implementation of *Te Whāriki* could affect children's learning presently and later in life, with emphasis placed on teachers' roles (MOE, 1996). It was from this debate that I found myself evaluating and reflecting on the curriculum through my own Samoan 'lens', with many questions arising that needed answers and which, a decade on, were brought to light through this study.

As a parent and a Pacific ECE teacher, I strongly believe that education does not start when children go to formal schooling, but begins at birth; second, that education should not be confined to the skills of writing and reading formally; and thirdly, children's cultural and spiritual values and beliefs should be embedded in learning programmes, with family being in partnership with ECE services.

There are many other areas of knowledge and skills that children need to be equipped in such as problem solving, and social and physical skills (Matson, 2009). These are life skills that can help them to mature in other areas of their development. In addition, I believe that a child who speaks his/her first language should be encouraged and supported to do so in early childhood service. This is important for the child's sense of belonging and well-being (MOE, 1996). Additionally, the importance of first language in children's learning has been acknowledged in literature and theories of both Western and Pacific academics (see Amituanai-Toloa, 2010; Clarke, 2009; Cummins, 1991, 2000; Kosonen, 2005; Malone, 2003; McCaffery & McFall-McCaffery, 2010; UNESCO, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978).

Through the years I have also become aware of political and social agenda in education especially in regards to Māori and Pacific children's learning needs. As noted, low academic achievement amongst Pacific students in New Zealand has been highlighted over the years by educational research, and in the subsequent academic and political debate arising. In 2001 the Labour Government introduced an equity funding system for Pacific ECE centre needs, based on an array of factors that included low income, and cultural and language needs of children and families (May, 2002), to encourage increased participation (ERO, 2013). A 10-year Strategic Plan was developed with a working party to focus on achieving quality participation for all young children in

early childhood education, and to reduce the achievement disparities between Pacific and non-Pacific learners (MOE, 2002).

Research gap

As noted, *Te Whāriki* is the Government-sponsored and mandated guideline for ECE in New Zealand today. Since its launch almost 20 years ago, there has been little research on its use and implementation for children or by Pacific teachers within Pacific ECE communities. As an ECE teacher myself, I see it as vital to get teachers' viewpoints on questions such as: how do they value *Te Whāriki* curriculum? How are they translating the *Te Whāriki* principles, strands and goals into practice? And how do they feel about *Te Whāriki*'s general guidelines? Overarching is the question of how teachers see the bicultural ethos which underpins *Te Whāriki*, with regards to how applicable and relevant it is to educating Pacific children.

The lack of research on Pacific culture in regards to *Te Whāriki*, as backed by my personal experience, and views expressed informally by colleagues in the field, indicated the need to investigate this issue further, and more particularly by gaining the perspective of Pacific teachers on this matter. Given that this is an exploratory study, I decided to focus on the views of Samoan ECE teachers so that an in-depth view of one particular culture was captured. As I am Samoan, I have a natural affinity with the participants in the research, and am well versed in the Samoan language and culture. It is my hope that this research of Samoan teachers' perspectives on *Te Whāriki* will provide a platform for other Pacific teachers and academics to examine their programmes critically as well.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

OVERARCHING QUESTION

What are Samoan teachers' perceptions of *Te Whāriki* as a curriculum framework for Samoan children?

Leading to:

Three Research Questions to address in this study:

- 1) How does the *Te Whāriki* curriculum support learning for Samoan children?
- 2) How are Samoan cultural values being promoted through *Te Whāriki*'s bicultural document?
- 3) How confident are Samoan ECE teachers in implementing the curriculum to meet the learning needs of Samoan children?

This study required *qualitative* methodology because I was interested in exploring the views of Samoan teachers in their work with Samoan children in Aoga Amata (Samoan Language Nests), and Mainstream (using mainly the English language) ECE services. The use of the qualitative study approach allowed for an indigenous methodology called Talanoa (talk, dialogue) and individual interviews as a method to gather the information needed for this study.

Challengers and Enablers

The literature written about *Te Whāriki* has identified both enabling and challenging features in the use of the curriculum. One of the main 'enablers' of *Te Whāriki* that have been consistently acknowledged in research, is its ability to cater for all types of ECE centres, regardless of their structure, philosophy or individual service's operation. This stems to a certain degree from the fact that *Te Whāriki* is an open-ended structure where anyone can use its contents to create teaching and learning programmes appropriate for their community of learners (ERO, 2013; Macartney, 2011; Te One, 2003, 2013).

In contrast, one of the challenges that has been noted about the curriculum is the difficulty of actioning its principles in ECE practices. ERO (2010, 2012) reported that one such challenge is the partnership that is emphasised between whānau and ECE

services in *Te Whāriki*. Teachers are struggling to make such partnerships work in order to have a reciprocal and responsive relationship with parents/whānau, to support parental and family aspirations for children. One of the recommendations made by ERO (2012) was the provision of professional development for ECE services to support and enhance these partnerships, as *Te Whāriki* does not provide guidance for teachers on how to nurture and get the best outcome from these relationships.

At a theoretical level, the relevance and appropriateness of a bicultural curriculum in a culturally diverse community, is that opportunities are provided through its non-prescriptive approach for other cultures to be facilitated and promoted. Since the launch of the curriculum there has been continual research and academic writing from mainly Western (and some Pacific) perspectives, which identifies the uniqueness of the bicultural curriculum. On the other hand, there has also been literature highlighting limitations of *Te Whāriki*, such as that it lacks consideration of New Zealand's multicultural diversity, especially in its practical implementation because of the very same feature mentioned above, the document's non-prescriptive nature (Brostrom, 2003; Luafutu-Simpson, 2011; Mara, 1999).

Although there are many ECE academics worldwide who are strong supporters of the bicultural document, it is not without its opponents, but all in the matter of searching for quality from a curriculum that has lasted two decades without a review (and there must be questions raised as to why it has not had a major review). One academic who has critiqued and identified *Te Whāriki*'s limitations in both theory and practice in ECE is Ken Blaiklock (2010a, 2012, 2013). Among the points that he covers is subject content knowledge (such as literacy, numeracy, art and science, etc.), which he feels can be easily neglected due to the general non-specific nature of the guidelines in *Te Whāriki*. He also argues the generalised curriculum would have a negative effect on centres' programme

planning for children, because it does not allow for quality learning in regards to targeting specific academic skills. Another academic who highlighted an important shortfall is Nuttall (2005) who asserted that there is no evidence of *Te Whāriki*, from any study done or examination undertaken, justifying a claim that “it is making a difference to children’s learning and development” (p. 20). Blaiklock supports this finding that there has been no research evidence produced on the curriculum to make such claim, however Smith (2013) disagreed, stating that, “*Te Whāriki* is based on a theoretical and philosophical set of principles backed up by diverse research” (p.2).

The *Te Whāriki* curriculum is well recognized for its bicultural integrity and consideration of tangata whenua (Māori) as well as other cultures (May, 2012). Although there are many reasons to praise and applaud these great achievements, there are also reasons for many to question where other minority cultures fit in the curriculum in regards to their values and beliefs. To date, there is a paucity of research from a Pacific perspective on *Te Whāriki* as a curriculum, although some of the pioneers involved in the consultative process were a group of Pacific women from ECE (Mara, 1999; Nuttall, 2013). There is also the on-going emphasis from the Ministry of Education on quality education, with reports of Māori and Pacific children being below average academically (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006).

ERO reiterates in their reviews of early childhood services the importance of quality in-centre programmes, and it is important to understand what quality means from different cultures in relation to the curriculum (ERO, 2011, 2013). One of the fastest growing cultures in our education system comprises Pacific migrants, and concern has been raised in the way quality is measured mainly from Western perspectives for our children (Farquhar, 1991). Pacific children should not be seen within a Western

worldview because Western quality might be different from how Pacific peoples measure quality from their own perspective (Farquhar, 1991; Macartney, 2011; Mara, 1999).

Thesis Outline

Chapter 1 presents the introduction to the Project's approach, its significance and Research Questions to be answered.

Chapter 2 is the literature review. This is presented in 3 parts.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology and research approach, with particular reference to Samoan cultural perspectives.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research.

Chapter 5 presents the discussion of the findings.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusion, project review, and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The review of literature related to the topic of this research project is presented in three parts. Part One discusses the historical development of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum, the metaphor adopted, the foundation principles of *Te Whāriki* and their application in ECE, as well as its theoretical underpinnings. Te Kohanga Reo and Pacific ECE movements are also discussed in this section. Part Two presents a discussion of the Samoan perspective with the inclusion of the Taiala o le Gagana Samoa document (Guidelines for the Samoan language). Part Three is a critical discussion on the theoretical underpinning of *Te Whāriki*, holistic and spiritual development, implementation of the curriculum and its challenges in ECE practice.

PART ONE

Historical Background of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum

The *Te Whāriki* curriculum's development in the 1990s was the result of the Labour Government's education reforms throughout the 1980s. The reforms involved the education sector from early childhood to tertiary education (Te One, 2003, 2013). The reforms came at a time when reports on the sector highlighted the need for change in its administration framework (Peters, Marshall & Massey, 1994), due to its inefficiency in providing educational equality for the diversity of the New Zealand community (Boston, 1990; Grace, 1990; May, 2012; Te One, 2013). The Government's findings pointed to the need for a major shift in society's approach to education, to the point where there is equality for all children (Te One, 2013). The Government formed the opinion that one of the main areas needing change was in the development of policy relating to the ECE sector (Benton, 1990; May, 2002). The *Te Whāriki* curriculum development was the first

sign of resulting change for ECE, although this change was brought through under a National Party Government.

In 1990, the Government tendered for interested individuals or groups to lead the work for the proposed curriculum, and the writers were selected through the Government's proposal process, beginning with a call for tenders as notified in the Education Gazette (Te One, 2003). The team that was given the contract, as mentioned earlier, consisted of two Pākehā representatives (Helen May & Margaret Carr from Waikato University) and later two Māori representatives Dr. Tamati and Mrs. Tilly Reedy of the Kohanga Reo National Trust, who brought into the curriculum project the Māori perspective (Macartney, 2011; Te One, 2003, 2013). This team of four led the consultative process and trialling for the curriculum (Macartney, 2011; May, 2002; Nuttall, 2003; Te One, 2013). Political involvement was evident from the start and throughout the consultation process, and in particular in the final curriculum document (Carr & May, 1993, 1999; Duhn, 2006; Macartney, 2011; May, 2002; Nuttall, 2003; Te One, 2013).

The *Te Whāriki* curriculum is the Ministry of Education's policy statement in which emphasis is placed on partnership between teachers, parents and whānau/families in response to ensuring a holistic learning approach for children (MOE, 1996). The early childhood curriculum was released in 1996 to all ECE services. As noted earlier, it was the result of a long process of consultation (1990 -1996) among professionals, academics and representatives of various ECE groups such as Kindergarten, Playgroups, Inclusive Education (Special Education Services), Playcentre, and the wider Pacific community (Macartney, 2011; Nuttall, 2003; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Te One, 2013).

The consultation process was significant because it was the first time for the sector to develop a curriculum for ECE and, most importantly, for the inclusion of

various groups such as the Pacific Language Nests which were in their early years of establishment (Ete, 2013; Te One, 2013). This highlighted the openness to and inclusivity of the consultants' approach to the diverse communities. Another significant involvement was the voice of tangata whenua (Māori) in the development of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum, signifying the importance of moving towards bicultural education and partnership in ECE. It is of more than passing interest that two of the four writers charged with preparing the groundwork for *Te Whāriki*, were trustees of the Te Kohanga Reo National Trust (Tilly & Tamati Reedy, as mentioned earlier), illustrating the importance of prior developments through Te Kohanga Reo, such as its curriculum framework that reflects Māori cultural values and beliefs.

The *Te Whāriki* curriculum was welcomed by the ECE sector and many in the wider education field with enthusiasm, not only because it was the first ever early childhood curriculum in Aotearoa, and came with a unique bicultural approach, but also because it survived in spite of the long consultative process and associated intrusion of political agenda (Macartney, 2011; May, 2012; Te One, 2003, 2013). These political interventions however blunted the edge of the enthusiasm, and criticism was directed at some significant changes made to the final draft by the then Minister of Education, Lockwood Smith, including dilution of the Pacific voice, deletion of the Special Needs section, and in particular to important aspects of Māori culture (Macartney, 2011; Mara, 1999; May, 2002; Te One, 2013).

Carr and May (1993) recognised from the beginning the importance and significance of having a curriculum that not only acknowledged the Treaty of Waitangi, but also the cultural diversity of New Zealand (Duhn, 2006; Macartney, 2011; MOE, 1996; Te One, 2013). The path to attaining this was seen to be a fairly inclusive and lengthy consultative process (Macartney, 2011; May, 2002, 2012; Te One, 2013).

Te Whāriki as the national ECE curriculum has been used as a guideline for centre programmes since 1996. Although its effectiveness in the teaching and learning of children has been critiqued by some professionals in the ECE field, the curriculum has continued without a review for almost 20 years (Blaiklock, 2012; ERO, 2013).

Heralded as a first ever document of its kind, due to its bicultural and non-prescriptive nature, and for the considerable length of the consultative process of its development, *Te Whāriki* has received international praise and attention over the almost 20 years of its existence (Blaiklock, 2012; Duhn, 2006; May, 2002, 2012; Te One, 2013). Its popularity may have contributed to the government not issuing a mandate for it to be officially reviewed, ignoring in the process the admittedly less than major amount of research evidence and academic writing in the field on the need for a review. On the other hand, it could be just that the amount of evidence of critique (Blaiklock, 2010a; Nuttall, 2003) on the curriculum and its effectiveness has not exceeded a politically unacceptable threshold, and so the government sees no reason for further action.

There is also a suggestion that the scarcity of critique is due to the prior techniques of practice of teachers being in agreement with the curriculum (Blaiklock, 2012; Nuttall, 2003) and consequently no reason is seen to review its philosophy. However, the fact that there are academics and professionals who will continue to formally and informally debate and dialogue on the topic, is in evidence in the array of literature so far accumulated (Blaiklock, 2010a, 2012, 2013; Brostrom, 2003; Cullen, 2003, 2008; Duhn, 2006, 2008; Hedges & Cullen, 2005; Nuttall, 2005; Te One, 2013).

The *Te Whāriki* Metaphor: A Woven mat

I believe the whāriki metaphor was wisely chosen for the curriculum as it represents inclusivity of different views in ECE (Macartney, 2011; May, 2002; Te One, 2003, 2013). As noted earlier, a whāriki is a woven mat and an important part of Māori

cultural traditions of weaving (Te Kanawa, 2006). A woven mat is used as a place where people sit together. So it is only appropriate that such a metaphor is used to describe the curriculum for the diverse ECE sector (Blaiklock, 2010a, 2010b, 2012; May, 2002, 2012; MOE, 1996; Nuttall, 2003; Te One, 2013). It symbolises a platform where all cultures and beliefs can be woven together for local communities of learners to form their own programme that is appropriate to their needs and development requirements (Blaiklock, 2010a, 2012; ERO, 2013; Macartney, 2011; May, 2002, 2012; MOE, 1996). The woven mat allows for the coexistence of different ECE philosophies and operational structures to create a learning environment that is inclusive of all ages, cultures, values and beliefs, capabilities and learning interests, and places the individual child at the centre of the curriculum (ERO, 2013; May, 2002, 2012; MOE, 1996).

The weaving metaphor emphasises the contribution of the ECE community to the making of the curriculum, and the same metaphor can be viewed as a reference to a place where teachers and outside agencies contribute to the child's learning and development (such as Group Special Education, MOE, ERO, Health agencies). The woven mat and the weaving process represent the multiplicity and importance of family and community contexts in ECE (Macartney, 2011; MOE, 1996).

This metaphor and the document's bicultural emphasis were part of the writers' efforts "to set up a curriculum that was **not** dominated by one worldview of the child and childhood" (Carr & May, 2000, p. 61). It is not an uncommon view that a key factor underpinning successful policy collaborations with government for *Te Whāriki*, has been the ability of the diverse groups within the early childhood sector to find some common ground, whilst also recognising the possibility of different patterns (May, 2002, 2012; May & Carr, 1996).

Despite its differences, *Te Whāriki* presented a formula for unity, the woven mat into and on which everyone could add their own unique perspective, and also support interrelationships within the ECE service, between ECE and parents, and community and other interested persons and entities (Drewery & Bird, 2004; MOE, 1996). *Te Whāriki* then became a platform for those leading and working with any community of learners, to create opportunities to encourage exploration, discoveries and extending territories, regardless of how each service might be oriented (May, 2002; Te One, 2003, 2013).

The weaving process of the whāriki is significant on its own as noted in the curriculum, because it presents the idea that no matter whether the service is a language immersion, mainstream (teaching mainly in English), full day or sessional service, there is an opportunity in *Te Whāriki* for teachers to create their own learning programme based on the four foundation principles (Empowerment, Holistic Development, Family and Community and Relationship) (ERO, 2013; May, 2002; MOE, 1996; Nuttall, 2003, 2005; Te One, 2013). The weaving process and whāriki are both symbolic in the ECE curriculum, highlighting that different patterns can make up one unique end result that will benefit all, and which signify an achievement of set goals, skills and child participation in centre programmes (Carr, 1999; May, 2012; MOE, 1996; Te One, 2003, 2013).

The whāriki can be viewed through different lenses in the context of ECE, in particular through those of the Māori worldview. The whāriki is woven with two sets of crossing flax fibres that interweave to make consistent patterns throughout to create the whāriki (Drewery & Bird, 2004). The length of the mat depends on the weaver's choice and for what purpose it is made. According to Drewery and Bird (2004, p.30), "the two sets of fibres are essential to the coherence and strength of the mat, and show the interweaving of different perspectives". This interweaving allows for creating not just

quality, but an effective curriculum for all children's learning in ECE (May, 2012; Tyler, 2002).

A whāriki represents wholeness, meaning that a woven display is not meaningless art but a representation of spirituality, emotions, relationships, physical gifts and intelligence (Te Kanawa, 2006). Weaving is the action and practice of determination and perseverance, which are qualities the weaver must have to complete a whāriki (Puketapu-Hetet, 1989; Te Kanawa, 2006). Thus physical strength, intelligence and spiritual acknowledgement are important during the process of weaving as is connecting with nature and ancestors (Prendergast, 1994). Weaving requires the attention of the whole person, mind, body, spirit and soul, and each thread represents the past, present and future, where one comes from, where he/she is at and where he/she is going in life (Macaulay & Te Waru-Rewiri, 1996; Te Kanawa, 2006).

The art and metaphor of weaving a whāriki, is likened to a child's life which involves relationships and the contribution of family, the environment and others into his/her life in order to nurture spiritually, socially, physically, emotionally and cognitively through warm and trusting relationships (Betham, 2008; MOE, 1996). Through interactions in these relationships, children develop a sense of who they are, where they belong and have security in the knowledge they are valued members of their society (MOE, 1996). For such aspiration to become a reality, it is important for adults to provide a holistic programme approach to ensure children continue to weave their own life's journey with confidence, and develop to their learning potential (Bone, Cullen & Loveridge, 2007; Drewery & Bird, 2004).

The weaving of a whāriki provides many opportunities for teachers, whānau and community to include their own cultural values, beliefs, language and special features in the ECE learning programme (Alvestad, et al., 2009; MOE, 1996). The children's

interests, strengths, and dispositions are woven into ECE programme planning and evaluations by teachers and educators however they see appropriate to the working of their service (MOE, 1996). This open-ended philosophical feature of the curriculum is viewed by some as both its strength and weakness (Alvestad et al., 2009). In this light, the strength of the metaphor is its inclusivity for all, and its weakness is leaving it to teachers to weave their own programmes, who may not have knowledge or understanding of the curriculum, and so provide learning from their own perspective, which is not necessarily in the children's best interest (ERO, 2013; Macartney, 2011).

The Four Principles of *Te Whāriki*

The guiding principles of *Te Whāriki* provide opportunities for early childhood services to weave their education programme based on the interests and aspirations of families for their children's learning and development (May, 2002; MOE, 1996; Tyler, 2002). The principles are foundation statements for teachers and inform ethical practices that enable teachers and ECE professionals to build relationships and provide a warm and nurturing learning environment for their learners (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; MOE, 1996, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978). The four principles, Whakamana (empowerment), Kotahitanga (Holistic Development), Whānau Tangata (Family and Community), and Ngā Hononga (Relationships) are interwoven and complementary to each other as seen throughout each strand and goal of the curriculum (MOE, 1996). Through the interweaving of the principles, strands and goals, teachers are encouraged and challenged to set up an environment for learning where children will be empowered (Macartney, 2011) to develop skills that enable them to reach their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978).

The principle of Empowerment focuses on how the ECE environment should support children to develop skills to learn and grow independently (MOE, 1996). The

Empowerment principle can be realised through the provision of children's social, cultural, spiritual, physical and cognitive needs within their environment (Drewery & Bird, 2004; MOE, 1996). *Te Whāriki* views children as being empowered when their physical and emotional needs are met, their cultural and spiritual values are acknowledged, and there are respect and trustworthy relationships with others (MOE, 1996). Providing these necessary aspects in a learning environment, enables children and their whānau to develop a sense of belonging in the ECE service (Macartney, 2011; MOE, 1996).

The Family and Whānau principle's focus is on interdependent learning with the child, whānau, ECE service and community. The teachers have a responsibility to weave their own programme which will support partnerships with parents and family through respectful interactions, and consideration of their cultural values and beliefs in their child's learning (MOE, 1996). The sharing of knowledge, skills and information can help extend the child's territory of learning and development, which is a concept the Samoan community is familiar with in regards to raising children within an extended family. 'E mama se avega pe a galulue fa'atasi', which literally means 'a heavy burden is lightened when everyone works in unity'. This is a representation of what a family or village can do to support their children's learning in Samoa, and in the context of Aotearoa in regards to *Te Whāriki*, parents, whānau, ECE service, outside agencies and the community, and of how all have a vital role to play in the life a child (MOE, 1996).

The Holistic principle highlights the importance of holism which means "the child's whole context, the physical surroundings, the emotional context, relationships with others, and the child's immediate needs at any moment will affect and modify how a particular experience contributes to the child's development" (MOE, 1996, p.41). The learning environment should therefore be focussed on planning and implementing

programmes that are inclusive of all areas of children's learning, development, cultural and spiritual beliefs, and their family and community. The Holistic principle is reflected in Empowerment, Relationship and Family and Community principles.

The Relationship principle emphasises how vital responsive and reciprocal relationships are in supporting children's learning, development and growth. The principle encourages collaborative interactions between adults and children in ECE (MOE, 1996). The Relationship Principle is founded on the understanding that children thrive in their learning when they are provided with opportunities to work in an environment with adults who are supportive and encouraging, as well as where the children can contribute into their own learning with their peers (MOE, 1996).

The Holistic development and Empowerment principles highlight the importance of child development, while the Family/Community and Relationship principles concern themselves with the environment in which the child is developing both in the ECE service, at home, and in the wider community (Drewery & Bird, 2004; MOE, 1996). The four principles include the child as an individual whose learning and development is influenced by the contribution of his/her whānau, community and society (MOE, 1996).

Although the ideas valued in the *Te Whāriki* principles are centred around the best interests of children, there are, however, questions raised through academic debates and critiques as to whether or not *Te Whāriki* is effective in meeting the learning needs of all New Zealand children (Blaklock, 2010a, 2012, 2013; Cullen, 2008). Duhn (2006) also questioned what empowerment means for "Pākehā teachers and children whose sense of belonging arises out of non-recognition of difference" (p.95), which raises a question of what and how much each principle of *Te Whāriki* means to the different cultures in New Zealand.

Te Whāriki aims to cultivate relationships between the child's learning environment and home and the wider community (MOE, 1996). This is vital in the weaving of a centre programme to ensure the parents and whānau contribute to the learning of their child (ERO, 2007a, 2013). In involving whānau, the values and beliefs of their family system naturally become part of the centre's programme. From this perspective, a Samoan child's cultural systems that are used to maintain relationships based on cultural values and beliefs (Anae, 2007), can be used in social interactions in his/her ECE centre. Inclusion of *Teu le va* and *va fealoa'i* (maintaining respected space/relationship) in the interactions with children and their families, can lead to better partnerships between the service and the child's family and community (Anae, 2007).

An ERO (2012) report on Partnership with Māori Whānau in ECE services found 78% of whānau have positive relationships with ECE, however it was highlighted that “only 10% managed to build effective and culturally responsive partnerships” (NZK, 2012, p.12). Although this report was largely on partnership with Māori whānau, valuable aspects were included that would be beneficial for building effective partnership between Pacific peoples and ECE services (NZK, 2012).

Te Whāriki's theoretical underpinnings

Te Whāriki's theoretical underpinnings are founded on the socio-cultural theoretical approach (MOE, 1996; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). This theory places children's learning in a social and cultural context, focusing on the vital role of reciprocal relationships and interactions (MOE, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Through these relationships children are encouraged to actively co-construct their own knowledge and understandings in everyday social and cultural settings with others (MOE, 1996; Smith, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978). However, the learning varies under different cultural dynamics (Lonner, 2000).

The four principles of *Te Whāriki* and their strands form a framework for children within an environment that includes people, language, places and knowledge relevant to the child (MOE, 1996). Within this context, opportunities are provided for all children regardless of their cultural or social backgrounds and learning dispositions to develop to their potential (May, 2002, 2012; MOE, 1996; Te One, 2003, 2013). Alongside the sociocultural approach is the philosophical belief through a metaphor of a woven mat for ‘all to stand on,’ which means every child in New Zealand and every type of ECE service can create their own unique programme to fit in with the beliefs and values of their whānau and community (May, 2002; MOE, 1996).

The *Te Whāriki* curriculum emphasises the importance of providing an ECE environment where children can bring their cultural ideas and values to share and extend on their knowledge through shared collaboration (Brennan, n.d.; MOE, 1996). It places importance on relationships between the child, teacher/adult, other children, parents and community, and the learning environment (MOE, 1996). These relationships help shape how children see the world, and therefore learn from these ‘models’ the skills and knowledge they need to build on their developing working theories and manage their world (Brennan, n.d.). It is also vital that teachers build and support children’s “secure attachment through consistent, responsive and nurturing relationships” (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [AGDEEWR], 2009, p. 2) that helps them develop trustworthy and respectful relationships with others (MOE, 1996). *Te Whāriki* also emphasizes the vital role of the scaffolding technique in the learning environment and it is important for teachers to be mindful when planning programmes for children that provision should be made to support them in expressing their ideas and feelings (AGDEEWR, 2009; MOE, 1996).

Although *Te Whāriki* has provided theoretical underpinnings that are inclusive, there have been, however, concerns raised since its beginnings such as that there is a mismatch between the Māori and Pacific worldviews (Duhn, 2006; Mara, 1999). Subsequently, literature pointed to evidence that *Te Whāriki*'s theoretical perspective may not agree with Pacific parents'/family's aspirations for their children (Blaiklock, 2010a, 2010b; Coxon, Anae, Mara, Wendt-Samu, & Finau, 2002; Cullen, 2008; Duhn, 2008; Mara, 1999), and therefore the curriculum needs to be interpreted in order to align with Pacific cultural values, so that children are taught from their own unique perspective (Blaiklock, 2010a; Mara, 1999). This was also found in Luafutu-Simpson's (2011) study of assessment and programme planning for Samoan children, where a mismatch was noted between *Te Whāriki* curriculum theory and practice. Bennett (2012, p.3) argued that "culturally responsive teachers connect learning programmes to home, sociocultural, and school experiences and create a community of learners with empathy and understanding".

Duhn (2008) and Mutch (2003) consider that the child in the sociocultural model of *Te Whāriki* presents as an individual caught in the midst of different systems of politics and globalisation. Duhn (2006) sees the curriculum as a document presenting only two cultures, and every child in New Zealand as a representative of one of these two. On the other hand, there is also the reality, according to some, that *Te Whāriki*, although presented as a bicultural document, is however a monocultural/mainstream curriculum.

PART TWO

Pacific ECE community: Pacific Language Movement

The success of Māori as tangata whenua in revitalising their language and culture through Kohanga Reo, was observed and followed by the Pacific ECE communities throughout New Zealand, particularly those who were under the umbrella of Pacific

church denominations (Burgess, 1988; Coxon et al., 2002; Ete, 2013). The Pacific communities saw this as an opportunity to realise their vision and desire to have their New Zealand-born children raised and educated in conjunction with their own language and culture. Part of this movement included the establishment of Aoga Amata (Samoan language ECE), whose first ECE centres were opened in Auckland and Wellington in 1985 (Burgess, 1988; Ete, 2013). The “Aoga Amata movement was a seed planted by the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa in New Zealand” (Ete, 2013, p. 49).

The Aoga Amata and other Pacific language ECE soon spread throughout the country, often, as mentioned earlier, under the umbrella of different Pacific church denominations (Ete, 2013; Coxon et al., 2002). Coxon et al., (2002, p. 20) noted that “Factors of identity have been implicit in the rationale behind the development of the Pacific early childhood movement in Aotearoa”. Ete (2013) observes that each Pacific Language Nest has their own Language Guidance document based on the principles of the current ECE curriculum *Te Whāriki*, although being bilingual with their particular heritage language, and centralised in Pacific cultural values. Similarly, New Zealand Kindergarten ([NZK], 2012), although mainstream based (using mainly English), supports Pacific cultural values in their teaching programme, through developing opportunities for Pacific speakers to work alongside teachers from other cultural backgrounds (such as Pākehā), so that there will be consistency for children between home and the kindergarten as well as their community.

Expectations of Pacific ECE parents

Anecdotal reports are that there is an expectation that early childhood teachers should support the learning and development of Pacific children in their culture and language (see also ERO, 2007b, 2008). Pacific parents want ECE services to be culturally appropriate and connected to their families and community (ERO, 2008; NZK, 2012).

This ideal aligns with values upheld by *Te Whāriki*, which emphasises that adults should provide an environment where children's cultural values and spiritual beliefs are supported through appropriate learning experiences (Macartney, 2011; MOE, 1996). This is also reiterated by Guo (2014) in her statement that, "culture is conceptualized in *Te Whāriki* as the most essential influence on learning, giving rise to a demand that early childhood education provided to children should be relevant to children's own cultural values and practices" (p.21).

An ERO report (2008) found that Pacific parents want their children to have good education, and hold high expectations for them to achieve well in school. Timperley and Phillips (2003) also found in their study that there were genuine high aspirations from Pacific families for their children. Parents valued education as an important part of their children's life, and saw themselves as first teachers for their children (ERO, 2008). Unfortunately, this is at odds with the reality that parents are often left out of consultation about issues concerning their children (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). In addition, parents may have a different understanding. For example, Pearson (1990) notes that the Western view and expectation of children and families, often works in contrast with beliefs and expectations of Pacific and other minority groups. A good example noted in literature is the idea of learning through 'play', which Pacific parents regard as a waste of time and non-constructive (Leaupepe, 2010; Paleai-Foroti, 2013). On the other hand, Leaupepe and Sauni (2014) confirm the New Zealand ECE sector highly values play as a vital component to programme planning and curriculum design.

Play is seen in the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* as a medium in which children develop an understanding and knowledge of how to make sense of their social, natural, physical and spiritual worlds as they actively engage within their family, community and society (Curtis & Carter, 2008). Densem and Chapman (2000) highlight

play as children's work, and that adults must allow children to explore and discover new learning through working things out on their own. Through play, children discover ways to problem solve, create new ideas, and their dispositions are enhanced in areas such as creativity and curiosity, as well as providing opportunities for children to express their personalities (Curtis & Carter, 2008; Pramling-Samuelsson & Fler, 2009).

By way of contrast, Pacific parents aspire for their children in ECE to learn to read and write before starting school (Hughes, 2004; Leaupepe, 2010; Paleai-Foroti, 2013), due to expectations to have subject knowledge and skills to help them do well in primary school (Hughes, 2004). Some of these expectations may have emerged out of parents' fear based on media reports of the low academic achievement and high number of school drop-outs of Pacific students in secondary schools (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). The MOE (2003) also reports one of the hurdles for Pacific children moving from ECE to formal schooling, is that the new entrant teachers do not introduce literacy and numeracy learning until the children are competent in their English oral communication. This teaching practice causes children to fall behind in their learning and has a negative 'ripple' effect on their education in later years of schooling.

There is a call for a shift in the way teaching and learning is facilitated, to ensure equity and consideration of bicultural/multicultural methods, as well as the strengthening of collaborative partnerships with whānau, families, communities and teachers, in which knowledge is shared to make decisions together to better educational achievement for all children (Airini, 1998; Bishop, 2003; Podmore, Sauvao & Mapa, 2003). As part of that shift, ECE literature that supports an early start to apply culturally appropriate teaching and learning methods include Airini (1998), and Podmore et al., (2003), who propose a holistic approach for learners through a bicultural/multicultural perspective, with the maintenance of learners' first languages being a central part of it.

Supporting that approach, Cullen (2008) states that “.... Māori and Pasifika leaders have argued increasingly that their values, meanings, expectations and practices should guide educational provisions for their children” (p.2). Coxon et al., (2002), also identify that educationalists from Māori and Samoan communities are dissatisfied with the lack of holistic approaches to education, and also the lack of inclusion of both “Māori and Samoan languages” (p. 50). Research literature reveals the disconnectedness of children’s cultural values from classroom teaching methods, meaning Western dominated ways of teaching detract from the ability of children to learn in ways they are familiar with (Bishop, 2003). The Western approach is seen as a disadvantage for Pacific families and their children, especially in regards to disparity between their academic achievement, and that of those from the dominant culture in the post ECE years (Harker & McConnochie, 1985; Nakhid, 2003).

The *Te Whāriki* curriculum as noted is embedded with bicultural values, and therefore teachers in ECE are expected to implement activities that promote these values (MOE, 1996). On the other hand, New Zealand is multicultural and ECE services have become more and more diversified, yet the bicultural requirement of the curriculum is still given priority (Guo, 2014).

Samoan perspectives of ECE

Samoan educators and communities have firm ideas on the place of the child in their communities, and what expectations there are for his/her learning and well-being. The impartation of knowledge Pacific-style is approached in a holistic ‘non-discrete categories’ way that brings into teaching reality rather than theorising, and therefore it is important to incorporate cultural elements into education curricula generally (Coxon, et al., 2002; Pene, 2000), and more particularly, that this kind of teaching and learning should be implemented in ECE programmes. In so doing, this will help teachers

“contextualise their teaching so that it is grounded in the cultures that are familiar...and more meaningful” (Pene, 2000, p.14).

As reported, Samoan children are raised to respect the Fa’a-Samoa (cultural values, traditions & beliefs) that have been passed down through generations, and this is important in their learning in ECE (Burgess, 1988, 1990). Children are part of their family’s everyday life, and they are expected to learn their role in the daily routine of their aiga (family) and village (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2014). They learn tautua (service) to the elders, aiga (family) and village (Burgess, 1988; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2014). In everyday interactions with their elders and aiga, children learn culturally appropriate social skills such as fa’aaloalo (respect), va fealoa’i (keeping respectful relationship with others), and feagaiga (know their gender role) (Airini et al., 2010; Anae, 2007; Betham, 2008).

An important aspect of a Samoan child’s development is spiritual well-being, which mainly refers to beliefs and values embedded in the child’s family system, including a belief in the relationship with their Creator (God) (Betham, 2008; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2014). In modern times, children are brought up in the church where they also take part from a very young age as consecrated through baptism and participation in Sunday school (Toso, 2013). There is an expectation that children attend church with their parents and respect the religious beliefs they hold. Through these churches also, Samoan children in New Zealand are supported in maintaining their language, cultural values and spiritual beliefs (Toso, 2011). Spirituality in the Samoan perspective is relational and dependent on healthy social interactions between the child and people in his/her family, village or other environment such as ECE service where relationships are nurtured and respected (Betham, 2008). It is also “life expressed in solidarity, a communion with the whole of creation, the very life of a people, their history, and stories

of creation, myths, legends and culture. It speaks of their way of thinking (mentality) hopes, beliefs, values and aspirations” (Salazar, as cited in Betham, 2008, p. 3). These values are reinforced in Aoga Amata as part of their programme (Toso, 2011), and are embedded in the philosophy and theoretical underpinnings of *Te Whāriki* (Gordon-Burns & Campbell, 2014).

PART THREE

The application of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum in ECE

The *Te Whāriki* Curriculum Aspiration

The opening words of *Te Whāriki* start with the curriculum’s vision statement for children:

This curriculum is founded on the following aspirations for children: “to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society” (MOE, 1996, p. 9).

The basis for the principles of *Te Whāriki* is the aspiration and desired outcome for a child to be well provided for in all aspects of his/her life, so that he/she is supported to develop holistically: that is, in his/her physical, social, cognitive, emotional, cultural and spiritual well-being (Macartney, 2011; MOE, 1996). *Te Whāriki* curriculum’s aspiration statement carries a vision of empowering young children to become effective members of society (Duhn, 2008; May, 2002; MOE, 1996). The aspiration enunciates what is to be realised for all children in New Zealand, regardless of their cultural background and family makeup, socioeconomic background or their learning capabilities and opportunities for learning. The statement recognises the importance of holism and acknowledges the importance of a child’s place within society (MOE, 1996). It also emphasizes the importance of the individual child as a learner, and as the starting point of the learning process, which includes knowledge, skills and attitudes he/she brings to

his/her experiences in the learning environment and that can be facilitated through responsive and reciprocal relationships with adults (Duhn, 2008; MOE, 1996). Through these relationships and together with warm interactions, a child's holistic well-being is strengthened; mana is nurtured (MOE, 1996) and respect is developed within a social context (MOE, 1996). These features can result in the child developing into a confident and competent learner, who can contribute well into the daily programme, and into the service's learning and the wider community (MOE, 1996).

Although such aspiration for children is worthy of praise, Duhn (2006, 2008) argues that the curriculum is a cultural artefact that represents the ambitions and aspirations of society and powerful adults, who view children as individuals who need to be moulded into their 'ideal' vision of the kind of people who will make future contributions to their society, in other words, to fulfil their vision (Duhn, 2006, 2008). *Te Whāriki* is not only theoretical in its approach to whom the child is and what he/she should become, but also is embedded in the ecology of politics, society and culture based on global influences and discourses and therefore is not a neutral document (Duhn, 2006, 2008). Adding to that view, Mutch (2003) proposes that the curriculum has a double function representing both national and global political interests.

Some academics also note that there is not enough evidence to say *Te Whāriki* is supporting children effectively in meeting the ideals suggested in its aspiration statement (Blaiklock, 2010a, 2012; Cullen, 2008; Nuttall, 2002), because of the varied interpretations of *Te Whāriki* by teachers who might not have the knowledge of how to implement the curriculum (Blaiklock, 2010a, 2012). While its non-prescriptive nature is regarded by many ECE professionals as a model of best practice nationally and internationally, ERO believed that it "could benefit from a comprehensive review of its implementation" (ERO, 2013, p. 6). Blaiklock (2012, 2013) suggested that the curriculum

should be assessed and evaluated in order to find out how much difference it is actually making in children's learning.

Cullen (2008) states that many ECE professionals have been advocating for children's rights, especially those labelled as disadvantaged, to be "perceived as confident and competent learners" (Cullen, 2008, p. 2), however there is evidence to support the contention that *Te Whāriki* is ineffective as a curriculum for New Zealand ECE diversity (Duhn, 2006). Literature shows that this is because, regardless of *Te Whāriki*'s claim to advocate for all cultures, evidence however reveals the dominant cultural group's values and beliefs are mainly the ones being supported (Chan, 2011; Duhn, 2006). Smith (2011, 2013), on the other hand, strongly argued that the effectiveness of the ECE curriculum in New Zealand is supported by "research evidence and ethical issues on children's rights" (Smith, 2013, p.3). This claim however is rebutted as being based on research findings that are noted as irrelevant to *Te Whāriki* (Blaiklock, 2012, 2013), and therefore the findings are questionable in relation to the outcome of the curriculum's aspiration statement (MOE, 1996).

Implementation of *Te Whāriki*

It would seem from the preceding that the history of the curriculum has not been smooth sailing, even though there is worldwide praise for its uniqueness as a bicultural document. From the beginning, issues have been raised about its theoretical underpinning and implementation (Carr & May, 1999; Mara, 1999; Nuttall 2003). Subsequently, the Ministry of Education funded projects for professional development and research study to support the implementation of *Te Whāriki*, and develop frameworks for "programme evaluation and assessment of children based on its Principles, Strands and goals" (Carr & May, 1999, p. 7). These professional development programmes were found limited in covering the need to help educators effectively implement the curriculum (Gaffney &

Smith, 1997). Consistent with that, in 2004 ERO reported that teachers lacked confidence in implementing *Te Whāriki* in regards to cultural values, and the programmes they were providing proved to be out of tokenism rather than from an in-depth knowledge of the curriculum (ERO, 2004). Again in 2013, ERO found the ECE services still in the same situation, continuing with ‘old practices’ (ERO, 2013).

Māori Context

From a Māori /bicultural perspective, there are also concerns about the implementation of *Te Whāriki* in ECE services, again regardless of international support for the curriculum. Nuttall (2003) noted from personal communication with teachers that the theoretical approach of the curriculum was not well understood in relation to practice. Due to this lack of understanding, educators go ahead and plan their programme based on their own interpretation (ERO, 2013). The Ministry of Education from 2009 required all ECE services to implement the *Te Whāriki* curriculum in the hope that this would support a more widespread application of quality and consistency of approach, especially in the Kohanga reo centres (MOE, 2009). This includes acknowledgement of the importance of Māori children’s world outside of ECE centres. The curriculum also provides a platform for whānau and community involvement (MOE, 2009) and therefore ECE teachers should involve them in their programme as part of *Te Whāriki* implementation, also utilizing whānau knowledge that is crucial in the learning of Māori children (MOE, 1996).

Māori culture is central to Māori children’s holistic development. Educators in early childhood settings should be knowledgeable and have an understanding of Tikanga Māori and te reo, and have requisite “views on child development” (MOE, 1996, p. 41). The bicultural nature of *Te Whāriki* enables educators to provide inclusive learning opportunities for children of all cultures (MOE, 1996). Contrasted with the above is the

assertion of Duhn (2006), who claims that while the Secretary for Education in his introduction to *Te Whāriki* is full of praise for its biculturalism, this does not go very far when it comes to ensuring the development of the ‘language and cultural prowess’ of the child, the core of one’s Māori identity according to May (2001), and indeed of any other culture. The necessary skill sets are just not provided in *Te Whāriki*, and likewise neither is the stage set for all children "to be given the opportunity to develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritage of both partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi", in spite of the introduction to the curriculum stating this as being supplied through the work's reflecting this partnership in "text and structure" (MOE, 1996, p. 9).

Alvestad et al., (2009), noted in their study that implementing *Te Whāriki* is a complex task, especially when considering the diverse nature of New Zealand early childhood services. This is supported by May (2002), while yet observing that the curriculum document’s presence in ECE services was noticeable. Ritchie (2012) raised concerns about having teachers who were not biculturally knowledgeable weave programmes for Māori children. This poses questions of the effectiveness of the philosophical implementation of *Te Whāriki* for indigenous learners, and whether the curriculum is really catering for Pacific and Māori children with respect to their cultures’ aspirations and beliefs, if evidence shows biculturalism is not properly implemented in ECE learning sites (Ritchie, 2012).

Pacific Context

Pacific professionals reported on *Te Whāriki*’s limitations in relation to a theoretical underpinning based on cultural and linguistic contexts of Pacific early childhood services (Mara, 1999). The implementation of the curriculum in Pacific centres was viewed in this report as being expected to go beyond what *Te Whāriki* represents, a bicultural document. This expectation of adapting the bicultural curriculum to create

Pacific programmes brought with it an increased expectation of teachers to try to make sense of *Te Whāriki*'s content in order to fit in with Pacific centres' own philosophies and programmes, based on cultural values and beliefs (Coxon et al., 2002; Luafutu-Simpson, 2011).

Mara (1999, p. 39) states that *Te Whāriki* "represents 'new territories' in programmes and provisions for Pacific Island children and their families". Subsequently, Luafutu-Simpson (2011) observed first-hand the resentment and resistance felt by some Samoan teachers towards the notion of implementing Western guidelines from *Te Whāriki* for assessments, which took away attention from "their philosophical objectives and forces them to operate from a worldview different from theirs" (p.53).

The idea of implementing *Te Whāriki* in ECE services for Pacific children using Western methods is seen as a mis-match of practice, because language and culture help develop children's identity and self-esteem (Hunkin-Tuiletufuga, 2001). Teachers therefore should be knowledgeable of different cultures to ensure children are not being marginalised through their implementation of a programme based on *Te Whāriki*, because the curriculum does not provide specific guidelines for implementation (Blaiklock, 2010a, 2012; ERO, 2013; Mara, 1999).

Mainstream context

Smith (2013), in her discussion paper, presented evidence showing that there are many ECE services that could improve on the way they implement *Te Whāriki*, and believes that better implementation is related to the level of knowledge and understanding of the curriculum, and facilitated by teachers through proper training. She highlights that there is a need for ECE services to have teachers who are fully trained and possessing knowledge of how to implement *Te Whāriki* every day in their work with their community of learners; only then can the curriculum be effective in its approach to

providing quality learning for all. This finding however, although it makes a lot of sense, is probably not feasible in the light of current government policies in which the requirement of ‘trained teacher’ is only compulsory for the ‘person responsible’, and these teachers do not have to be full-time employees (MOE, 2015). The removal of the (2002 – 2012) Strategic Plan target for ECE services to have 100% qualified teachers by 2012, and replacing it with a reduced target of 80% (Carr & Mitchell, 2010) might have worked against the implementation of *Te Whāriki*, due to having non-qualified educators working with children, who have not been trained fully, if at all, to work with the curriculum.

There were two concerns raised in the ERO report (2013): one was that teachers planned programmes for teaching and learning based on the curriculum principles they chose or understood, and secondly, the curriculum is ineffective due to its flexibility and being non-prescriptive. These concerns raised the issue of the negative effect the general nature of *Te Whāriki* has on the learning and teaching programme for children, as teachers were found to be relying on their own interpretation of the curriculum principles.

This finding reiterates the importance of teacher knowledge, as asserted by Smith (2013), that the weaving of the programme depends on the knowledge of the teachers: but what would happen if they do not possess the knowledge they need? The ERO (2013) however, suggested in its findings that there was a need for further investigation into the implementation of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum, in regards to the provision of “a bicultural curriculum for all children, and the supporting of ‘Māori children to experience success as Māori’” (p. 18).

The idea of leaving it to the teachers to weave their programme is seen by some academics within New Zealand and internationally as an idea that leaves teachers to do whatever they think is right, and so the danger is that they will weave in their own/old

practices to provide a programme for children in their care (Macartney, 2011; Nuttall, 2005). There is also no evidence to support the idea that the weaving of the principles to suit ECE philosophies can create effective programmes for children's learning, as noted in recent literature (Blaiklock, 2012, 2013; ERO, 2013; Hedges & Cullen, 2005).

The curriculum recognises the importance of having educators in ECE who have knowledge and understanding of how children learn and develop, and how the context of their learning environment influences the outcome of their learning (ERO, 2007b, 2013; MOE, 1996). Concerns have been raised in the last two decades in regards to the role of educators in ECE centres (Hedges & Cullen, 2005; Nuttall, 2005) and as noted by ERO (2013, p.7) "there was highly variable understanding of *Te Whāriki* and associated practice across these services". This finding suggests that educators' role and understanding of the curriculum varies, but that they should be knowledgeable of it as children's learning depends on it.

In addition, there were guiding documents published by the MOE to support the implementation of *Te Whāriki* in ECE services. In 1998, the MOE released 'Quality in Action' and in the following year 'The Quality Journey' (MOE, 1999). These documents were given to all chartered ECE services to help teachers and educators effectively implement the curriculum, and so provide quality education for all children and whānau of ECE services. The MOE released *Kei Tua o te Pae*/Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars (MOE, 2004b) to support teachers in their assessment of children based on the principles of *Te Whāriki*. Unfortunately, even with these documents, concerns were still being voiced through the literature about the lack of understanding in the implementation of the curriculum in everyday practices (Blaiklock, 2010a, 2012; ERO, 2004, 2013; Luafutu-Simpson, 2011; May, 2002; Rau & Ritchie, 2011; Te One, 2013).

By 2000, it was noted that in most centres “*Te Whāriki*’s visual presence was apparent” (May, 2002, p.12) but teachers were still struggling with its implementation, due to its afore-mentioned non-prescriptive nature, and furthermore, teachers were weaving their own curriculum from their understanding which did not necessarily reflect the learning needs or cultural values of the children (ERO, 2013). Although these concerns have been raised for nearly two decades, Smith (2011, 2013) stands by the *Te Whāriki* curriculum, while asserting that, “effective implementation of *Te Whāriki* demands interpretation, reflection, dialogue, careful planning, observation and consultation with parents/whānau and children” (Smith, 2011, p.151). The effective observation of these conditions is however dependent on how knowledgeable the teachers are of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum, as reported in the ERO (2013) National report.

ERO (2011) asserts in a broader sense that *Te Whāriki* promotes literacy learning through its principles, which seek to empower children to become literate through activities that are meaningful and engaging. It encourages a holistic view of literacy where infants, toddlers and young children engage with literacy in ways that reflect their growing expertise, and that incorporates their home literacy practices.

Challenges with the implementation

The contention in some literature over the years that one of the curriculum’s oversights is that it lacks guidelines or prescriptions (Blaiklock, 2010a, 2012; ERO, 2013), of how the principles and strands should be woven into individual services’ programmes, is reiterated throughout this thesis. Conjoint with this assertion is the idea that the weaving of individual curricula to fit in with ECE services’ own community values, may not be ideal if teachers do not have the understanding and knowledge of *Te Whāriki* in relation to its implementation (Cullen, 2003; Mara, 1999). Cullen (2008) argued that:

“Teachers have considerable autonomy in their use of the curriculum, and also considerable potential for undervaluing the theoretical underpinnings of *Te Whāriki*, because the curriculum is principled rather than prescriptive and it relies heavily on teacher qualities to guide teaching practices” (p. 10.).

This concern of having knowledgeable teachers in ECE was reflected poorly upon in the ERO (2013) report. The review, agreeing with Macartney (2011) and Nuttall (2005), as noted above, indicated evidence of incompetency in programme planning, and teachers using old (pre-*Te Whāriki*) practices rather than using the non-structured weaving metaphor to create their own (ERO, 2013) appropriate learning programme for their children and whānau.

As noted, it is almost two decades since the official launch of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum, yet reports in related research literature provide evidence that many educators in early childhood services are still struggling with its implementation and are unable to realise the curriculum’s full potential for cultural and social effect (ERO, 2010, 2011, 2013). This finding is not just a recent concern, but an on-going issue since the beginning, as noted above, and as Mara (1998) reported, that Pacific educators were struggling to understand how to weave their cultural and language based philosophy to match the *Te Whāriki*’s philosophical approach, due again to the curriculum’s lack of prescribed guidelines for implementation. ERO’s (2013) findings highlight the “need for further guidance and support for services, to explore more deeply the strands and associated goals, dispositions and outcomes in *Te Whāriki*” (p.7). Blaiklock (2010a, 2012, 2013) and Nuttall (2005) noted the curriculum is a document that has many great ideals but does not provide specific enough guidelines for educators to follow, in order to provide efficient programmes for children.

One of the challenges that has been identified in the curriculum is the lack of inclusion of subject content knowledge (literacy, maths, science etc.) skills, although on the other hand there is an argument that the Communication and Exploration strands (MOE, 1996) provide opportunities to promote the skills for subject knowledge. However, educators are not provided in the curriculum with support on how subject knowledge can be facilitated (Hedges & Cullen, 2005) by using play as a tool for learning. In contrast, evidence from a research study with a Pacific background noted how pre-schoolers become competent in their literacy skills using family and cultural ways of being taught (Coxon et al., 2002) and learning, which involves having supportive adults guide them in their reading.

Hughes (2004) highlighted the importance of children in Vanuatu being given structured learning in literacy and numeracy. Tanielu (2004) pointed out that the important part of Aoga a Faifeau (Pastor's school) in developing literacy at an early age for a Samoan child, was learning the Samoan Faitau Pi (Samoan alphabet). These early years' experiences were more structured compared to *Te Whāriki*'s free exploration. Such a view was evident in Leaupepe (2010) and Paleai-Foroti's (2013) studies about play, which older aged Pacific parents do not accept as a way for children to learn, yet is supported in the *Te Whāriki* curriculum.

"*Te Whāriki* is open to multiple interpretations and is, as such, a site of where knowledge, values and pedagogy are contested and, when this is recognised, can be negotiated" (Macartney, 2011, p.4). However, while from a philosophical perspective it sounds an ideal approach, putting it into practice might produce a different outcome as visible in some of the literature such as Blaiklock (2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2013), Duhn (2008), the ERO (2011, 2013) reports, Fleer (2003), and Hedges and Cullen (2005). These academics have identified that the flexibility of the metaphor in regards to weaving

their own programme, has not been a success in the teaching and learning of children, due to various reasons such as avoidance of subject knowledge, and the question of how knowledgeable the teachers are in the delivery of the curriculum within a multicultural society. However, it is noted that the interweaving of the strands of *Te Whāriki* can illustrate the belief held by Pacific peoples that one's life is a holistic process (Koloto, 2004).

The literature is split over the issue of having a non-prescriptive curriculum, in light of such facts as noted in the ERO (1998) report that in 1997, about 16% of ECE services lacked confidence in implementing the curriculum, because it did not provide a prescription to do so. While that assessment was made only a year after the curriculum's release, it seems nothing much has changed in the almost 20 years since then, as revealed in the ERO report (2013) that teachers are still not confident in the implementation of the curriculum. Another addition to the concern over implementation of *Te Whāriki* was the mandating of the Principles and Strands of the ECE curriculum, linking it to the Education (ECE) Regulations (2008) regulatory requirements. These regulations for curriculum and ECE licensing criteria (MOE, 2008) require all ECE services to implement the curriculum according to the needs of their particular group and to operate in line with their own philosophy (ERO, 2013). This addition may have added pressure on ECE teachers to implement *Te Whāriki* without understanding how, especially with the government's openness to having non-qualified teachers in ECE (Mara, 2013) which has become a concern for many parents. The concern with the curriculum's implementation has been raised before and in recent years, much more so in academic reviews and debates as noted (see Blaiklock, 2012, 2013; Cullen, 2008; Duhn, 2006, 2008; Smith, 2013). The same was found in the 2011 Taskforce report, which

“recommended an evaluation of the implementation of the early childhood curriculum,” (New Zealand Government, as cited in ERO, 2013, p. 1).

Summary

The origins of *Te Whāriki* are rooted in the growing realisation during the 80’s that the Education Department was not delivering for ECE a systematic approach, and one that was integrated with the rest of the education system. This led to an embarking on the process of workshops and consultation with a wide variety of social and ethnic groups, from which the first draft emerged. At this point political agenda intruded, and changes were made that lessened the innovativeness of what had been accomplished, however the result was still a document that received worldwide attention and praise, not least for its biculturalism. At the same time, there has been a rising number of academics and professionals in the field who are critiquing the curriculum’s theory versus practice, due to evidence that *Te Whāriki*’s lack of instructions on how to implement it, is leaving teachers to continue on with old practices (Hedges, 2003).

Unfortunately, the lack of any major Government-initiated review of ERO findings over the Curriculum’s 20-year lifespan has stifled its growth, transformation and improved implementation, to reflect for example changing demographics and associated cultural and linguistic needs. While the document has shown itself to be full of good objectives related to early childhood growth and development (based on its Four Principles and Five Strands), superficially at least, on evaluation, however, questions are raised over its political embedding of children in the dominant culture, and deficiencies in various areas such as in regards to its vagueness about how to implement its theories and in relation to features such as holistic development that get less than full treatment. Such is part of the substance of the on-going academic debate.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter identifies and describes the research methodology, processes and procedures associated with the study's cultural context, its theoretical position and influence on the outcome of the study. The sample selection for the research is explained and reflected upon with respect to the gathering and collection of data, the data analysis process, considerations of ethical practices, and the limitations of the methodology used.

Theoretical Conceptual Framework

Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative research is a study approach designed with an exploratory emphasis, used to gain an insight into views, perspectives and reasoning behind social trends or lived experiences of people (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002). Qualitative research is interpretive, and is useful in exploring how people think and feel about social issues that affect their lives, and also provides a way in which they can voice their concerns as members of their community. Consequently, for this study, it was important to use a qualitative research design, in consideration of its appropriateness to the topic for exploring the richness and potential insight of phenomena (Ramalingam & Jones, 2008) gathered through research interview questions (see Appendix A).

The heart of this research was based on the knowledge and experiences shared (Parkinson & Drislane, 2011) by Samoan teachers in ECE, and therefore it was necessary to employ a research framework that had the ability to consider social, cultural and professional ethics (Collier & Elman, 2008; Lincoln, 2009). Since I was interested in exploring the views of Samoan ECE teachers about the *Te Whāriki* curriculum, the qualitative research methodology was adopted, firstly because it dealt with people's social reality (Hughes, 1992), secondly, the participants' voices were important to the

research, and thirdly, it worked in tandem with different research methods and techniques (Collier & Elman, 2008), which in this study included the indigenous methodology of Talanoa and individual interviews.

Using a qualitative approach enabled the data to be interpreted with reference to the natural context from which it was taken (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), including gathering information first hand from the participants and using a familiar place to carry out the research, such as in this study the teachers' places of work. It presented the concept of an inquiry approach in which as a student researcher, it was important to analyse and code the data into description and theme, and use this resulting information on the views of participants in regards to the *Te Whāriki* curriculum, to write the findings (Creswell, 2002; Parkinson & Drislane, 2011).

Indigenous Methodology

The recent emergence of indigenous research brought to light culturally appropriate processes and methods relevant to the researching of a particular people or community, whose values and belief systems differ from that of Western ideologies that dominated the research world for a long time; often the results were seen through the lens of the researchers rather than that of the participants (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 1999). The processes, practices and protocols within indigenous cultures, such as building relationships with the participants and considering collective ownership of the research (Smith, 1999), were often ignored or misunderstood by Western researchers, based in an academic milieu that is embedded with individualistic values (Vaiotei, 2006). In some cases, information shared by the participants was not always truthful, because relationship aspects were neglected in the process and indigenous people felt they were being used for their knowledge and devalued in their contribution (Castellano, 2004; Chilisa, 2012; Ermine, Sinclair & Jeffery, 2004; Smith, 1999; Vaiotei, 2006). Smith,

(1992) saw Western researchers as people who had the power to distort, make invisible, to overlook, to exaggerate and to draw conclusions based, not on factual data, but on assumptions, hidden value judgments and often-downright misunderstandings. They have the potential to extend knowledge or perpetrate ignorance (p. 53).

Battiste (2002) stated that “indigenous researchers cannot rely on colonial language and thought to define their own reality. If we continue to define our reality in the terms and constructs drawn from Eurocentric infusionism, we continue the pillage of our own selves.”

The introduction of indigenous methodologies was a step forward towards utilizing indigenous worldviews and minimizing marginalization and academic institutional colonization within the research field (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 1999). They provide platforms for cross-cultural researchers to grasp cultural understanding and knowledge of different cultures (Greenhill & Dix, 2008) in the ECE field. They have transforming power in identifying the importance of relationships, collective perspectives (Smith, 1999) and worldview of a particular group of people/community. Having their own unique methodologies based on shared knowledge and mutual understanding of cultural protocols and processes help empower indigenous people to have their voice in a forum where there is respect and accountability (Anae, 2007, 2010; Battiste, 2000; Vaioleti, 2006).

Talanoa methodology

The Talanoa methodology belongs to the family of phenomenological research and arises from a Pacific way of interacting through talking and/or face-to-face dialogue (Latu, 2009; Manu’atu, 2007; Otsuko, 2006; Vaioleti, 2006). As noted earlier, the use of Talanoa as an indigenous methodology from a Pacific perspective was made possible through the qualitative research framework. The word ‘talanoa’ originates from Pacific

Islands such as Tonga, Samoa, Niue and Fiji, and has been well documented as a research methodology by Tongan academics such as Vaioleti (1999-2002, 2003, 2006), Manu'atu (2002) and Prescott (2008). In the political arena, Halapua (2005) used Talanoa as a platform to dialogue and resolve political issues such as that of the Fiji coup in 2000, and the Cook Islands economic recovery programmes (1996-1997). Halapua believed the Talanoa methodology played a big role in political leaders reaching decisions because of its cultural appropriateness and its nature of allowing every voice to be heard. From political to academic, Talanoa has been used in forums where university students and professionals in education, health and business discuss and share their research findings.

Talanoa is made up of two words; tala means to explain, to talk or to inform (Vaioleti, 2003). The word noa means void, not in any particular order or structure (Latu, 2009; Vaioleti, 2003). It can also mean without guideline or direction. "Tala also means to command, tell, relate and announce, and noa means common, old, of no value, without thought or exertion, which then literally means talking about nothing in particular, and interacting without a rigid frame" (Vaioleti, 2003, p.23). Talanoa is a methodology that promotes reciprocity and building of trusting relationships between researcher and participants (Vaioleti, 2006).

The use of Talanoa as a research methodology is a step forward towards utilizing indigenous worldviews, and minimizing marginalization and academic institutional colonization within the research field (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 1999). Pacific participants and researchers together, are enabled to construct their knowledge in dialogue through Talanoa. It is different from Western methodologies with their tendency to give power to the researchers to control the process (Latu, 2009; Otsuko, 2006). It ensures the researchers are in a position where there is mutual understanding and respect based on

cultural protocols, and provides opportunities to go beyond the research questions via in-depth dialogue in a non-threatening environment (Anae, 2007; Otsuko, 2006).

Talanoa Methodology from a Samoan perspective

Talanoa is a verb and it literally means ‘to talk’. Out of talanoa comes talanoaga, a noun that describes a methodology some Samoan researchers use in their research to differentiate from the Tongan research conceptual framework (Cowley-Malcolm, 2013; Kesi, 2014; Kolone-Collins, 2010). The idea of using Talanoa in Samoan research is not only appropriate but also quite relevant to the holistic way Samoan people relate within their own community. It was deliberately employed in this study to align with the purposes and culture of the participants, as well as the nature of the research topic. The Samoan people live and make decisions collectively through talking/dialoguing together (Vaioleti, 2003, 2006), whether within their extended family or in wider village matters. It is a way matai (village chiefs) conduct their meetings as pule (position of authority) in their role (Anae, 2010). Talking and sharing views is the most effective way of communication, and it helps bring transparency in any meeting.

Talanoa can be combined with one of the most effective ways that Samoans use to collaborate when decisions need to be made called soalaupule (sharing of power/authority) (Utumapu-McBride, Esera, Toia, Tone-Schuster & So’oaemalelagi, 2008). Soalaupule is made up of three words, *soa* (from the word fa’asoa) meaning to share or give out, *lau* meaning you and *pule*, authority or power (Tuafuti, 2010). Soalaupule means sharing of power/authority among people who are involved in a meeting or talanoaga (the noun coming from Talanoa). It brings people together to express their views while respecting one another in their contribution (Lui, 2003). For my research project, Soalaupule was part of the Talanoa process with the participants from the first point of contact (first meeting), through interviews, and afterwards because it was

important to have a clear view of each teacher before analysis of data. The combination of Talanoa and Soalaupule, enabled the participants and researcher for this study to work together and make consensus decisions for the interview dates and times, as well as the discussion and sharing on the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix B).

The Samoan core values of alofa (love), fa'aaloalo (respect), tautua (serving) (MOE, 2009) and honouring others were naturally embedded in this study through the Talanoa methodology. There was also great consideration given to the importance of va fealoa'i (respectful relationship) (Anae, 2007, 2010) in order to maintain effective professional relationships with the participant teachers in the community, during and after the study. Anae (2010, p. 14) stated that "any Pacific researcher who is culturally competent in his or her own culture can 'do' research because they can teu le va (respect relational space) within their own communities." These criteria led to ensuring that clarity about roles and responsibilities before, during and after the interviews was maintained and so avoided leaving participants feeling deceived and used in the contribution of their knowledge.

Although Talanoa, as discussed in this chapter, is a Samoan practice turned methodology, it is interesting to note some studies from the Samoan community, such as that of Cowley-Malcolm (2013) and Kesi (2014), used the word Talanoaga to describe the methodology in their research. Cowley-Malcolm (2013, p. 85) argues the point of difference being that "Talanoa is taken from a Tongan conceptual framework that highlights Tongan language and concepts." Such a statement can be disagreed with because talanoa is an everyday practice in and for Samoan families. Vaiioleti (2006) found that in Samoa, the local people regarded "talanoa as an ancient practice of multi-level and multi-layered critical discussions and free conversations" (p. 24), which led to decision-making for church and business at a national level. Kesi (2014) and Kolone-

Collins (2010) viewed ‘talanoaga’ as a noun to the verb ‘talanoa’. In Kolone-Collins’ (2010) research, talanoaga is viewed as a form of information transmission through fagogo (story-telling), reflections and questioning. Talanoaga was seen as a trustworthy method of a face-to-face meeting between two or more people (Kesi, 2014) which is the same as the meaning and use of the Talanoa concept in Pacific research (see Latu, 2009; Leaupepe, 2010; Manu’atu, 2003; Otsuko, 2006; Prescott, 2008; Vaioleti, 2003, 2006). Talanoa as a methodology, is useful in all aspects of a research study with Samoan or other Pacific cultures, because it can be a formal or informal dialogue with flexibility of time (Latu, 2009; Otsuko, 2006; Vaioleti, 2003, 2006), depending on the subject at hand. It is the simplest and yet most effective way to open doors to reliable, valid and first-hand information (Vaioleti, 2006).

Research Processes

Setting Up the Research Process

Finding Supervisors

The first step taken after enrolment was to find two supervisors who would help support me throughout this journey. Being a Samoan student, it was important for me to have supervisors who are of the same culture because of the knowledge and understanding of cultural values and protocols required, so that there would be an understanding on both sides of the processes (such as talanoa) adopted during interviews, and also some of the language used in this study, which a non-Pacific person would otherwise find hard to understand. Just as important was the supervisors’ experience in research and support with previous students, and their availability as well as interest in the chosen topic. One supervisor was available at the time and later I received the support of another Samoan supervisor.

Compiling resources for the literature review

The process of compiling resources for the review of literature started before the research proposal. Some of the resources such as journals and research articles were purchased online (via 'ERIC' - Education Resources Information Center at eric.ed.gov) and some were books and magazines from AUT and local libraries. Although there was a wealth of information in most of the resources, it was important to use the literature specifically relevant to the themes chosen for the study, which in itself was rich in information. During this time, there was also the search for the most appropriate and relevant methodology for the study and discussions were had with two Pacific lecturers/researchers.

Sample Composition

Selection of contributing centres and participants

The aim of this research study was to find out the views of Samoan teachers of the ECE curriculum *Te Whāriki*. Experiences and knowledge of the topic were very important to this study, so the participants had to be qualified teachers and had to have worked at least 5 years with children in an ECE service and to have been involved in using the curriculum. The reasons for these selection criteria were to ensure there was enough experience of practices in using *Te Whāriki*, and that there was the possession of an in-depth knowledge of its values and beliefs. In order for the study to produce valid data, another criterion was to interview teachers who had not worked with or had professional association with the researcher.

The original proposal (PGR1) for the study had a plan for finding participants through a Talanoa evening at AUT South Campus, to network and share resources/information. The plan was to use this as a platform to introduce my topic for the study and invite the teachers to write their details if interested to be part of it.

However, the feedback from the Postgraduate AUT Ethics Committee highlighted some ethical issues on this approach, and it was decided then, with the supervisor, to abandon the Talanoa evening idea and replace it with direct contact with the ECE services via telephone. This contact was to be with managers/supervisors to introduce myself, and to ask for permission to visit their ECE centre to find out if any Samoan teachers there would be interested to participate in the study. This was accepted by the Postgraduate AUT Ethics Committee, who granted Ethics permission to start the study.

Once the ethics application was approved (see Appendix C – Ethics Approval), the prospective full immersion Aoga Amata centres were selected and compiled from the SAASIA (Sosaite Aoga Amata Samoa I Aotearoa) website. Through the list of centres in the online Localist Directory, under ‘Early Childhood Services’, Mainstream centres’ telephone numbers were compiled. These were called to introduce myself to the manager/supervisor, and to ask for permission to visit their centre to meet face-to-face to explain my research study. If and when the managers/supervisors gave their verbal permission, I made an appointment with each centre and telephoned them back with a date. After the initial telephone contacts and setup of times and dates to visit the centres, the task of approaching ECE centres and teachers became easier, although the criteria I set to qualify the teachers to be participants created challenges in finding those who met the qualifying requirements.

Most of the centres approached did not have eligible volunteers for the study: either they were not fully qualified, or had worked less than five years in ECE. There were eight early childhood teachers chosen for this study. Four of the eight were chosen from mainstream ECE centres, since the researcher wanted to find out the effect of the multicultural setting on the teaching of Samoan children in that multicultural environment, and four from Aoga Amata centres, in order to research the impact on

Samoan children's development. The study took place in South Auckland where there were a number of early childhood centres to choose from in regards to finding Aoga Amata and mainstream services with Samoan teachers.

Before the day of my visit, I rang each centre to remind them and confirm if the agreed time was still doable. It was important from the start with these conversations to remain respectful in all interactions and communications, in whichever language was appropriate to the ECE services. With the Aoga Amata, it was important the conversations were in Samoan and I adapted my dress-code to suit the nature of the Aoga. Overall, the centres approached were happy to help with the research project, which may have had something to do with the topic of the research project being related to *Te Whāriki*, and its use by Samoan teachers being perceived as a useful addendum to teachers' working knowledge. Following screening questions to the centre manager to establish if valid respondents were available at the particular centre, of the potential respondents approached, nearly all consented readily to taking part, with two not participating, one due to workload, and the other being on leave at the time of approach.

Amongst the centres who did possess criteria-matching potential respondents, one Aoga Amata (full immersion) had four fully qualified and registered teachers who had worked in the field for more than five years. These teachers, upon receiving information about our first meeting, agreed to take part, and were the voice in the study of the Samoan teachers in Aoga Amata.

The four Mainstream early childhood services teachers were from three different centres. Three were from Otara local early childhood services (of whom two work in a privately owned early childhood service, and one in a community-operated preschool) and one from a state kindergarten in Manurewa. The two teachers who volunteered from the private large early childhood services organisation were in their early 60s and have

been working in their centre for more than five years, however, both worked for a small community service before moving to this centre. The third teacher was from the community-operated preschool, which caters for 2-5 year old children. She has worked in the field of ECE for seven years. The fourth mainstream teacher was from the kindergarten and has been working in the same centre since graduating with a Bachelor's degree (teaching and learning ECE) seven years previously. She was the youngest of the sample.

The participants who met the criteria (fully qualified, having worked 5 years or more, and who were unknown to the researcher) and were interested, were given a Participant Information Sheet and later a Consent Form which were discussed face-to-face.

Collection of Data

Method of Data Collection

Individual face-to-face interviews using Talanoa (talking) were used to gather data for this study from the eight participants. The reason for using an one-on-one interview method was that, it was the only way I could capture the opinions and views of each teacher without being influenced by others. Much thought and conversation with other Master's degree candidates about their data gathering methods were taken into consideration, before choosing individual interviews as a data gathering method for the study. Part of this consideration was based on the common factor found in these conversations that focus groups did not work well because some shy participants could not open up and share their honest opinions about the topic while others were present, which therefore affected the researchers' data results outcome.

Two groups of questions were provided, the first five to profile the participants, and the following eight relating to their views on the curriculum. Although reflective

questions were provided to guide discussion and ensure the written answers agreed with what was said, the interviews were informal and participants were free to share anything from the heart and their own experiences. As data was gathered, it was written as direct quotes in the language format in which they shared (i.e., in English or Samoan).

Before the interviews, as noted above, a Consent Form (see Appendix C) was given to each participant, once they confirmed their interest. Participants were asked to read through the Consent Form and to make sure they fully understood the written information before signing. This was also checked with them before the interviews: each participant and I went through the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form again to make sure all was well before participating in the interview. The participants chose the dates and times for their interviews, which all happened in their places of work, after work hours. As noted above, during the interviews the researcher repeated back what was written down to the participants and asked reflective questions to ensure what they said had been recorded correctly. Consideration of cultural protocols and processes had to be taken seriously to ensure ethical practices were followed at all times during the meetings and Talanoa, as well as the analysis of the data. Keeping the relationships open, respectful and honest helped in gathering the relevant and important data for the study. If any clarification on participants' comments were required, the participants were contacted directly.

The Talanoa and dialogue with the Aoga Amata teachers were conducted in both English and Samoan and were hand-written at the time of interviews in the source language of the participants. In addition, what are called Side Notes, where participants extended upon their answers to the interview questions, were also written in the source language to maintain their authenticity and then later translated, if Samoan was used, into English. This was the same with the three teachers from the mainstream centres except

one participant (a New Zealand born Samoan) for whom English is her only spoken language.

Transcripts

The data gathered was transcribed from the interview notes, both direct answers to the questions posed and further conversation with each participant during our face-to-face Talanoa. The information given by the participants was written in the way they each shared, again, to maintain authenticity of their experiences especially in relation to cultural perspectives and feelings about the curriculum. As mentioned above, Side Notes were also written during dialogue with each participant, who added extra information and hence more value to the answers given to the interview questions. When the transcription was completed, copies were given to the participants and feedback was sought to make sure the authenticity of their Talanoa/sharing was not lost in transcription. There were two participants who made corrections to the translations of their Talanoa notes, which were in the Samoan language.

Analysis of Data and Interpretation of Results

The analysis of the data is part of the process in defining information collected, in order to narrow down into common themes, especially in relation to the information about the curriculum regarding children's learning. Analysing the data was a challenge; it took a few weeks to get it into themes due to the varieties of participants' responses. In saying that, through careful processing, themes did emerge, and there were also responses that were quite similar, which were easy to compile.

The first part of the analysis was to identify the similar answers for each question from the eight teachers and separate those that were different, using data analysis techniques such as content coding to interpret and separate into themes and "hence adhere to the naturalistic paradigm" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1277). The second part was to

interweave the previously mentioned ‘side notes’ from each teacher to help make sense of their answers in a much more in-depth context. The analysis also helped bring some of the long answers given into perspective and enabled me to identify where the teachers stood on each question (agree or disagree).

During the work on analysing data, I found a couple of comments that I felt needed clarification for my own understanding in the context in which the statements were made. The participants were contacted, and met with, to discuss the statements. In addition, when the data analysis draft was presented to the supervisors, there was a consensus that more information and clarification was needed in some parts and a meeting was set up with the Aoga Amata teachers, and two mainstream participants were happy to be contacted by telephone.

Presentation of Results

From the analysed data, themes emerged that are presented in Chapter 4: Findings with direct quotes from the participants’ comments. Finally, recommendations are presented and discussed, based on the findings and results of the study in light of current research and debate on the *Te Whāriki* curriculum.

Background of the participants

The age range of those selected for the sample was from 32 to 66 years at the time of the interviews. The Mainstream ECE teachers like Aoga Amata were all migrants from Samoa in the early 1970s and 1980s except one who was born in New Zealand, with English as her first language. Five of the participants were primary teachers in Samoa but could not teach in New Zealand due to their qualifications being unrecognised in New Zealand. Five of the teachers were grandmothers at the time of the interview. These teachers were given a second chance to gain teaching qualifications during the tenure of the Labour Government (1999-2008), which offered scholarships for Pacific students to

study in ECE. This gave the women the opportunity to go back to study, even though they were already relieving and working part time at Aoga Amata. The ages of the four teachers at Aoga Amata ranged from 47 to 66 years at the time of the interviews. All four had been working in the same Aoga Amata since graduating with their Diplomas between 2004 -2007, and three teachers upgraded to Bachelor degrees in 2010 and 2012, although one was yet to complete hers at the time of the study. One of the participants was the supervisor of the Aoga Amata. They all spoke Samoan as a first language and had in-depth knowledge of the Samoan culture, which is useful in promoting the total language immersion philosophy of Aoga Amata.

The youngest participant was aged 32 and New Zealand-born. She had been working in the same kindergarten for eight years and at the time of being interviewed for this research project was studying for a Master's Degree at AUT.

In Chapter 4: Findings (comprising data analysis results), the respondents' names are not shown; instead a coding system is employed to reference them thus: Participant A.1[2,3,4] for Aoga Amata, and Participant M.1[2,3,4] for Mainstream.

Figure 1: Detailed Breakdown of Participant Profiles

Centre-Type	Participant	Age	Qualification	Institute	Years of experience
Aoga Amata	A1	66	Bachelor of education (B.Ed)	AUT (ECE Pasifika)	8
			Diploma of teaching ECE (DipECE)	Auckland College of Education (ACE)	
	A2	65	B.Ed	AUT (ECE Pasifika)	9
			DipECE	ACE	
	A3	50	B.Ed	AUT (ECE Pasifika)	10
	A4	47	DipECE	ACE (Pasifika)	8
Mainstream ECE	M1	52	B.Ed	AUT (ECE Pasifika).	9
			DipECE	ACE (Pasifika)	
	M2	63	DipECE	AUT (Pasifika)	6.5
	M3	65	DipECE	ACE(Pasifika)	12
	M4	32	B.Ed (ECE)	University of Auckland (UoA).	8
			Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDip)	AUT	

Limitations of Talanoa methodology

Although data gathered may have highlighted the importance of cultural protocols and maintaining relationships, Talanoa has some limitations when viewing it from a time frame standpoint and academic criteria for research. There is a view that using the Talanoa methodology in a short-duration research may not result in valid data for the researcher, because trust and mutual respect need to be developed over a period of time (Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2012). Through such-developed trust, participants feel at ease to share freely their true feelings about the topic because they feel comfortable with the researcher. Much time is needed to build such relationships between researcher and participants if the Talanoa methodology is to be effective in its holistic cultural use, and hence the reason why it is important to allow sufficient time, and flexibility in schedule, for research to take place. On the other hand, some researchers have found Talanoa's flexible timeframe a challenge due to participants' laissez-faire commitment to

appointments for interview or focus group, which means the participants turn up whenever they want and this can lead to time allocated for others falling behind schedule (Otsuko, 2006). Another limiting factor with Talanoa's flexibility is that while more time allowed for dialogue benefits the researcher's study with information, it can also lead to familiarity issues and both researcher and participants lose sight of the topic.

Summary

The ways and means of discovering the data that feeds into the study of how Samoan educators respond to the national ECE Curriculum *Te Whāriki*, have been presented with an outline of how qualitative indigenous research methodologies such as Talanoa along with Content Analysis, have been employed to more accurately profile their viewpoints. It highlights the importance of gaining an Ethics approval from AUTECH to ensure the researcher and participants are kept safe and accountable. Also, some factors about the impact of Talanoa as an indigenous methodology have been discussed in relation to its limitations and advantages for research studies.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter Four presents findings from the Talanoa (individual interviews) with eight Samoan ECE teachers. It focuses on the information gathered from the interview questions (see Appendix A) with direct quotes presented that support each emerging theme. The interview data has revealed different views on how the *Te Whāriki* curriculum is providing for Samoan children's learning and development in ECE. Although the participants were in individual Talanoa, the data gathered found common themes, which are presented under each research-guiding question. The comments extracted from the Talanoa are not in order of how the interview questions were presented, but rather from the result of collating from answers and side notes, and categorizing under each question.

4.1. Research Question One:

How does the *Te Whāriki*. curriculum support learning and development of Samoan children?

Question One presents the themes drawn from the interviews, that highlight the different methods and ways teachers believe the *Te Whāriki* curriculum figures as important in the learning of children in ECE, focussing in this study on Samoan children. In answering Question One for the research, participants' comments are presented in the language they used, with translation where appropriate.

Working in Partnership with parents and families

Throughout the interviews, one of the important areas highlighted by the participant teachers was partnership with parents and families of children attending ECE services. Some of the comments were related to how the curriculum *Te Whāriki* reflects the philosophy of the ECE services involved in the study, in relation to the partnership

between the ECE service and the parents/whānau. Some of the participants commented on the vital role parents play in the learning of their children, and concluded therefore that nurturing the relationship between the ECE service and the parents was of utmost importance in facilitating relevant cultural competence for teachers, and consistency for children between home and the learning environment.

...I can see the philosophy of Aoga Amata in the curriculum, especially how it supports the relationship between adults, the teachers and parents. It encourages teachers to work in partnership with families, ...the centre and parents working as a team... is better for children's learning... So for me as a teacher; inclusion of parents and whānau in our programme, inclusion of their cultures can help bring quality to children's learning... Our Samoan parents are very good with supporting our fundraising and helping on children's trips... Yeah, the curriculum supports our Samoan parents to get involved but the only problem is that teachers are not given information exactly in *Te Whāriki* on how to work with parents because everyone is different and you don't want to offend someone if you do the wrong thing... (A1)

A3's comment also highlighted the importance of inclusion of parents/family in the philosophy of Aoga Amata, but went further, mentioning the importance of partnership in relation to cultural knowledge and teachers' practice as well.

I know the Aoga Amata values in its philosophy are about working together with Aiga (families) and community. We have a responsibility to our families and their children. Working as a community is encouraged in *Te Whāriki*, but should give ideas [on] how to [do this] ...this can produce better results for the Samoan children in our centre because we can tap into the cultural and child rearing knowledge so we practise these in the centre when children are with us. Remember even though we are Samoans each family have their own unique way of raising their children...some parents might see my way of dealing with behaviour differently from theirs...so it's better for us to share these[sic] information for consistency... (A3)

The mainstream teachers also spoke about how they saw partnership in *Te Whāriki* as a way in which teachers could help create an environment of trust and consistency for children, although M4 felt at her centre this was not happening as it should, as it would have, if *Te Whāriki* had been consulted properly.

...*Te Whāriki* encourages warm and responsive relationship between teachers and families...I feel this is in our philosophy for a reason because we can't work without the parents' permission or do anything. Remember we need consent

from the parents to go out to our trips and other curriculum areas like using computers for their learning...you know, any decision we make has to be okay by the parents...Samoan parents usually are very good in support if they know what's happening in the centre, it's a sense of pride for them sometime to support their children... (M1)

...*Te Whāriki* reflects our centre philosophy in many areas although it is questionable how many of us who put *Te Whāriki* into practice. I don't think many teachers understand the meaning of partnership promoted in *Te Whāriki* because if that was the case, then everything should be fine between parents and the teachers in our centre. But parents don't really get involved...to promote here but it's hard when you have someone...who is from a different culture and doesn't understand Māori and Pasifika cultures...even trying to build that kind of relationship...You know what I mean? ...Parents are important source of information and can help in having consistency for children's learning, but teachers need to include them as stated in *Te Whāriki*, this help build equal responsibility and results in quality programme...this is where I feel the curriculum failed to give guidelines on how to implement its content... (A2)

The responses from the majority of the teachers during the interviews acknowledged the vital role of partnership and collaborative work between whānau and the ECE service in the teaching and learning of children. Partnership and collaboration between the ECE service and the parents/whānau was noted in the teachers' comments as reflecting their philosophy. Some acknowledged that it was important for parents to be included in the ECE service's programme because it helped teachers understand the cultural knowledge, child rearing and beliefs of the child's family, and also help bring quality into the ECE service's programme. Parents are also seen as a source of consistency for the centre programme and learning of children, because of their roles in sharing information that is crucial in programme planning; two participants, however, made a point that in order for such consistency to take place; teachers need to make sure they include parents. M4 commented ... "the curriculum failed to give guidelines on how to implement its content," which reiterated the point made by A1 as well, that *Te Whāriki* does not give ideas to help teachers in getting parents and whānau involved.

Children learn through reciprocal and responsive relationship with teachers

This theme emerged out of participants' comments in responding to Question 5 (Curriculum interview questions). These teachers commented extensively and with reference to the *Te Whāriki*, on how important reciprocal and responsive relationships between children and teachers are, in facilitating effective teaching and learning in ECE.

...I didn't really understand *Te Whāriki* until I work at Aoga Amata and see the way other teachers work...One of the things I learned at the first time using *Te Whāriki* was how important reciprocal relationship is between teachers and children and how teachers should be responsive when working with children. In *Te Whāriki*, it talks about the importance of warm and nurturing relationship in children's learning and development...not just a good relationship...it's good for the kids to have that kind of relationships with teachers, you know, caring and loving them...I think that's what *Te Whāriki* is talking about but should be more specific for people like us and our children. (A3)

I know this reflects our own Fa'aSamoa way...So in Aoga Amata we do the same, we take on the roles of parents in teaching children about proper ways...what I'm trying to say is that *Te Whāriki*'s idea of reciprocal and responsive relationship is something that is practised in our Samoan culture...*Te Whāriki*'s idea of reciprocal and responsive relationship is something that is practised in our Samoan culture...we build good relationship with children, love and respect them which *Te Whāriki* also teaches us to do... (A4)

Other participants also commented on the importance of reciprocal and responsive interactions between teachers and children. One of the main themes noted in the comments from participants was the trust factor in the relationship between children and teachers, and that such should be a priority because it makes a difference in children's learning.

As a teacher, I feel one of the most valuable lesson[s] that *Te Whāriki* teaches us is the relationship between a child and a teacher...the kind of relationship that every teacher should have is like how you hold a baby when he first arrived in the world...you know...you have this love and you want to protect them so no one can hurt them...then the child will trust you that you will do anything to protect them...That's what I feel *Te Whāriki* wants us to do...it (*Te Whāriki*) should provide us with some suggestions though on how we can build these kind of relationships with children because every child is different, especially to help new teachers... (M3)

I think part of child development is how children respond emotionally to people, and that is important to how they feel about learning with a particular teacher. For example, being close with a child is not just about talking about activities...it's about a relationship that is based on mutual trust, but it has to start somewhere. We're human beings and we thrive in relationships, ...so a child who knows there is a teacher who respects and loves them regardless of how they behave, gets more out of a learning environment than the one who is ignored...I see both sides in the centre and feel the relationship between teachers and children need to be better for the sake of children...again the *Te Whāriki* has some great ideas and most parts are spot on...but having no guidelines does not help teachers know what to do and I think that's probably why teachers don't understand the importance of responsive relationships... (M4)

Reciprocal and responsive relationships and trust between children and teachers are important factors that the participants agreed on in relation to *Te Whāriki* and their importance in the learning and development of children. M4 commented on the need for the teachers to be better in their practice of building such relationships. Although *Te Whāriki* was noted as the promoter of reciprocal and responsive relationships, the teachers also saw it as a document that lacked guidelines to inform the teachers on how to build relationships between them and children.

Holistic learning for children in *Te Whāriki*

Holistic learning is referenced throughout *Te Whāriki*, and acknowledged as meaning different things to different people and cultures. The responses provided here represent the views of holistic learning from different perspectives, based on Question 5 of the Curriculum Questions (see Appendix A). The participants provided some answers based on how they saw *Te Whāriki* support the learning of children in general, and Samoan children specifically, evaluating its attention to Holistic learning.

Te Whāriki talks about holistic learning which means providing for the child's social, physical, cognitive and emotional development...I think the content of *Te Whāriki* gives teachers room to think outside the box in preparing different outdoor and indoor activities for kids' learning, but the problem is it (*Te Whāriki*) does not give any information about how to do it...There are also other areas like the culture and children's religions I feel we don't promote in our programme because of other religions as well...I feel Samoan children are missing out because our culture is more than the language...I feel it's hard for

new teachers to understand how to set up a holistic programme for all the children in mainstream let alone our Samoan kids... (M1)

M1's understanding of holistic learning and opinion on how it is practised in ECE, was shared by A2 as noted below:

I'm not sure how you see it but a child's holistic development and learning depends on how the teachers set up their programme to make sure the child's physical, spiritual, cultural and social learning are given resources to encourage and support, as well as family involvement. The curriculum's bicultural content can be used to provide learning for all children...I suppose it's easier to provide for all areas of a child's development in Aoga Amata...maybe the people who wrote *Te Whāriki* did not think about how teachers can put this holistic development into practice...because it's okay for Aoga Amata and other language nests, we only have our culture to think about...but not for mainstream. They have many different cultures and beliefs...it would be hard to provide a holistic learning programme...teachers will overlook other cultures or children's development...

The following comments highlight the view that *Te Whāriki* provides opportunities to support Samoan children in ECE. However, there was also some disappointment on the influence of Western theories, which the participants felt did not align with the Samoan culture. For example, M4 commented:

The curriculum has some consideration on cultural values,...well; let me say this, it cannot really provide holistically for Samoan children, or any one particular culture...unless you are operating from Western theories. The curriculum is based on Western ideas and thinking, Samoans don't raise their children the same way...talking spiritual and emotional development will be a hard match to find in *Te Whāriki*, Samoan spiritual beliefs are very different from what is suggested in the curriculum...(M4)

When you say holistic development, it means the whole child, right?...well from my opinion as a teacher and as a Samoan, I agree the curriculum does support different cultures and beliefs; and it has provided opportunities for teachers to do that...But I don't agree that it can give opportunities for Samoan children or even other cultures to promote their whole well-being socially, culturally and especially religious beliefs; it's not effective in that way...I think also because our way of life in church can't be promoted in centres (mainstream) like ours...and no compulsory requirement in the centre that tells the teachers they have to...(M3)

...I think that Samoan children are not really provided for holistically in *Te Whāriki* especially considering their culture, family values such as Christian beliefs, but inclusion of teachers' knowledge can make a difference especially in Aoga Amata... we're lucky we know our own culture and it helps with the work

we're doing with the children...I think *Te Whāriki* should tell the teachers what to do and how to make up [a] programme that caters for children as a whole person...(A1)

Analysis

Participants expressed their view on the curriculum with respect to its impact on the holistic learning and development of children, and Samoan children in particular. They were of the opinion that *Te Whāriki* did provide opportunities for learning for all children, but some felt it did not really provide specific ideas to cater for the cultural and religious beliefs of Samoan children. However, the emphasis to be adopted, in their view, was very much in the hands of the teachers and their ability to promote family involvement and provide the appropriate resources. It is this freedom to determine the extent of focus on the children's holistic factors that is of concern, it being felt that the combination of this with the dominance of Western theories resulted in a loss of alignment with Samoan culture. Quite simply, "Samoans don't raise their children the same way". Another view held was that the curriculum was not effective for any culture in relation to promoting the "child's whole well-being socially, culturally and especially spiritual beliefs," because *Te Whāriki* does not tell teachers how to go about it.

One of the interesting points shared by one Aoga Amata participant was that holistic learning may be easier to provide if only for the reason that teachers find it easy to focus on one culture. This is especially because having teachers of the same culture means there is a shared understanding of the child's cultural and spiritual values and beliefs, which helps in supporting their learning and development, and keeps consistency between home and the ECE service. ERO (2011) reported on the importance of centres working together with whānau to maintain relationships, and sharing important information for and about their children's learning and development.

There were also other general comments including some criticism of *Te Whāriki* in its lack of guidelines to assist in the preparation of programmes that support child development holistically in all areas. Some comments also went as far as asserting that the *Te Whāriki* did not provide holistically as far as Pacific emphasis was concerned, except for the general suggestion of inclusion of all cultures in the curriculum.

Te Whāriki curriculum views holistic development from the whole context of the child's physical, social, spiritual, cultural and emotional well-being (MOE, 1996) and such is seen as a natural approach in Aoga Amata. However, on the other hand the mainstream participants provided a critical eye, with the observation being made that it was "Hard to see it (*Te Whāriki*) as a holistic curriculum, as it does not cater for in-depth learning experiences for children", and it showed only "surface [level] consideration of all cultures". Added to that was the fact that there was "no compulsory requirement for teachers in the centres to include cultures and spiritual beliefs" (M3) of any one particular culture, and in fact "Samoan children are given choices in the curriculum, that do not agree with their cultural and spiritual beliefs".

Further points raised were the lack of understanding of *Te Whāriki* by most teachers, a lack of guidelines on how to deal with different age groups, and most importantly for one participant, "*Te Whāriki* only briefly mentioned spiritual [development] but does not put any emphasis on how the child's soul and mind should be provided for." The child should be seen from every area of his/her being. The overall conclusion seemed to be that '*Te Whāriki*, in actual content, does not provide for all children holistically especially spiritual and cultural values and beliefs.' The question that could be asked in this case is from M4: "How can *Te Whāriki* then be viewed as a holistic curriculum?"

***Te Whāriki* supports play as a teaching and learning method**

The participant teachers acknowledged that play is encouraged in *Te Whāriki* as a method in which children can learn and develop. There is an indication in the curriculum that children's knowledge and skills can be developed when they are allowed to play and explore on their own (Curtis & Carter, 2008). *Te Whāriki* recognises play as a way of learning in which children are enabled to explore and discover their unique abilities, strengths, interests and capabilities (MOE, 1996). Play supports children in the development of their skills such as their physical, cognitive, natural and social world. It can also help them deal with their emotional needs, and find their own place where their spiritual values are accepted and respected within their social and natural surroundings (Curtis & Carter, 2008; MOE, 1996).

The Exploration strand was highlighted in one participant's comment, where children are encouraged and supported to work things out on their own through play. This freedom given to children to learn through play was seen by some participants as acceptable and valuable to learning. Some embraced it but were also aware of play as a Western ideology and that it does not fit in with Samoan parents' wishes or cultural beliefs. Some felt the idea of play is useful for teaching and promoting Samoan language while some viewed it as a learning tool for younger children. Some excerpts from the views expressed by participants follow below:

The whole of *Te Whāriki* is based on play and especially the Exploration strand where play is clearly seen as a way in which children develop skills and empowering them to learn on their own. Through play I believe children are given chances to grow and create their own theories of learning...*Te Whāriki* reinforces play for learning...As I watch children everyday play and learn, my own mentality has changed to accept it as useful for children...(A3)

The same participant also shared from her experience as a Samoan what play meant to Samoan parents:

Samoan parents tell their children off when they play, but in *Te Whāriki*, it is the way children build their knowledge and learn how to work things out...how to play with their peers or socialise with each other...you know some parents when they pick up their kids they ask; Is that all the children have been doing all day is playing? They want us to sit and teach them to write and learn their numbers, write their names...This might work in Samoa because everyone has the same expectation but in New Zealand it's not like that, plus they have the Aoga a le Faifeau (Pastor's preschool) where they learn the Faitau Pi (Samoan alphabet) and learn the Bible verses...so they have reading and writing before they go to Primary school. (A3)

The following responses acknowledged play as a learning tool, but questioned how it would be useful for Samoan children if the teachers do not have the knowledge, language and other culturally relevant skills needed to successfully extract it from the curriculum and apply it in a socially and culturally acceptable way.

Learning in *Te Whāriki* is seen through play...I agree with *Te Whāriki* in encouraging play as a way for children to learn but still it's a Western idea...If you're talking about literacy and numeracy that's great, you can teach that but in Samoan language?...How can we in mainstream if we don't have the knowledge of the culture? There's a lot of contradictions in the curriculum, Western values are obviously the dominant culture in every way you look at it, so it would've been better to have a curriculum that gives instructions on how to implement ideas; you know...Supporting the children to read and write, teach them how to hold a pencil or use a ruler, develop maths skills all that stuff...so they can be prepared for school...(M4).

Another excerpt from a participant viewed *Te Whāriki* from a different perspective, that play is acceptable to an extent.

Te Whāriki sees play as a way of learning and teaching at the same time...Play is useful for settling new children; and it's also good to give children some free time to explore, especially the babies and toddlers... The older children should have limited free time and do some structured activities to prepare them for school. I think *Te Whāriki* only promotes play for learning but does not give any idea on how children should be prepared for Primary school like writing and reading or maths, you know? I reckon the children should be exposed to basic writing and numeracy learning so they don't get overwhelmed when starting school (M1).

On the other side of the scales, another participant felt *Te Whāriki*'s support for play as a means for learning can still be used to the advantage of Samoan children from

their language perspective, this being the acquisition of a personal life-changing belief for the participant. As commented below:

Play is not a Samoan thing but it's supported in *Te Whāriki*...you know this is the way palagis teach their children; but us Samoans we tell our children not to waste time on things that don't produce something good...I used to agree with this thinking. We used to order children to help mum and dad. In saying that, as a teacher in New Zealand, it was hard to switch...now we use play to teach children our Samoan language...I see things differently now since we work with *Te Whāriki* as part of our philosophy. I might not agree with other areas but play as a way of learning, I like it...I've changed my way from previous beliefs in writing and reading to accepting that children learn when they play (A2)

Summary

The curriculum emphasises the important role play has in the learning and development of young children in ECE. *Te Whāriki* encourages educators to provide learning experiences where children can explore skills that help them develop their own working theories about the wider world (MOE, 1996). Play was acknowledged by the participants as a method of learning from different perspectives, with some however drawing attention to problems with this method. Here are some more excerpts from the participants' responses:

Te Whāriki reinforces play for learning...As I watch children everyday play and learn, my own mentality has changed to accept it as useful for children. (A3)
...we use play as a way to teach our Samoan language every day (A2)

M4 voiced her opinion saying, "I agree with *Te Whāriki* in encouraging play as a way for children to learn."

There is general support for play as a method in which children can learn and develop their skills and explore further learning. The participants accept the emphasis on play in the curriculum and each mentioned how they see it as useful in their observation of children in their work. For example, one of the participants from Aoga Amata (A2) agreed that play helps teachers facilitate activities in which Samoan children can learn in their language. Another colleague also highlights that not only children have benefited

out of play, but she also has learned the value of play by observing how and what children learn during their activities.

This participant (A3) shared that her own mentality has changed from disregarding play due to upbringing beliefs, to accepting it as a useful tool for children. M4 agrees that play encourages learning every day for children, however she also brought up another point from her position as a mainstream teacher that not all teachers in her category have the cultural knowledge or the Samoan language to support the children from the Samoan community. M4's view is in line with finding that although teachers do not have to be culturally connected to children's cultures, it is however more appropriate and helpful for children's learning.

Interesting themes that emerged

During Talanoa with each participant, some interesting topics emerged out of our sharing and these are presented as 1) Participants' upbringing and memories of play and 2) Subject content knowledge.

Participants' upbringing and memories of play

A3 shared her memories of what play was like for her growing up in Samoa:

I remember back in Samoa me and my sisters and brothers and our cousins were always happy when we finished doing our chores for the day, because we were able to go for a swim with our friends from the village. Our life back at home was not like the kids here in New Zealand. They are lucky to have time to play and not have chores like we did. Sometimes we didn't play at all because we didn't finish our chores on time. My parents were very strict and we got the fusipau (belt) if we neglected our chores and went to play volley or got involved in any kind of sports happening in the village without permission. So we had to do our work fast then went...

A2 also shared a similar story. She said:

We had no time to play as youngsters in Samoa. We had responsibilities and duties to carry out in our own home. I remember one time when I was late home with my cousin with lau ulu (breadfruit leaves) for the umu (on the ground oven cooking). We saw our friends playing hop-scotch in front of the church so we stopped and played, and forgot the umu...we were late...so we both got a

hiding...and we were punished by banning us from going to the malae (village meeting/events ground). Playing was almost a bad thing in Samoa, it's like you can't have free time to relax and/or join recreational things...

The two Aoga Amata teachers' stories were supported by M2's story.

... Oh there is no time in Samoa for play, younger or teenage years...If you want to go and play volley or bingo even during the school holidays, you had to complete every task you supposed to do or you would be getting a hiding when you came back. Our parents were very strict...either obey or suffer the consequences...we had no time to waste in any games or sports even when we were much younger like six or 8 years old, we got scolded if us children played skipping or anything, we always had to do the feaus (chores). We looked after our younger siblings all the time...After that, we were expected to do our Bible reading if there was no homework...free time was not in our parent's vocab...

M4's childhood memories were different from the others. She was born in New Zealand and had good memories of growing up with friends and cousins whom she played with at the park most days after school. She had fond memories of her mum taking her and her siblings to the park.

I had a lot of fun as a child. My sister and I were enrolled into extra-curricular after school, we had gymnastic and ballet...It was great. Even though our parents were brought up in Samoa and migrated here... we were very blessed they did not have many rules for us or expectations on doing cooking or cleaning. That was a Saturday agenda...my parents let kids be kids, so we had a lot of freedom to be honest.

The four participants' childhood memories of how their parents viewed play as part of their childhood learning and development were very different. The three teachers who were raised and migrated to New Zealand as adults shared similar memories of what it was like in Samoa as a child. There were responsibilities and duties to carry out as part of the wider family. If these were not followed or enjoyment of games or sports became a priority, then they suffered the consequences of physical punishment. There was also a mention of how free time was unheard of because there was an expectation to be doing homework or reading the Bible. One participant mentioned that on top of all the other chores there was also the responsibility of looking after their younger siblings.

Comparing the migrated participants to the New Zealand born, there is a vast difference in the parents' approach. M4 enjoyed her childhood and had parents who supported her development of extra-curricular interests outside of school. Her memories of her upbringing were pleasant, and were of lots of fun and freedom, which raised the interesting point that her parents were migrated from Samoa, yet were quite different from many indigenous Samoans in their approach and belief for their children. This approach was noted in A3's comment that her own mentality has also changed as she watched children learn while playing. Through working with children, A3 came to accept play as a useful way for children to learn and develop.

Subject knowledge: Literacy and numeracy skills

Subject knowledge was highlighted in some of the participants' comments. Some were of the opinion that *Te Whāriki* should have provided guidelines to help teachers teach children literacy and numeracy and other items of subject knowledge. These comments were directed against *Te Whāriki*'s emphasis on play as a way in which children learn. The viewpoint in the comments was that children needed to be prepared for Primary school, and some learning experiences such as writing and reading should be supported in the curriculum for children who are near school age, so that when they start at Primary school, they would be familiar with their routine and programme. It was noted from one of the Aoga Amata participants that parents often disciplined their children to learn through structured activities such as writing and reading. Two other participants voiced their views on this subject by saying that:

... I reckon the children should be exposed to basic writing and numeracy learning so they don't get overwhelmed when starting school (M1)

This idea was also supported by M4 who said,

... it would be better to have a curriculum that gives instructions on how to implement ideas; you know... Supporting the children to read and write, teach

them how to hold a pencil or use a ruler, develop maths skills all that stuff...so they can be prepared for school...the parents would be very happy if the curriculum supports these especially now with the push for literacy and numeracy in schools.

A3's comment also raised the same concern in relation to some of the parents in Aoga Amata, that parents want to see their children successfully learn literacy and numeracy during their time in preschool (see p.92):

You know some parents when they pick up their kids they say; is that all the children have been doing all day is playing? Sometime it's hard to please them...They want us to sit and teach them to write their numbers, write their names and know the letters of the alphabet but the children are not interested...

Te Whāriki's support of play as a natural way for children to learn throughout their years in ECE (Alvestad et al., 2009), influenced these participants' opinions from different perspectives.

Some participants admitted to now holding life-changing views on the value of play from the perspective of children's learning, such that they now see the world differently in regards to their 'normal' childhood upbringing, in which it was considered that play was not at all related to learning. In other words, they have accepted play as a way in which children learn. This shows the participants' support for the curriculum *Te Whāriki*, which framework for ECE in New Zealand posits play as a central and valuable component in children's development (White et al., 2009). This view might be different from individual cultures perspectives or parents' beliefs in what they see as education, as noted in some research (see Huang, 2013; Hughes, 2004; Leaupepe, 2010), and this is reflected in the comments from the participants.

These comments highlighted some of the literature citing the importance of introducing children to the skills of particular subjects such as science, numeracy and literacy, with the objective that they would grasp these before getting into Primary school, which could make transition from ECE manageable in regards to understanding

concepts for writing, reading, problem solving and numeracy skills. *Te Whāriki's* Communication Strand Goal [3] highlights the importance of “stories and symbols of own culture” (MOE, 1996, p.78) in support for literacy and mathematics skills.

Blaiklock (2010a) pointed out that the limitation of having a curriculum that is “generalised and holistic in nature” (p.4), is that it does not give teachers guidelines to facilitate and support children’s learning in subject content knowledge. On the other hand, however, there are also other concerns such as not having teachers who possess knowledge and understanding of how to implement *Te Whāriki* (Hedges & Cullen, 2005) in ECE services. Without *Te Whāriki* knowledge, it can result in practitioners providing programmes that are planned on a basis of their own understanding and interpretation (Blaiklock, 2010a, 2012; Macartney, 2011; Nuttall, 2003, 2005). An example of this is seen in M4’s comment that

.... you struggle to make sense and you end up doing what you think is right, but isn’t necessarily right for the children and their families.

Wylie and Hodgen (2007) agreed with the teaching of subject knowledge in ECE as being important to children’s success academically up to age 16, given that ECE provides a quality learning environment regardless of their background. This view also supports Samoan and other Pacific parents’ beliefs on education outcomes for their children, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Parents and grandparents from Pacific Islands and other minority groups have the belief that in order to be successful in this country, subject knowledge is central for children, even from an ECE age. In contrast, some of the Aoga Amata participants embraced play as a method of learning, even though they were brought up in Samoa where play was not seen as useful at all. It was clear from their opinions that working in ECE with a curriculum that values play as learning, helped re-educate them in embracing it as a valuable way for children to discover their own unique abilities and skills.

Pacific cultures are supported on the topic of subject content by other cultures such as those of China (Huang, 2013) and Vanuatu (Hughes, 2004), in regards to a preference for structured activities such as numeracy and literacy. In viewing the responses from the participants, the Aoga Amata teachers highlighted another important aspect of learning through play. The teachers found that even though Samoan parents do not accept play as valuable for learning, they (the participants) use it to their advantage in teaching and guiding the children in learning the Samoan language and culture. This was also highlighted in the ERO (2007a) report that some Pasifika ECE services were doing well in promoting early literacy and numeracy through play using relevant and appropriate resources. The MOE (2003) highlighted the fact that children's success when transitioning into school depends on their verbal proficiency in their first language, which can help support them in their thinking and literacy skills. However, as Nuttall (2002) warned, the curriculum implementation still needs a lot of work, which is an issue other academics and professionals are still debating (see Blaiklock, 2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2013; Cullen, 2008; Macartney, 2011; Nuttall, 2003, 2005; Smith, 2011, 2013).

4.2 Research Question Two:

How are Samoan cultural values being promoted through *Te Whāriki*?

The following themes present the views of the participants on how they view the Samoan culture in the bicultural curriculum. There were differences in the opinions of the teachers, but one point that was clearly stated was that the curriculum is dominated by Western theories (see Question 4.1)

Samoan Culture in a Bicultural Curriculum

The bicultural nature of *Te Whāriki* was seen by four of the participants as important in the facilitation of the Samoan culture and others. The bicultural concept provided opportunities for teachers to set up activities or programmes that supported and

encouraged children to learn in and about Samoan values, beliefs and traditions. The following comments are excerpts from the interviews:

...I suppose if you want to be an effective teacher, you would know how to provide learning activities from studying the bicultural nature of the curriculum. You can put Samoa in your bicultural. Only because I feel Māori and Samoa are quite similar. But if you really need to include our Fa'a-Samoa then I feel *Te Whāriki* doesn't have anything of our core values; you know fa'aaloalo (respect), alofa (love) ma le tautua (service)...The Taiala book has our values but the problem is that they're presented in a palagi (European) way (M2)

Another participant supported this view:

It's good to have the bicultural curriculum because it gives other cultures a chance to promote theirs in ECE. As for the Samoan culture, I feel *Te Whāriki* having bicultural values also gives rooms for Samoan values to be taught and encouraged, but as far as our aganu'u (culture) goes; there is no ola tautua (live to serve), loto alofa (love from the heart) ma ola fa'aaloalo (respectful) and no way provided to tell teachers how these should be practised in your work with children especially our Samoan children. These are the three things we teach in our families' everyday... (A1)

On the other hand, there were other comments received that did not agree *Te*

Whāriki could promote Samoan culture from its bicultural nature:

I have colleagues who say that having a bicultural curriculum can help teachers promote our own culture but actually I disagree...biculturalism means the Māori culture and Pākehā; so how then the Samoan culture could be promoted? You can't use something created for one culture to promote another, it does not work like that...and what about encouraging independence and individualistic learning which are against Samoan and Māori values...how a child is seen in *Te Whāriki* does not match the child raised in a Samoan home...(M4)

I acknowledge the bicultural curriculum because we should honour Māori, but the curriculum for all cultures based on this bicultural model is frustrating at times...another thought, how can we use *Te Whāriki* for a multicultural centre if we can't understand Māori culture? ...palagi (European) ways of learning dominates *Te Whāriki*, ...Samoa people have the Taiala language document to follow so this should be the only one for Samoan children but even that we can't do it in mainstream centres because teachers don't know how...it just sits on the shelf for display with other MOE books... (M3)

Analysis

Half of the participants saw the bicultural nature of *Te Whāriki* as providing opportunities for the transfer of Samoan culture to children. Comments were made on the

hallmark of an effective teacher being to know how to integrate Samoan culture through use of the bicultural provisions of *Te Whāriki* that were compatible with those of Samoa. The problem highlighted was that a full correspondence was not seen as possible, due to the absence of Fa'a-samoa cultural traditions from *Te Whāriki*; while Taiala had them, *Te Whāriki*'s bicultural values were seen as giving only superficial place for Samoan values, and with no proper implementation procedure provided. Supporting comments focussed on this superficiality and the absence of core everyday values of fa'aaloalo (respect), lotu alofa (love from the heart), ola tautua (live to serve). The implication drawn from all this was that you cannot use something created for one culture to promote another, and the stop gap measure of the Taiala is not properly able to be implemented, due to inadequate training, especially in Mainstream centres, and so "just sits on the shelf". Additionally, it was considered that *Te Whāriki*, to the extent it followed Western ideologies, was opposite to all Polynesian cultures by emphasising independence and individualistic learning.

Culturally appropriate programmes based on *Te Whāriki*

One of the common practices noted in the teachers' responses in the interview data was that the learning outcomes of *Te Whāriki* are used as learning objectives or ideas to create culturally appropriate programmes for children in their ECE services. Some excerpts from participants:

... you know how hard it is to try and fit our culture in? I think it (*Te Whāriki*) needs to be re-written to make it easier for the teachers to plan for all children and their cultures...as every day we just talk and do activities in English. Sometimes, I miss my own language and wish to go and work in a Samoan centre...you feel it's more meaningful, *Te Whāriki* needs to work....(M3)

.... Communication (Goal 3) talks about symbols and stories of cultures, so to apply this in Samoan culture, teachers look at ideas such as Samoan dance, old stories such as Sina and the tuna (eel), instruments such as pate (wooden drum). (A3)

I don't actually find *Te Whāriki* useful in regards to promoting Samoan cultural values. I know it does not tell the teachers what to do so the aim is to have teachers create their own programme that suits their centre. My issue is that without guidance for teachers on how to promote cultures there is no way they could on their own. *Te Whāriki* is too complicated, and teachers in my own centre use learning outcomes to set up goals for our programme themes.(M2)

***Te Whāriki* and the Inclusion of the Samoan language**

Aoga Amata participants (3) strongly voiced the opinion that *Te Whāriki* gives support to the inclusion of different languages in ECE services. It was mentioned that the weaving of the service's own programmes means the teachers are enabled to use their own language in planning their programme daily. Some of the teachers especially in Aoga Amata believed *Te Whāriki* can be utilised to their advantage in relation to language and culture maintenance, but this depends on the teachers being knowledgeable of the Samoan language and values. The following comments highlight their views on the topic:

There is an opportunity for Aoga Amata to support the Samoan language in our everyday work with *Te Whāriki*. It's easy to do this in Aoga because we are a full immersion language nest, not like the mainstream services. I feel as long as the teachers know the curriculum inside out then it's easy to just include the language. (A4)

Te Whāriki can be great for language maintenance...Samoan children's language can be used as a way to promote the culture in ECE. Language is supported in *Te Whāriki* but maybe the teachers don't know how to put it in activities 'cause it doesn't tell you how ...Especially mainstream centres, they have different cultures...(M1)

Another mainstream participant commented that Aoga Amata has the best positioning in regards to children's language and cultural learning through the curriculum. M2 stated:

I feel *Te Whāriki* can work better in Language Nests like Aoga Amata because they can focus on one culture...They can teach children in their language and use *Te Whāriki* to guide their programme. We in mainstream have too many cultures to consider and it's hard to see where they all fit in with the curriculum.

Summary

Participants generally use learning outcomes of *Te Whāriki* as learning

objectives or ideas to create culturally appropriate programmes, although some find it quite difficult to get ideas that will fit into this pattern, in spite of adopting strategies like brainstorming, and the result is a lot more talk and activities in English. Others find it relatively easy, and seem to have more inspiration when it comes to matching Goals with appropriate cultural practices like art or dancing to action them, however it is acknowledged that this is through their own initiative since *Te Whāriki* is silent about how to implement the Goals. Yet others seem confused about how to relate what is in *Te Whāriki* with their own (Samoan) culture, without explicit guidance, but manage to set up goals for their programmes from the Learning Outcomes of *Te Whāriki*. Aoga Amata service staff were more confident that they could use *Te Whāriki* to the advantage of Samoan culture, dependent on the level of teachers' cultural competence. That confidence was tempered with the knowledge that staff need to know the curriculum "inside-out". The lack of Samoan teachers and clear instructions on how to implement *Te Whāriki* in favour of Samoan culture, does not help at all in Mainstream ECE services. Mainstream teachers felt at a disadvantage in trying to support the Samoan language and culture in the midst of trying to provide for other children from diverse backgrounds. This is reflected in their general feeling that Aoga Amata teachers were better positioned to support Samoan culture, because of their single culture focus.

Samoan child's image in *Te Whāriki*

The Samoan child's image is not apparent in *Te Whāriki* curriculum according to some of the participants. The interview question about the image of a Samoan child in the curriculum opened the door for the teachers to share how they view the *Te Whāriki* document in regards to Samoan children's cultural values and beliefs. For example, M2 commented that:

If a child is a Samoan and you try to find him/her in the content of the curriculum, then you will be looking for a while and you still won't see the real

Samoan child being Samoan in *Te Whāriki*. How can you see if the culture of Samoa is not included? This question is making me think again about the cultures promoted in *Te Whāriki*...they are not our cultural values it's more of palagi and all the government politics.

M2 was not the only participant who felt the Samoan child is invisible in the curriculum, as seen below in M4's answer:

I don't think I would view Samoan children through *Te Whāriki*. Let's just say I don't think it's a good guide in that area. I think there is so much more to Samoan children and their culture, just valuing all cultures isn't good enough, we need a better guideline...*Te Whāriki* is so vague and general that any educator can view things in the way they want, so it's hard to see where the Samoan child fits in, in a multi-theory and political agenda driven curriculum. (M4)

This was also supported in the opinion of another participant:

It's easy to picture a Samoan child in *Te Whāriki* as an individual rather than someone who lives in the ways of his/her own culture. In other words, the child in the curriculum is seen as an independent learner but not as someone who is within his family...this I believe is a child who grows up in a palagi family so it doesn't match a Samoan child's life...(M2)

Te Whāriki can be great for language maintenance...Samoan children's language can be used as a way to promote the culture in ECE. Language is supported in *Te Whāriki* but maybe the teachers don't know how to put it in activities 'cause it doesn't tell you how...Especially mainstream centres, they have different cultures. *Te Whāriki* can be used for our culture if teachers know it but if only Māori and palagi teachers in a centre, how can Samoan children learn? *Te Whāriki* needs to change or have a new one...it needs to have some sort of instructions in the curriculum to follow...(M1)

Another participant also shared her opinion that the Samoan child is not seen in *Te Whāriki* because she believed the image in the curriculum is a representation of the author's belief system:

I'm not sure actually how it (*Te Whāriki*) could be thought to have the image of a Samoan child. I could see there is a child there but in Bronfenbrenner's theory. I think if the curriculum was written by a Samoan or other Pasifika people, we might have a clear picture of a Samoan child. You can see what kind of people who wrote the curriculum, as one of our lecturers used to say, 'people who only see from one perspective, and that is their perspective'. (A3)

Two participants voiced a different opinion from the others on this question.

These were both from Aoga Amata:

I think it is up to the teachers how they see the child in *Te Whāriki*. Sometimes I think we can get caught up in trying to work everything out and forget what's important and that is the quality of education for children. A Samoan child or any other child in New Zealand can be seen in *Te Whāriki* but that is dependent on the teachers in the way they provide their programme.(A2)

A4 also stated her view on how she sees a Samoan child in *Te Whāriki*:

I have to think really hard about this question, because the image of a child can be seen although it's hard to find amongst the many different strands and goals. The image of a Samoan child can be viewed from the principles...we have a child in the family and community principle, also the Relationship because kids build relationships with others, they don't grow up alone...It all depends on teachers' knowledge...

One participant from mainstream responded:

“Ou te masalo lava au ia, o le fesili lea, e leai se tali mautonu aua e pei e le o aliali mai po o fea tonu e iai le ata o le tamaititi Samoa i totonu o le *Te Whāriki*. A lelei le faatinoina o galuega ma metotia a faiaoga e pei ona tusia, ia ua tatau foi ona vaaia se ataata mai o le tamaititi Samoa...E fa'alagolago uma i le atamai o le faiaoga aua e le o tau mai e *Te Whāriki* pe faapefea ona aumai I luma le ata o tamaititi Samoa...” (Translation): I think this question does not have a right or wrong answer, because there is no evidence to tell us where the Samoan child is embedded in *Te Whāriki*. If the teachers implement the curriculum methodically and effectively, then an image of a Samoan child may be seen through these implementations. The child's image is dependent really in consideration of teachers' knowledge in implementing the curriculum because *Te Whāriki* does not tell teachers what to do.”

Summary

This question opened up the subject of Samoan children's cultural values and beliefs. Some Mainstream participants felt Samoan cultural values were not promoted and consequently the 'real' Samoan child was not to be seen. Other Mainstream participants, who pointed out the curriculum's vagueness and obscurity resulting from the drivers of multi-theory and political agenda, and impingement of the *Te Whāriki* authors' belief systems, shared this impression of invisibility. Similarly, one of the Aoga Amata participants felt *Te Whāriki* was biased towards the perspective of Bronfenbrenner, Vygotsky and other Western theorists. This participant felt the Samoan child's image was constructed only from these sources (Western theories). On the other hand, two of the

Aoga Amata participants asserted that the Samoan child's visibility really is dependent on the teachers' input and knowledge of the curriculum, although it can be difficult to navigate through the strands and goals. A mainstream participant felt the curriculum does not specifically display anything that either promotes or diminishes the image of a Samoan child. Also, in her opinion, the curriculum's non-prescriptiveness is problematic in that, *Te Whāriki* does not tell the teachers how to provide learning experiences with emphasis on a particular culture let alone Samoan.

In summing up this theme, it is evident in the comments from the participants that each has her own idea on whether and how a Samoan child is seen in *Te Whāriki*. There is an understanding that without the visibility of Samoan cultural values in the curriculum, a Samoan child does not exist in its bicultural philosophy, especially when Western theories such as those of Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky are clearly visible. Another noticeable point raised is the importance of having cultural and implementation knowledgeable teachers to support the children's learning based on *Te Whāriki*, with an indication this may help promote the image of a Samoan child.

Learning outcomes are used to create culturally appropriate programmes

One of the common practices noted in the interview data was the teachers' responses on how the learning outcomes of *Te Whāriki* are used as learning objectives, or as ideas to create culturally appropriate programmes for children in their ECE services. This was highlighted in the following comment, with the Aoga Amata participant (A3) in agreement (p.104):

In our centre we use goals and learning outcomes of *Te Whāriki* to work out and make up our own unique ideas to promote cultures. For Samoan culture, we pick a goal or learning outcome then brainstorm some ideas that we know can support the values and beliefs of Samoa. (M3)

The comments from the teachers on how they make up their own programme to cater for cultural values of Samoan children, indicates that the use of learning outcomes

to create themes or goals is common amongst ECE services. However, it is also noticeable the teachers feel inadequate in using the curriculum properly to enable them to create effective programmes for children and this does bring frustration to some as seen in M2's (p. 101) comment. The root for this frustration seems to be pointed at the lack of specific guidelines for teachers in the *Te Whāriki* curriculum.

***Te Whāriki* supports the Inclusion of the Samoan language in the daily curriculum**

Aoga Amata participants (3) strongly voiced that *Te Whāriki* gives support to the inclusion of different languages in ECE services. It was mentioned that the weaving of the service's own programme means the teachers are enabled to use their own language in planning their programme daily. Some of the teachers especially in Aoga Amata believed *Te Whāriki* can be utilised to their advantage in relation to language and culture maintenance, if the teachers are knowledgeable of the Samoan language and values.

Some comments from two Aoga participants:

There is an opportunity for Aoga Amata to support the Samoan language in our everyday work with *Te Whāriki*. It's easy to do this in Aoga because we are a full immersion language nest, not like the mainstream services. I feel as long as the teachers know the curriculum inside out then it's easy to just include the language. (A4)

Te Whāriki is great for language maintenance...Samoan children's language can be used as a way to promote the culture in ECE. Language is supported in *Te Whāriki* so the teachers can help take up this chance to teach our language to Samoan children regardless of what kind of centre they work at. (A1)

4.3 Research Question Three:

How confident are Samoan ECE teachers in implementing the curriculum to meet learning needs of Samoan children?

Lack of prescribed guidelines proves frustrating for teachers

The participants shared openly about their work with *Te Whāriki*; even though there were differences in some opinions and views on the effectiveness of the curriculum in facilitating learning for children. One of the first points mentioned which the majority

of the participants highlighted, was the lack of instruction in the curriculum to help support the implementation of *Te Whāriki* in the centre. It was evident in the responses that teachers were either uncomfortable or lacked confidence in implementing the curriculum. Although some supported its flexibility in weaving Samoan cultural values and language into it, having confidence in creating learning programmes for children proves to be a hard ask for some. For example, the following statements from participants:

Te Whāriki I find it has good and bad points. I don't like the fact that it does not have guidelines to tell the teachers how to plan programme for children. The weaving together of four principles, 5 strands, Goals and learning outcomes to plan programmes for children's learning can be very frustrating. It has been a learning experience for me but I am getting better at it, but in the first two years it was really hard...(A3)

Another participant's statement appears to agree with the above comment from A3 that the implementation of the curriculum can be frustrating because it is hard to follow something with no specific guidelines:

The good thing about *Te Whāriki* is that it's easy to make links with any activity...but if we have to follow every strand and goal we'll be lost because it's hard to understand how to make activities out of goals that are too general and it means children miss out of quality deliverance.(A1)

The mainstream teachers also found the implementation process for the curriculum a challenge. It was noted that the participants either did not feel confident or found the openness and lack of prescription a barrier for the curriculum's implementation.

I use *Te Whāriki* mainly for programme planning and assessment of children and for linking my learning stories and planning to goals and learning outcomes. I feel it is still quite confusing at times...because you know there is deeper meaning behind all the goals and strands but you just can't get to it. So you end up just making sure you deliver bicultural which is Māori and English mostly because we don't all have the knowledge of Samoan, Tongan, and other cultures...it would be good if every culture has a teacher here to help bring cultural activities for children...so children don't miss out.(M1)

Te Whāriki can be used as a guide when looking at aspects of the child's development journey...it is still questionable though. Although there are learning outcomes and suggestions, there is no set way to implement the different goals and strands ...most teachers will take for example the idea of well-being and have their own interpretation of how that should work for a child, and not consider the child's family and their values, their feelings.(M4)

...*Te Whāriki* has not really laid out how to weave the values of different cultures together with its philosophical values and beliefs... It needs to have some kind of instruction guidelines for teachers, we seem to be doing our own thing and how we understand it...but no one knows what the right way is...great ideas but lack helpful instructions.(M2)

Lack of Tertiary training in the implementation of *Te Whāriki*

This is one of the common topics emerging out of the participants' responses about their study in regards to the implementation of *Te Whāriki*. Although the majority of the participants mentioned this concern, the comments that stood out were the effect it had on the participants when they started work at ECE services:

The problem with our study at Uni is that we didn't learn how to put *Te Whāriki* into practice...but we had the quality in action book then and it helped a little bit; still the students never got taught how you can use it (*Te Whāriki*) to make up activities for cultural purposes or teaching different children especially now New Zealand is multicultural.(A2)

Well, thinking back now; I feel cheated because you get given this free curriculum and then no one tells you how you should work with it when you become qualified...you don't know whose ideas you supposed to follow, Māori or Palagi...I have to admit that I struggled for some time and then you realise you're not the only one, everyone else feels the same...We had assignments on *Te Whāriki* and we had to do some work on practicum but that was all...We should've been taught how to use it in centres when we become teachers, whose job is it then? The University or the centre? (M1)

I feel the problem with all the confusion we have as teachers is that the curriculum is not that important in tertiary education...You'd think this curriculum would be given more time to teach, and show the students how to put it in practice when working with children; but not at all...You come out of Uni and you wonder how you're going to implement *Te Whāriki* because no one told you. I think this is a common problem with all the new graduates.(M4)

Teachers' own understanding impacts on the curriculum implementation

It was evident in the data gathered that the teachers' understanding of the curriculum has an impact on how they implement it in their programme. Some of the

teachers, although sounding enthusiastic, shared in their own admittance their lack of understanding and confidence in the use of the curriculum for planning programmes for children, as noted in the excerpts below:

We use *Te Whāriki* as part of our observations...for the learning stories because we still refer back to the original forms with links to the strands and goals but apart from that we just create themes for our fortnightly programme and discuss as a team which goals and strands to link our topic to. So I just kinda follow what the others do, use it to link our programme and that's easy to do, but I know deep inside, we're not using it (*Te Whāriki*) properly and I know it has much more than we understand and because it's not broken down for us...I feel it should be given description for teachers to follow. (M1)

There was another concern raised by the participants, which, although unrelated to the question on implementation, the participants made it obvious it had some influence on their understanding of *Te Whāriki* from the start. The conversation with the participants uncovered some of the issues that often do not get addressed at the tertiary level of education. Comments such as:

Just wondering if the government has done enough to help new teachers in the field to learn how to deliver the curriculum in centres, because even though I work in ECE for a long time now I still don't believe I know the full picture about the way it should be used...actually I think what they should do is to get the people who are already practising and understand how to use the *Te Whāriki* to run workshops and not people who never work with children. That's how I felt about the workshops we went to...people that taught us didn't work in a centre...how can one learn from someone who doesn't know? (M3)

Nothing much we can do if our own leaders don't even understand how to use *Te Whāriki*...It's a hard task only because we're so used to reading and doing what we're instructed to do, but with *Te Whāriki* it doesn't; so you struggle to make sense and you end up doing what you think is right, but isn't necessarily right for the children and their families. (M4)

I sometime wonder why the Pasifika people have to learn in English at Uni because the course I took was called a Pasifika Diploma in ECE. I think it's wrong to have people like us learn in English when we suppose to teach Samoan children in our language. Don't you think this is odd 'cause we should've learned then how to use *Te Whāriki* for planning in Aoga or other Language Nests?... I think the teachers for Language Nests should be taught in their own mother tongue for the children's sake especially when it comes to the curriculum... (A4)

Another participant also supported the above comment in her own statement about her understanding of the curriculum.

...if I can be honest with you without being disrespectful to anyone, I feel the way we practise *Te Whāriki* is the outcome of our training. I think it is not consistent... We are working with Samoan children in our own language and culture but we are trained in the palagi way... it does not work if you bring another culture's language and ways to put *Te Whāriki* into practice for Samoan children... why teach us in English when we use Samoan in Aoga? ...the funny thing is how the government want Pasifika people to encourage their own mother tongue but they teach teachers in English... (A1)

Analysis

The participants' responses in the Profile section of the Interview Questions (see Appendix A) highlighted some of the concerns raised about tertiary training. The participants voiced concern on the lack of teaching guidelines for *Te Whāriki*.

It is obvious under this theme that the participants did not have confidence in both *Te Whāriki* and the training they had in their respective institutes. The participants felt that they should have been given guidance on how *Te Whāriki* is implemented during their training as student teachers. They also raised the concern that the lack of prescription did not help the teachers understand or provide appropriate learning activities based on *Te Whāriki*. The teachers openly shared that the curriculum goals and learning outcomes were used as a link for their programme planning, which is evidence of their lack of in-depth knowledge on how to use the curriculum. The confusion of the teachers seems to be directed at the government for its lack of taking responsibility in ensuring the teachers receive appropriate training for implementation of the curriculum.

There were some other concerns raised by the participants in their comments such as one who felt that working with *Te Whāriki* was a challenge because it did not give teachers instructions on how to implement it, which may result in teachers creating learning programmes based on their understanding and not exactly resulting in what is right for the children. Another concern was the fact that the Aoga Amata teachers were

taught in English, which two participants found led to a mis-match between tertiary training and practice.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The following discussion highlights the themes emerging out of the findings, and focuses on the participants' views shared on and about the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* in theory and, mainly, in practice. These views are discussed with reference to relevant literature consulted for this study. The findings might help provide some light for the main research question: What are the perceptions and views of Samoan teachers about the *Te Whāriki* curriculum? The discussion also presents themes which might provide some answers to the three guiding questions for the study. This chapter is organised into two parts: Part One focuses on the themes captured from the Findings in relation to each research question. Part Two presents the views of the participants on the importance of education in the early childhood services, as well as their own journey in tertiary studies.

5.1 Part One

Themes from the Findings

Question 1

How does the *Te Whāriki* curriculum support Samoan children's learning and development?

The themes presented in Part One are discussed in order of the three Research Guiding Questions. Four major themes arose in the discussions of how *Te Whāriki* supports Samoan children's learning – relationships, partnerships, the ideal of holistic learning, and play.

The first themes highlight how the participants view *Te Whāriki* in light of how children learn. These present both positive comments and critiques from the participants, with relevant links to literature where appropriate.

***Te Whāriki* supports Collaboration and Partnership through Relationships in ECE**

The *Te Whāriki* Principle ‘Family and Community (Whānau Tangata)’ states that:

Children’s learning and development are fostered if the well-being of their family and community is supported; if their family, culture, knowledge and community are respected; and if there is strong connection and consistency among all the aspects of the child’s world (MOE, 1996, p. 42).

The first theme emerging from the Talanoa covered the importance of collaborative relationship and partnership between children and their parents/whānau and the ECE service. The participants’ comments in this theme highlighted some important points about effective relationship and partnership, which results in positive learning outcomes for children.

The participants all shared a belief in the importance of nurturing relationships between parents, extended family and teachers because of its impact on ‘facilitating relevant cultural competence’ for ECE teachers, and consistency for children between home and the learning environment. This concept, that partnership between teachers and families of the children produces better results for children, is allowed for in the Aoga Amata philosophy, which mirrors the *Te Whāriki* position. Inclusivity of families in the child’s education processes equals inclusion of cultures and hence improves quality. In the light of how *Te Whāriki* encourages warm responsive relationships, Aoga Amata respondents were consequently disappointed with *Te Whāriki*’s vagueness on how to develop and maintain these relationships.

Mainstream practitioners saw partnership in *Te Whāriki* as a way in which teachers could help create an environment of trust and consistency, such as sharing of knowledge, including of culture, child-rearing and actual individual preferences. It was

also noted that Samoan parents are supportive if they know what is happening in the centre, whether it be for their children's learning, or helping the teachers with other areas such as excursions or fundraising. This was also noted by a participant from Aoga Amata.

The teachers found that Samoan parents are usually good in support, and that it is with a sense of pride that they help. Madjar, McKinley, Jensen and Van Der Merwe, (2009) found that Pacific parents wanted to help but did not know how, perhaps because of a lack of communication between the ECE service and the parents and whānau. Coxon et al., (2002) also found that parents were willing to give their support but they did not know how and when. The participants however voiced their concern that the *Te Whāriki* curriculum was not clear on the 'how' part of building effective partnerships with families. In saying this, it is also important to look at other areas of teaching practice, whether the teachers are properly consulting the curriculum or perhaps they are already doing it but do not know how to link it to their teaching practice.

The Talanoa with the participants raised some valid reasons for supporting the idea of working in partnership with parents and whānau. There was an opinion that the inclusion of parents and whānau in centre programmes as well as their cultures, can help bring quality to children's learning. This includes the area of child rearing knowledge of parents, which was noted from the conversation with one participant as a practice they implement in Aoga Amata. An acknowledgement of parents as first teachers of their children was mentioned by a Mainstream teacher, which highlighted the importance of information shared between ECE staff and whānau in planning appropriate quality learning experiences for children. The acknowledgement of parents as educators for their children opens doors for consistency between home and the ECE centres (MOE, 1996).

It was interesting that Aoga Amata and Mainstream teachers shared how their ECE services' philosophies support working in partnership with parents and family. They

also acknowledged some good practice in building and maintaining partnership with their ECE families, although one participant raised some concern in relation to *Te Whāriki* versus teachers' practice, which she felt was not a match, especially when a teacher is from another culture and did not know Māori or Pacific cultures.

Te Whāriki emphasizes the important role parents and families have in their child's learning, and therefore ECE services should provide culturally appropriate means of communication with parents and extended family (MOE, 1996). It was also apparent in one mainstream participant's statement that there was a concern with the leadership approach in her centre because of a lack of understanding of Pacific and Māori cultures. The participant asserted that:

...parents don't really get involved...but it's hard when you have someone... who is from a different culture and doesn't understand Māori and Pasifika cultures (M4)

This participant's comment highlighted the reality that most ECE centres face with their leaders (who often do not understand how to work with Pacific and Māori families), sometimes due to a lack of cultural knowledge, especially when leaders are from another culture such as that of the dominant Pakeha culture. ERO (2008) supported the participant's view in its report, that teachers did not know how to involve Pacific families in their children's education, perhaps due to their lack of skills in leadership. Such practice was found to have a negative effect on the partnership between teachers and parents especially when parents are left out of consultation in regards to issues that affect their children's education (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). Adding to this is the ERO (2008) report, which found that the only contact some teachers or schools would have with the parents was when a child did something negative. Although this report was for the schools, it is important to reflect on this point in regards to ECE services. This could be a negative contributing factor that stops parents from being involved in their children's

education. However, it is also important for teachers to consult *Te Whāriki*'s Principles such as Family and Community (MOE, 1996), where it clearly states that “culturally appropriate ways of communicating should be fostered, and participation in the early childhood education programme by whānau, parents, extended family and elders in the community should be encouraged” (p.42).

Working in partnership with families can help ECE teachers make effective decisions about learning programmes for the children. It is also important that teachers provide opportunities for families to utilize their cultural knowledge (values, beliefs, traditions), and use these to create appropriate planning for children. It is vital in this partnership to have an open and honest communication that can be an effective strategy for a collaborative working relationship. Such relationship will not only provide security and consistency for the child and their family, but also a quality programme for the wider community.

In reflecting on the metaphor of *Te Whāriki* in regards to the relationship between child, ECE and family, I am reminded of the baby shoot in the centre of the flax or harakeke bush that needs protection. The baby shoot is not to be disturbed during the cutting of the leaves (Puketapu-Hetet, 1989; Te Kanawa, 2006). It is protected by its parents on either side and behind them are the leaves that represent whānau gathering around the parents to protect the new generation (Tupawa, 2009). This metaphorical image of the harakeke plant reflects the importance of a child in the family from a Māori worldview, and the need for adults to nurture and protect him/her both at home and in ECE services. Just as the harakeke family protects the baby, the same practice is expected of educators, parents and whānau in raising the child. The ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1979) views the child as embedded within the systems in which he/she lives, and the closest system is the family. When a child is safe and secure within this

system, it is possible for him/her to face any challenge within other systems as he/she progresses through life. Effective partnership can provide children with security, trust and confidence, knowing that they are loved, cared for and have a place to grow in their community (MOE, 1996).

Collaborative learning between teachers/educators and children

The Principle of Relationships (Nga Hononga) emphasizes the importance of “relationships between the child and people, places and things” (MOE, 1996, p.43).

The participants agreed in their views as to how *Te Whāriki* emphasizes the importance of working together with children, and providing an environment that encourages and supports them in their learning. Some of the comments highlight the general feeling from the participants that the *Te Whāriki* curriculum places importance on reciprocal relationship between educators and children, and the role of teachers in providing warm and nurturing relationships that lead to positive learning and development. Others felt the curriculum teaches educators to build good relationships with children, and to love and respect them (A4, p 85). The support for *Te Whāriki* is unanimous on its reciprocal and responsive approach to learning so much so that one of the participants from mainstream compared it to holding a baby when he/she first arrives in the world (M3, p.85). The teachers viewed the kind of relationship *Te Whāriki* emphasized for children and teachers from a positive and supportive position. A4 talked about the fact that the kind of relationship portrayed in the curriculum reflects the Samoan way of life within families and community. There should be respect for each other’s rights as a member of a family. The *Te Whāriki* curriculum (MOE, 1996) encourages adults who work with children to make sure they “provide encouragement, warmth and acceptance” (p.43) for children in their care.

Brennan (n.d.) viewed *Te Whāriki* as a curriculum that re-centralises learning through relationships. This view aligns with all the participants' comments, and it is important for all ECE teachers to centralise their teaching and learning pedagogies to become exclusive yet inclusive for individual children. Vygotsky strongly believed that family and community are a vital aspect in the “process of making meaning” (McLeod, 2007). Vygotsky saw the importance of social factors in cognitive development, and therefore the kind of relationship a child has with a teacher, playing a crucial part in the outcome of his/her learning (McLeod, 2007).

Throughout *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996) warm and supportive adult models are evident. All the strands and goals support responsive and reciprocal relationships between children and adults. However, a comment from one of the participants (M4, p.87) forces one to reflect and consider if the curriculum is really being implemented in the way it is written. This was also supported by M3's (see p. 85) comment that:

...*Te Whāriki* should provide us with some suggestions though on how we can build these kind of relationships with children, because every child is different especially to help new teachers... (M3)

Te Whāriki in theory seems to be coherent and presents some great ideas for teachers to follow, however the evidence from some of the comments also sees another practical side that its effectiveness depends on the teachers in ECE services especially those who are responsible for the delivery of the curriculum. It is difficult to know if all services are building and maintaining effective relationships with children, family and community, and this seems to be a loophole in the process. There is no system set up to monitor whether the teachers are responsive to the needs of children and family, whether the management and teachers are working in partnership with their whānau or whether *Te Whāriki* is understood to an acceptable level by teachers and their community. Although *Te Whāriki* has some great ideals and philosophical approach, it is hard to know how

effective relationships are in reality, and this is evident in the comments from the participants.

Holistic Development - Body, Mind and Spirit

The *Te Whāriki* curriculum “reflects the holistic way children learn and grow” (MOE, 1996, p. 41). Holistic development encompasses every aspect of a child’s life. The child’s cognitive, physical, emotional, spiritual, social and cultural aspects make up the context in which the child is embedded (MOE, 1996). It is noted also that in an ECE service, a child’s learning and development is integrated through open ended play opportunities and “consistent warm relationships that connect everything together” (MOE, 1996, p.41).

The participants view holistic learning and development from different perspectives. The following comments highlighted how some of the teachers felt about *Te Whāriki*’s idea of holism.

The curriculum is based on Western ideas and thinking, Samoans don’t raise their children the same way... talking spiritual and emotional development will be a hard match to find in *Te Whāriki*, Samoan spiritual beliefs are very different from what is suggested in the curriculum... (M4)

When you say holistic development, it means the whole child, right? ... well from my opinion as a teacher and as a Samoan, I agree the curriculum does support different cultures and beliefs; and it has provided opportunities for teachers... I don’t agree that it can give opportunities for Samoan children or even other cultures to promote their whole well-being socially, culturally and especially religious beliefs. (M3)

Holistic development of a child is a common factor of belief within Pasifika and Māori cultures. *Te Whāriki*’s view of a child from a Māori perspective is also supported in Koloto’s theory of Tangata Kakato (total or whole person) (as cited in Drewery & Bird, 2004). From a Tongan perspective, the process of one’s life is holistic, and consists of three parts, physical well-being (mo’ui fakasino), mind or intellectual well-being (mo’ui faka’atamai) and spiritual well-being (mo’ui fakalaumalie). Samoa, Tonga and

other Pacific cultures hold similar views on human lifespan, which do not agree with the stages of development such as those enunciated by Piaget (as cited in Santrock, 2008) and Erikson (as cited in McLeod, 2013). These theories focus only on a certain stage of development, one at a time. Pacific cultures believe that there are phases throughout life that are dependent upon expected roles and responsibilities within a child's family and culture (Betham, 2008; Burgess, 1988; Drewery & Bird, 2004; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2014). Holistic learning and development from the Pacific perspective, is seeing the child as an important part of the family unit, not just to the parents but the extended whānau. It is important for educators therefore to work in partnership with families to ensure consistency of learning and nurturing of the child between home and ECE service, which enables the child "to grow up as a confident and competent learner" (MOE, 1996, p. 9).

It is evident in the participants' comments that the spiritual well-being of children means much more than that which is presented in *Te Whāriki*. Spirituality is embedded in each Samoan child rather than being just a belief system. It is the child's mana, or that which empowers the child from within, and this is regarded as tapu (sacred) with respect to relationship (Airini, 1998; Anae, 2010) between the child, family and adults in ECE (MOE, 1996). When contemplating the spiritual dimension, this is more likely to be handled in approaches to pedagogy that are alternative to mainstream perspectives (Airini, 1998), and may have an effect on the participants' stated views.

***Te Whāriki* promotes learning through play**

While *Te Whāriki* sees play as the major way of ensuring the whole development of the child, most of the participants were a little unsure of the value of play, which reflects the literature. In an ECE service, a child's learning and development is integrated through open-ended play opportunities and "consistent warm relationships that connect everything together" (MOE, 1996, p.41).

A1's comment provides something that is worth reflecting upon such as that, although play is not regarded as important in the Samoan culture (especially traditionally amongst the older aged), it still provides opportunities for children to learn their gagana Samoa (Samoan language). This idea, though, has to be something that comes with knowledge of the children's culture.

I don't particularly know why playing is bad. Our parents don't realise the importance of allowing children to play. (A1)

Play supports children in the development of their skills in different environments, such as their physical, cognitive, natural and social worlds. It can also help them deal with their emotional needs, and find their own place where their spiritual values are accepted and respected within their social and natural surroundings (Curtis & Carter, 2008; MOE, 1996). The Exploration strand was highlighted in one participant's comment, as being an avenue where children are encouraged and supported to work things out on their own through play. This freedom given to children to learn through play was not seen by all participants as acceptable and valuable to learning. Some embraced it but were also aware of play as a Western ideology, and that it does not fit in with Samoan parents' wishes or cultural beliefs. Some felt the idea of play is useful for teaching and promoting Samoan language, while some viewed it as a learning tool for younger children.

Although play is looked upon and emphasised in *Te Whāriki* as useful in children's learning and explorations, the defining evidence for such usefulness comes down to the way teachers provide and plan the learning environment, including their parts in the process. This is why *Te Whāriki* offers examples of how adults/educators can help facilitate learning for infants, toddlers and young children (MOE, 1996). M4 felt that the curriculum, however good it may sound, was lacking instructions on how to implement these suggestions in order to support children in preparation for primary school. In

contrast, it has been argued that play, as promoted in *Te Whāriki*, is a powerful method of learning, and provides opportunities for preparing children for school. This viewpoint is at variance with the Samoan cultural perspective and belief that when children are left to play, they are not learning but aimlessly participating in non-constructive activities that produce nothing useful (Paleai-Foroti, 2013). The comments made by some of the participants support the view of parents and Samoan ECE teachers, found in the studies by Hughes (2004), Leaupepe (2010) and Paleai-Foroti (2013), on the idea of play in children's learning. This was also observed in my own journey as an educator (see 'My ECE Journey' Chapter 1), where parents, mostly from South African business backgrounds, did not view children's play as a valuable way of learning, which led to a change of routine and programme in the four-year-old room.

Although some of the research from Pacific perspectives found there was less understanding of the value of play in learning, and that play was not welcome as a way in which children learn, Pacific peoples are not alone in this view. As noted, Chinese parents were also discovered to be holding the same belief, that play is not useful at all as a learning idea for children (Huang, 2013). However, in reading the studies involved, it was interesting to find that the participants were traditionally older parents born and raised in their countries of origin, which may be the reason why most of the participants viewed play from this perspective. Contrary to this, there were comments from two participants who found play acceptable and saw its value in children's development. One commented that in Aoga Amata, play activities were used to the teachers' advantage to facilitate the Samoan language.

Numeracy and literacy skills

While reference was made to the need for children to be ready for primary school, in terms of literacy and numeracy, it was noted that *Te Whāriki*, in its play emphasis,

neglected to add details of how to make play relevant to such preparation. The Aoga Amata respondents were somewhat equivocal about structured learning, being supporters of *Te Whāriki's* play way, although recognizing that it (structured learning) was a preference of parents, while the Mainstream respondents felt that such structure was necessary:

“... I reckon the children should be exposed to basic writing and numeracy learning so they don’t get overwhelmed when starting school.” (M1)

Parental requirement was an added justification:

...the parents would be very happy if the curriculum supports these... (M4)

The Aoga Amata respondents' reservations, in spite of parental support about structured learning, were highlighted by A3: “...but the children are not interested.”

Some of the participants found that, in spite of their upbringing, their views had altered radically through exposure to *Te Whāriki*, and were now aware of the advantages of play. Some of these participants also referred to research literature that emphasized the necessity, from a primary school perspective, for subject content knowledge learning. On this view, *Te Whāriki's* non-prescriptiveness itself enables content learning, although a lack of teachers specifically trained in implementation of such is a hindrance, while closing the underachievement gap for Pacific students was mentioned in the literature as an aim of such learning at a preschool level.

As noted earlier, Pacific cultures are not the only ones with a preference for structured learning to be available for near-primary children; China and Vanuatu are two others who figure in the research literature in this way. From a Samoan viewpoint, while there seemed to be more support for a structure from Mainstream participants, Aoga Amata staff felt that play was worth pursuing, in the context of learning the Samoan language and culture, in spite of parental opposition to the idea. The success of this approach was confirmed by the ERO (2007b) and extended upon by the MOE (2008),

who concluded that it was important for children to be proficient in their first language to help with the transition to primary, and help with the development of their own thinking patterns. However, relevant curriculum implementation was noted by Nuttall (2005) as lagging, and thus the subject of on-going academic debate: consensus on how to apply the curriculum was lacking.

Question 2

How are Samoan cultural values being promoted through *Te Whāriki*?

Samoan culture and language in the *Te Whāriki* curriculum

The findings that have emerged from the participants' responses seem to be leaning towards a view that *Te Whāriki* as a curriculum does not promote the Samoan culture, such as the opinion voiced by M2 (p.101-102). This particular participant felt the curriculum was not useful in regards to Samoan cultural values, but at the same time is also aware that the nature of the curriculum is open for teachers to create their own unique programme for their learning environment. *Te Whāriki* is seen by M1 (p. 103) to be rather complicated, who is therefore of the opinion that teachers are just providing programmes based on themes, which in reality could be about anything, with no necessity to be related to Samoan cultural values or other cultures. M3 felt the same way about the curriculum not providing cultural opportunities for Samoan children, and went further to suggest that the curriculum needs to be re-written for the sake of inclusive programmes that cater to all cultures. And again, this was noted in A3's comment, that:

.... learning outcomes or goals are like ideas the teachers just need to come up with cultural practices and action them, it is really just Samoan practice come alive through the guidance of the goals and learning outcomes... that's the only way to do it because *Te Whāriki* doesn't say anything about the how to...

Although the three participants held different opinions on the inclusion of cultural values in *Te Whāriki*, each one raised the concern that *Te Whāriki* was not helpful in their work due to the absence of supported guidelines.

The discussion on cultural values also included the Samoan language as noted in the comments in the Findings, an example of which follows:

... in ECE, Language is supported in *Te Whāriki* but maybe the teachers don't know how to put it in activities 'cause it doesn't tell you how Especially mainstream centres, they have different cultures... (M1)

The non-prescriptive aspect of the curriculum has proven to be an issue with many ECE services, and it has been highlighted in some of the literature from both Pacific and Western academics (Mara, 1998, 1999). The comments from the participants have highlighted the concern raised in the literature review on the issue of *Te Whāriki*'s non-prescriptive nature, and its effect on teachers' practice in regards to its implementation. This is not a new finding but a reiteration of what has already been in the literature since the curriculum's early days as noted in ERO (1998) and Mara's study (1998, 1999).

The participants seem to be in agreement with some of the literature (as referenced in this study) available since the curriculum's early years, which has argued that there is not enough empirical evidence to prove *Te Whāriki* is working in facilitating the learning and development of children in ECE (Blaiklock, 2010a, 2012, 2013; Dalli, 2011; ERO, 2013; Nuttall, 2002, 2005).

Although the lack of instructions on how to use the curriculum is found to be a challenge for the participants, some studies found this is not the case with all ECE practitioners (Dalli, 2011; Nuttall, 2002; Smith, 2013). Some find the lack of prescribed guidelines offers opportunities for diverse cultures, flexibility and spontaneity for teachers' programmes and children's learning interests (Alvestad et al., 2009), which means *Te Whāriki* is not dictating what to do, but allows for creativity and flexible planning to suit children's on-going learning and development, whether from a Samoan cultural perspective or another.

The *Te Whāriki* curriculum has been the subject of many discussions amongst academics and professionals to maintain and improve the validity of the curriculum, especially considering the fact that New Zealand is quite multicultural. The Samoan teachers in this study clearly voiced the importance of Fa'a-Samoa (Samoan cultural ways) or aganu'u (culture and customs) in the learning of Samoan children, but understand as well they do not have the in-depth knowledge of the curriculum. Perhaps the comment from M3 about re-writing the curriculum, voices a good reason for teachers to re-examine their professional practices in implementing *Te Whāriki*. The participant's comment reiterates the ERO (2013) report that suggested a "comprehensive review of *Te Whāriki*'s implementation" (p. 6), which has also been promoted by other academics/researchers (see Blaiklock, 2010a, 2012; Cullen, 2008; Hedges & Cullen, 2005; Nuttall, 2005).

Some of the comments from the participants indicate the bicultural nature of *Te Whāriki* as being a challenge, in response to which perception one (M2) commented that it cannot provide for all cultures. Some participants feel the idea of using a bicultural approach to cater for a multicultural situation is forced, and that 'one size does not fit all'. The general feeling is that biculturalism between Māori and Pākehā meant something different, from what it meant for Samoan culture. Another expression supportive of this opinion, from her own perspective, comes from M4, who views the bicultural curriculum as more of a document born out of a political agenda, than promotion of cultures. The document is viewed as a curriculum that reflects politics and power plays, which clash with community cultural beliefs. On the other hand, the same participant sees *Te Whāriki* as a promoter of children as active, competent and confident learners (MOE, 1996). M4 sees the children as subjects who have been caught up in the midst of political systems, family expectations and societal pressure. Her view is supported by Duhn's (2008)

argument that “the bicultural child in *Te Whāriki* produces a neoliberal/global version of childhood in the context of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand” (p.1).

This participant’s (M4) mentioning of the political history of *Te Whāriki* in her response to the interview question (see Appendix A, C.8) regarding the image of the Samoan child in the curriculum, is something that most teachers are not aware of, and it is evident M4 has some knowledge of political influence in the beginning of *Te Whāriki*. However, other participants from Mainstream, although they do not relate the child’s image to political influence, hold similar views about the absence of the Samoan child in *Te Whāriki*, due to a lack of Samoan cultural values being present in the curriculum.

The teachers in this study all want to see the “ideal” Samoan child in the curriculum, which means values, beliefs, tradition and customs of Samoa. The holistic learning of the Samoan child includes his spirituality, mind, body and soul, which are all promoted in the curriculum. However, as noted previously, the limitation of knowledge and instructions to implement *Te Whāriki*, play a big part in the ability to identify the Samoan child.

M2 highlights the point of a “real” Samoan child not being seen in the content of *Te Whāriki*. The Samoan child mentioned here may have referred to a child being subjected to a curriculum that provides all the necessary guidelines to ensure he/she is learning the ways and traditions, literacy and numeracy as well as spiritual beliefs and practices of his/her own culture. This is an ideal world for any culture, but in reality, for instance in Aotearoa, we are quite multicultural and it would be hard to try to cater for every culture individually. On the other hand, *Te Whāriki* has provided in its content opportunities for all cultures through its non-prescriptive nature, in line with the meaning of whāriki being ‘a mat for all to stand on’ (MOE, 1996).

From the participant's view, a Samoan child should be considered not as an individual within the curriculum based on Western ideologies, but as a learner who is learning within their family the values and beliefs of their culture: such learning is a social, holistic activity.

The generalised nature of the curriculum was also blamed for the lack of understanding of how to provide activities that support cultural learning in mainstream centres. However, Aoga Amata practitioners take on board the nature of *Te Whāriki* and use their own cultural knowledge to facilitate learning from Samoan culture and language.

On a personal reflection, *Te Whāriki* has all the ideas and philosophical approach that can be used to promote the Samoan culture and language; however, the participants have given their voice as to how they view *Te Whāriki* in regards to cultural values and beliefs. The comments and other concerns voiced during Talanoa with the participants enabled me to see much more than what could be written. The teachers for this study all value and hold their Samoan culture in high regard, with the desire to pass their knowledge of what is important to their children and grandchildren. This knowledge I observed first hand in their practice with the children in their care.

As noted, the Samoan culture holds three unique values that children are taught through role modelling and imitation from an early age within their family environment. These are Alofa (love), Fa'aaloalo (Respect) ma le ola Tautua (service). Within a Samoan family, these values define a Samoan child because they are important practices to uphold, and since a child is embedded in the family as a unit rather than as an individual, the parents and aiga (family) are reflected in how he/she behaves. A good name for a family is dependent on whether the child upholds these values regardless of how academically able he/she is.

The *Taiala mo le gagana Samoa* (MOE, 2009) document emphasises the importance of these three values, which in *Aoga Amata* are taught in everyday interactions between teachers and children. This is seen through the way children talk and respond to their teachers and others. ERO (2007b) reported how well some of the Pasifika services provided “the teaching and learning of Pacific languages, cultures and beliefs and were strong features of the programme in these services” (p.7). In *Aoga Amata*, it is easy to see these practices but it would be hard to notice in Mainstream because of its diverse nature in both children and teachers’ cultural backgrounds. This does not mean the Mainstream teachers are not practising the three core values of the Samoan culture (*alofa*, *fa’aaloalo* & *tautua*), but they may not know they are already from their own perspectives.

Alofa or love is important in the Samoan culture because it is something that is embedded within a person and very much resonates with Christian beliefs. *Alofa* can be practised through giving, sharing and caring for one another. Samoan children can be taught these practices during their time in the centre in play and group activities. Teachers can role model these every day during their interactions with children. *Fa’aaloalo* or respect is a value that provides opportunities for children to learn about their relationship with others. In a Samoan family, respect is something a child should learn earlier because he/she needs to be able to relate well to the rest of the family and especially his/her elders. However, *Te Whāriki* has minimal if any emphasis on such values, and hence the impression is reinforced that the curriculum is at odds with Samoan values and beliefs.

Question 3

How confident are Samoan ECE teachers in implementing the curriculum to meet learning needs of Samoan children?

Curriculum Implementation

As seen, the participants' comments uncovered some of the areas that cause frustration in the implementation of *Te Whāriki*. It appeared that teachers seem to be doing whatever they feel or understand as the "right thing to do" for the programme they provide for children. On the positive side, they were very aware of their shortcomings and what they needed to do to address them. This is a good starting point for future action. Some of the participants blamed their training provider for not teaching them how to implement *Te Whāriki*; however, its general nature was raised as the main reason for the struggle they have had with the curriculum as noted in the participants' comments (see participants comments, p. 109)

The two main reasons noticed in the teachers' comments on their struggle in implementing *Te Whāriki* were: 1) lack of prescribed guidelines and 2) lack of teachers' confidence in using *Te Whāriki* for programme planning.

The findings from the sample reveal that most of the participants did not seem to have full confidence and understanding of how to implement *Te Whāriki* effectively. There was a common response of frustration at the open prescription of the curriculum, and how that made it difficult for teachers to use. This was evident in the Findings, which supported Mara's (1998, 1999) study and was subsequently voiced in some of the recent literature (see Blaiklock, 2010a, 2012; ERO, 2013; Nuttall, 2005). It would appear that the idea of leaving *Te Whāriki* to the teachers to weave their own curriculum, does not seem to bring confidence to some of the participants on how they could effectively put the curriculum into practice. Nuttall (2005) had a similar observation of the teachers'

practices as noted, commenting that the non-prescriptive nature of *Te Whāriki* “creates a particular challenge for ECE teachers’ thinking about curriculum” (p. 13). On the other hand, there is a positive side to its open nature which enables all types of ECE services in New Zealand to use only one curriculum to cater for different philosophies and structures (Nuttall, 2005). In other words, *Te Whāriki* does not attempt to micromanage every shade of opinion and philosophy with regards to the governance of ECE services, but instead allows for a high degree of local autonomy regardless of their structure of management and operation.

The finding also supports the ERO (2013) national report, which found that 10% of ECE services staff had limited understanding of *Te Whāriki*. According to the report, this limitation “often resulted in superficial references to the *Te Whāriki*” (ERO, 2013, p.7) and/or teachers using only some parts of *Te Whāriki* that they felt comfortable or familiar with.

It is hard to pin-point exactly why teachers are struggling in understanding how to implement *Te Whāriki*, whether it is the lack of professional development with regards to its implementation, or misunderstanding of how to break it down into smaller ‘bites’ in terms of written instructions on how to action and put into practice each strand and goal. *Te Whāriki* does not give any indication by style or content that multicultural adaptations are intrinsically provided for, and therefore regarded as valued input.

In other words, multicultural features are seemingly not explicitly referenced in the curriculum.

There is a commonality between the ERO report (2013) and the summary of the participants’ responses, which is the limited understanding in the implementation of the curriculum. It appears that the two categories of ECE services studied for this research project share the same practice of using the *Te Whāriki* goals and learning outcomes as

noted earlier (Chapter 4 Analysis) to link their programme planning to the curriculum, seemingly indicating that this is a common practice. Questions can be raised concerning how teachers from other cultures can implement effective programmes for Samoan children if they do not have knowledge of the Samoan culture. The comments from the Aoga Amata participants reflect what ERO (2004) highlighted in their report that, “provision for diversity of cultures needs to move beyond tokenism to a deeper understanding of how service provision impacts on different cultures” (p.16).

The diverse philosophies and values may or may not agree with the curriculum’s philosophical perspective, due to the cultural and professional beliefs of each particular group of ECE service. Some of the academics and professionals in the field have also voiced their views as following, which may draw attention to reasons for seeming variability of application by teachers.

“*Te Whāriki* is open to multiple interpretations and is, as such, a site of where knowledge, values and pedagogy are contested and, when this is recognised, can be negotiated” (Macartney, 2011, p.4). Cullen (2008) argued that: “...teachers have considerable autonomy in their use of the curriculum, and considerable potential for undervaluing the theoretical underpinnings of *Te Whāriki*, because the curriculum is principled rather than prescriptive, and it relies heavily on teacher qualities to guide teaching practices.” (p. 10).

In summary, evidence in the findings indicated incompetency in programme planning and teachers using old (pre-*Te Whāriki*) practices rather than weaving their own (ERO, 2013). This finding is not just a recent concern, but an on-going issue since the beginning, as ERO (1998) and Mara (1998, 1999) reported, and reflect Hedges’ argument that in order for *Te Whāriki*’s promises to be realised and sustained for the future

learners, it is critical to have adults who are experienced, knowledgeable and expert in its implementation (Nuttall, 2013).

5.2 Part Two

Profile of the participants

Introduction

The discussion uncovers some of the frustrations and challenges the participants faced during their journey at tertiary education studying for their ECE qualifications. The participants shared openly about the reason why they have had problems in effectively implementing *Te Whāriki*. The teachers were of the opinion that the training they had at university did not prepare them for the task of using the bicultural curriculum in their work with children.

The participants as noted (Chapter 3 Methodology) were all older Samoan born who migrated to New Zealand for a better life for their families and children; attending university for study at their age was an opportunity in gaining a qualification in New Zealand. This was not an easy journey due to the language barrier, but they persevered through Western dominated training and ‘against all odds’.

Tertiary Training

The majority of the participants went back to tertiary training to study under the Labour Government’s 10-year Strategic Plan for ECE (2002-2012) Pathway to the future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki (MOE, 2002). Mara (2014) found that in the years 2001-2005 a high number of Pacific women entered tertiary education and the majority were Samoan women. The Plan encouraged those who were interested in ECE teaching to achieve a qualification or if they had one already to upgrade it. It had a focus on groups that were under represented in the sector. The government offered scholarships, mentoring services and the like for Māori and Pasifika students together, with other incentives for tertiary

institutes that were offering Diploma of Teaching ECE (Pasifika). The participants were just a few of the many Pacific peoples who went back to study under the Labour Government regime.

It was highlighted in six of the participants' comments (4 Aoga Amata & 2 Mainstream) that going back to study was largely motivated by pending requirements to have a qualification to work in ECE. Although they successfully achieved their qualifications, they felt they had no choice but to go back to study in order to keep their jobs in ECE service. Three of the participants shared also that due to political uncertainties in the future on the minimum required qualification, they continued on to upgrade to the Bachelor of Education (Pasifika Specialty). One teacher (M2) mentioned that receiving her qualification helped her secure job opportunities, but believed that "having a qualification did not make one a good teacher, because one had to have a love for children to be able to work with them". This participant's comment reflects the whole philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the curriculum, namely that relationship and community are important factors in a child's learning and development.

In summary, it is evident in the participants' responses that their return to study at tertiary level was not by choice but by necessity due to government requirements for teachers to be qualified as part of the above-mentioned 10-year strategic plan for ECE (2002-2012) under the Labour Government.

Lack of training in implementing *Te Whāriki*

It was highlighted in the comments from the Findings that teachers struggled after their study to implement *Te Whāriki*, due to the fact that such skills were not taught during their training at university/tertiary level institutes. The concerns raised included questions on whose responsibility it was to train student teachers in the curriculum's implementation. The degree to which student teachers at different academic institutions

were acquainted with implementing *Te Whāriki* did of course vary. However, the fact remains that the lack of instruction into its use, whether in making up activities for cultural purposes, teaching different cultures, or virtually any other pedagogical task, was an almost universal observation amongst the respondents, with some feeling a distinct sense of frustration at missing out on the deeper abilities of the curriculum. This lack of instruction was blamed on a lack of sufficient importance attached to the document at tertiary level training, which participants found frankly surprising, and disappointing, but by no means uncommon.

English Language in a Pasifika ECE Programme

All but one of the eight participants mentioned that going back to study at tertiary level was a challenge. The principal part of that challenge was voiced by all as having English as a second language. Writing academically in a language that required more than just average everyday English was very hard for the participants, to the degree that two of the participants did not return to upgrade to the B.Ed. (ECE).

This issue raises the conjoint question as to why the qualification programme provided for Pacific students is called ‘Pasifika Education’, when every subject is taught in English, even the Pacific concepts. It was highlighted in one of the participant’s [M2] comments that, attending a course that she thought was delivered partially in Samoan at least, felt like some sort of injustice was served to Pacific learners. This participant’s concern can be linked to Mara’s (2006) study of Pacific women whose constructions of cultural identity were influenced by tertiary education, due to biases and ‘cultural norms’ of the dominant groups. It is notable from the participant’s comment that equitable opportunities were not available for all at the tertiary education level, starting from the language used in classrooms for a Pasifika-specialised course, even though the lecturers

were Pacific academics. Some of the Aoga Amata also voiced their feelings about this issue during our Talanoa:

...I think it's wrong to have people like us learn in English when we supposed to teach Samoan children in our language... (A4)

...why teach us in English when we use Samoan in Aoga? the funny thing is how the government want Pasifika people to encourage their own mother tongue but they teach teachers in English.. (A1)

The comments highlight the common concern that New Zealand, although officially multicultural, is still monocultural in its practices and education (Coxon et al., 2002). The ripple effect of this is that, Pacific teachers who have been subjected to Westernized learning methods and theories end up teaching children the same way. The responses from the participants have also brought some positive light in regards to their courage to share their concerns. By voicing their opinions, they took a first step in moving away from the colonial thinking of just accepting what is the 'norm' in society without challenging it. This is evident as well in the participants' comments on how *Te Whāriki* is implemented in Aoga Amata and Mainstream services, as M1 (p. 108) voiced that she felt cheated as a teacher because no one told her how to use the curriculum for her work as an educator.

Summary

The comments from the Aoga Amata participants are in reflection on their own periods of training, which contrast markedly with the major changes in ECE teacher training requirements initiated to date under the National-led government. Some of these requirements are the new entry criteria in Initial Teacher Education programmes, such as attaining Level 3 NCEA and Level 7 IELTSs, the lack of which would have prevented some of the participants in this research from being able to study for their degrees, had they been attempting to do so currently. This trend implies a shrinking pool of indigenous teaching talent available to the New Zealand education system, at a time when changing

demographics - the New Zealand 2013 Census data (Department of Statistics, 2013) indicates the Pacific population is rising quite quickly - show there is a need for a widespread change in approach from monocultural to multicultural education (May, as cited in Spoonley, McPherson & Pearson, 2004). The New Zealand Government may need to look at creating more inclusive and less marginalized tertiary level qualification programmes (Cram, Phillips, Sauni & Tuagalu, 2014; Sheriff, 2011). This topic ought to be discussed and debated further in academic forums with people who participate in policy making for education. Then again, one can also argue, how can multiculturalism work if biculturalism is not being successfully implemented?

5.3 PART THREE

Reflections on the Methodology

Data Collection

Interviews

I intentionally chose individual face-to-face interviews as the method of data collection. Before my application for the Master's Degree, I had planned to use two different methods, an individual interview and a focus group. However, this changed after conversations with two previous Master's students who experienced frustrations hosting focus groups for their study. One of the students felt she did not get much information from the two groups she had invited to have a Talanoa with her on her topic. I reflected on this and wrote down pros and cons for using a focus group, and it was then that I decided to have only an individual interview as a method of gathering data.

One of the points that stood out in the list of cons for a focus group was the 'influence of power relation.' The two students found some of the participants hardly had anything to say because they waited on the older/more confident participants to do the talking, which was not helpful in obtaining results for their study. Utumapu (1998) also

saw first-hand the limitations of having a focus group where participants who are overly confident dominate the discussion. Another issue raised was that when participants are known to each other, their ability to share openly and without thought of consequence is negatively affected. The relevance of this was higher due to the Aoga Amata participants being all from the same service and two of the mainstream teachers from the same ECE centre.

What worked well

I believe that the Methodology used was appropriate for this research: in the individual interviews, Talanoa worked really well. After putting them at ease and gaining their trust, the participants were keenly interested in sharing their experiences, and interviews went much longer than had been intended. Many said that this was the first time that they had been asked such questions, and they welcomed the opportunity to share their views.

Other things that worked well included the researcher's ability to translate Samoan passages of the participants' responses when they felt the need to switch to their mother tongue. Another positive for the researcher was her having the cultural knowledge in terms of protocols in approaching the participants, and knowing the appropriate interviewing techniques, especially towards those holding matai titles (chiefly title name), which facilitated the process of building relationships, and the collection of valid data.

Areas for improvement

Sample Construction

Amongst the things that could and perhaps ought to have been done differently, was the selection of more participants from a wider sample. A specific sample improvement would have been to take the Aoga Amata stream participants from separate centres, rather than the same centre, to avoid data contamination (in other words,

participants from the same centre would normally relate to each other on a day to day basis and hence increase the level of uniformity of responses due to the sharing of ideas and joint building of philosophies). Also, the search for participants could have extended beyond the mainstream (all English) and full-immersion (all Samoan) centres to include bilingual (Samoan/English) centres, a factor that should be built into subsequent research.

Data Collection Methods

In reflecting on the data collection and interviews, one of the improvements to the study in hindsight would have been using a recording device for the interviews. I realise it would have been helpful in the getting the exact information and its context. On the contrary view, however, the presence of a recording device may have left the participants less open and willing to share, and more guarded in their responses.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research highlight some positive aspects as well as issues of concern already revealed in previous literature, and as well, this study brings some new ideas to reflect upon in our work with Samoan children and community. It is the hope of this research, while acknowledging the limitations of its scope, to have been able to voice Samoan teachers' views in regards to *Te Whāriki*; and to have been able to constructively critique it where appropriate from the standpoint of our cultural values, and in some way add to the existing body of literature.

The study's focus was to properly hear the teachers' views on the curriculum, as much as it was for me to grasp their stories and see where the Samoan ECE community stand in regards to the popular *Te Whāriki*. As it happened, the richness of their stories and their knowledge shared, highlighted for me as a student researcher the importance of being culturally competent when working with Samoan children, using the *Te Whāriki* curriculum.

6.1 Research Findings

The findings of this research are aimed at providing an answer for the overarching research question: What are Samoan teachers' perceptions and views of *Te Whāriki* as a curriculum framework for Samoan children?

In pursuit of this aim, findings for the study were able to be compiled through the utilization of three Guiding Research Questions and eight interview questions. The Guiding Research Questions comprised the following points of query: Support from *Te Whāriki* for Samoan children's learning, the promotion of Samoan cultural values through the use of *Te Whāriki*, and whether Samoan ECE teachers have sufficient confidence to meet the learning needs of Samoan children.

The level of support from *Te Whāriki* for Samoan children's learning is highly dependent on the setting of implementation, with Language Nests (Aoga Amata) faring considerably better in obtaining culturally related support via the curriculum than their counterparts in the Mainstream setting.

Regarding the promotion of Samoan cultural values through the use of *Te Whāriki*, because its emphasis is bicultural, that does not mean that all other cultures automatically become part of that 'bi,' because it is bicultural, as most of the participants understood, in a Māori-European sense, not in any other cultural scenario.

On the subject of whether Samoan ECE teachers have sufficient confidence to meet the learning needs of Samoan children, through implementing the curriculum, the Findings clearly identified the fact that although *Te Whāriki*'s philosophical ideal and metaphor can provide opportunities for the Samoan culture and language to be facilitated and embraced in ECE, it was noted that the core values of Samoa, however, had limited exposure. *Te Whāriki* did not have instructions or prescribed guidelines that specifically enabled teachers to teach children these values (love, respect and service), which was voiced during Talanoa. It is also noted in the findings that the participants regarded their cultural values and beliefs as an important part of education, which they believed should be included in *Te Whāriki*, a viewpoint that is supported by literature not only from a social perspective but cultural practices as well (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978). Children come to ECE services with knowledge of their cultural backgrounds and these can be shared and extended on in their learning environment.

The research findings discovered that the majority of the participants' views aligned with what has already been found in previous research or literature review such as that the lack of proper guidelines did not help at all with teachers in their

implementation for children's programmes (see Blaiklock, 2008b, 2010a, 2011, 2012; Macartney, 2011; Mara, 1998, 1999; Coxon et al., 2002; Nuttall, 2003, 2005).

It was revealed (in the findings) that the Samoan teachers in this study faced challenges and issues. The research showed that the teachers were not being properly prepared to handle the curriculum, which is a mandatory document for the operation of early childhood centres in New Zealand, and that this lack was not just attributable to their own failure to follow up on study of *Te Whāriki*, it was a structural problem. The issue identified is that *Te Whāriki* was not being properly taught in the tertiary institutes from which they were being issued their qualifications, to quote one participant: "Whose job is it then?" (M1). The absence of proper training, of instruction in how to implement it, results in a lack of teacher understanding and hence confidence, which helps explain why they do not make good use of *Te Whāriki* or go into it in depth, and lack confidence in providing programmes for children that are based on *Te Whāriki*, because they feel they *can't*.

Limitations of the study

As a student researcher, I acknowledge the sample chosen for this study was not large enough to provide a more valid set of data, let alone do justice in bringing an addition to the literature for the *Te Whāriki* document. Part of the reason for this was the lack of volunteers from the Aoga Amata contacted for the study, however this was, in hindsight, resultant on the criteria set for choosing a sample. Aoga Amata participants were from one service due to the lack of volunteers who could fit the criteria set for the research study from the start. One of the decisions made that influenced the result of this study was the choice to use only one method to gather the data from the sample. Individual interviews were chosen, based on an outcome of conversations with peers on the struggle they have in holding focus groups to gather data. Together with my own

knowledge of dealing with new people and from a cultural perspective, I felt it would be better to get the participants one-on-one so they can openly voice their opinion, without holding back because someone else was present, who additionally might have a dominant personality and so would have more say than others. The timeframe set to complete the research was also another factor, and in retrospect it could have been extended further to allow more time to research the topic thoroughly from other perspectives.

Strengths of the study

The study has evaluated in hopefully useful depth a topic of interest to the ECE sector and especially practitioners of Pacific cultures, namely the extent to which *Te Whāriki*, the Government-provided nationally mandated ECE curriculum, caters for children from Pacific backgrounds, and enables teachers to deliver programmes in keeping with children's cultural backgrounds. The data collection process, comprising qualitative-method interviews, provided a robust series of questions to extract meaningful information on how the teachers of the sample were managing to fulfil their teaching/learning objectives through the use of the curriculum. Furthermore, the adoption of the Talanoa style of interviewing proved very successful in putting respondents at their ease, and encouraged them to be possibly somewhat more forthcoming, and so providing insightful comments that aided the achievement of the research aims, than they would otherwise have been.

Another strength of the study is its painstaking efforts to extract all the possible conclusions and implications of the data collected, via sound data analysis techniques such as content coding, and linking to a wide range of other supportive literature (although there was very little on the actual topic itself relating to the Pasifika context).

Further research

This study is perhaps just ‘a drop in the bucket’ of the chosen topic and certainly of the wider early childhood sector generally. However, it is a step towards building a platform for other Pasifika early childhood communities to follow up with their own whānau and teachers how the *Te Whāriki* curriculum programme affects our children in ECE locally, and influences their own cultural and language learning in Aotearoa. Furthermore, it also highlights the need for more Pacific research into the use of the language documents provided for each Pacific community in relation to the *Te Whāriki* curriculum, and to find out their relevance and effectiveness in the teaching and learning of Samoan/Pacific children. There is also a need for large-scale research into the use of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum in different types of centres.

6.2 Recommendations

***Te Whāriki* needs to be reviewed**

It is clear that *Te Whāriki* needs to be reviewed with the participation of ECE professionals and academics in the sector, not only for the structural elements long held to be absent by the ECE academic community, but in regards to the present study, with a focus on the missing cultural elements that will make it more relevant to Samoan/Pacific communities, and indeed all of New Zealand’s minority cultures.

Need for Monitoring

Specific monitoring of the implementation of *Te Whāriki* throughout the country by governmental authorities such as the ERO needs to be increased and become more focussed, especially to identify areas of structural weakness that result in the failure to achieve stated aims of multicultural development, the enunciation of which itself needs to be clearer.

Need for Curriculum-Trained teachers

For *Te Whāriki* to be sustainable and effective for New Zealand's future generations, the adults who work with children need to be knowledgeable and skilled in the implementation of the curriculum. There is also a need for teachers to be well prepared in their understanding and knowledge of different cultures in order to be enabled to implement the curriculum appropriately for all children.

Need for Specific Curriculum Training

Tertiary education ECE programmes need to include specific training on elements relating to the implementation of *Te Whāriki*, and the provision of guidelines for ECE practitioners already in the field. The training of student teachers in classrooms should emphasize the importance of cultural knowledge and values in their learning, preparing them for work in the field.

Need for Review of *Te Whāriki* Implementation

There is a need for further study into the Implementation of *Te Whāriki* in early childhood services, to ensure quality education is provided for all New Zealand children with emphasis on their cultural values and beliefs. There is a need for a large scale research into the use of the curriculum in different types of centres including Language Immersion ECE services, Bilingual and other different philosophies and structures.

Need for Review of The *Te Whāriki* Subject Content Guidelines

Clearly, there is something to be said for the inclusion of more subject content knowledge in the curriculum than is currently the case. The need for actual information to help children develop their working theories has to some extent been overlooked in the push for enabling their self-actualisation. The change required is not that great, with some specified extensions of the strands of Exploration and Communication possibly being enough to prepare pre-schoolers for their transition to primary school. Additionally, given

its emphasis in *Te Whāriki*, play should be a focus of exploration of how to integrate subject content into pre-schoolers' days, without extending them too far, with ECE Pacific teachers going a step further to endeavour to include with play the desired cultural/linguistic elements that bring about the realisation of the image of the Samoan child.

Inclusion of Bilingual centres in Subsequent Research

The inclusion of participants from bilingual (Samoan/English) centres (in addition to those from mainstream (all English) and full-immersion (all Samoan) centres, is a factor that should be built into subsequent research.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – Research Questions



Research Question:

Main Research Question.

What are Samoan teachers' perceptions and of *Te Whāriki* as a curriculum framework for Samoan children?

Three questions will highlight any finding from this project and will help answer the main research question.

- 1) How does *Te Whāriki* curriculum provide learning for children?
- 2) How are Samoan cultural values being promoted through *Te Whāriki*?
- 3) How confident are Samoan ECE teachers in implementing the curriculum to meet learning needs of Samoan children

The following questions will guide and inform the progress of this research project:
Background/teacher profile:

1. How long have you been teaching in early childhood education?
2. What qualification do you hold in ECE?
3. Where did you study for your qualification?
4. How do you think your centre (mainstream/aoga amata) differs from others?
(aoga amata/mainstream)
5. Do you use *Te Whāriki* curriculum as a guide for your practice? How?
(If not, what 'way' have you adapted? Give examples).

The curriculum:

1. What has been your experience in using the *Te Whāriki* curriculum?

2. What are your views on *Te Whāriki* as a bicultural early childhood curriculum?
3. Do you think *Te Whāriki* curriculum provides effective guidance for Samoan teachers in ECE?
4. What learning opportunities does *Te Whāriki* curriculum provide for Samoan children?
5. From your own experience, how is *Te Whāriki* supporting children holistically in your centre?
6. What influence does your implementation of *Te Whāriki* have on Samoan children's own Cultural values and beliefs?
7. How does *Te Whāriki* influence your own cultural/professional beliefs and values as a Samoan teacher?
8. How do you currently view Samoan children via *Te Whāriki* curriculum?

APPENDIX B – Info-sheet for Participants



Participant Information Sheet (Information for Talanoa participants)

Research Topic: *Te Whāriki early childhood curriculum, from Samoan teachers' perspectives.*

What is the purpose of this research?

My research is carried out as part of a thesis for my Masters degree in education qualification at Auckland University of Technology. In order to achieve this, I need to gather information from eight Samoan early childhood teachers, four teachers from Aoga Amata and four from Mainstream ECE services.

How can I be part of this study?

The project requires the participation of fully qualified teachers in early childhood education who have worked in the field for at least five years; and have been working with Samoan children using *Te Whāriki* curriculum in their programme.

What will happen in this research?

The project involves individual interviews for one hour with flexibility for any question you may have at the end of the interview. If you should choose to participate in the study, you will be given a consent form to sign before participating, given you feel well informed of the process and the requirement for your part.

What are the discomforts and risks?

The research topic does not present any risk

There are no foreseen discomforts or risks to your part in this study as the interview is only for one hour. However, the process is designed to be flexible to allow you to stop if you need a rest during the interview, or an urgent matter comes up. We will continue on when you are ready to do so.

If however after the interview and you decide not to continue on as part of the research, you are free to do so and the information you provide will be destroyed and not use for any part of the study.

What are the benefits?

Your participation in this research interview will support me towards the completion of my Masters' degree in education. I chose to explore the perspectives of Samoan teachers because there has not been any research specifically carried out on this topic from Samoan view.

The finding of this study will also provide useful information which might help support Samoan teachers in their programme in ECE centres. The study will benefit

teachers from other cultures as well in gaining an understanding of how to provide effective programme based on *Te Whāriki*, for Samoan children and others.

How will my privacy be protected?

Confidentiality is of top priority to ensure your privacy as a participant will be respected throughout the project. Your personal details and that of the centre you work for will only be known to the researcher (me). The interview transcript will only be seen by you and I. A copy will be given to you at the end of the interview and there will be no third party involved at this point. There will be no name used in the study but each participant will be replaced with a number and this will be the only identification seen by any third party at the presentation of the analysed data.

You will be given a copy of the first and final draft of the analysed data for feedback; and the thesis will be made available online for your interest.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The interviews will be carried out outside of working hours and plan appropriately to suit participants. I will remain flexible and work around the participants preferred time in considering

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

The research interviews are proposed to start on April 22nd 2014. I will need to hear from anyone who is interested by the April 4th so that arrangement for interview dates can be made. Three weeks is given after the Talanoa meeting for those who are interested to contact me.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Upon Agreement to take part in the research interviews a consent form will be sent to you which you need to carefully read before signing. If you have any question concerning the content of the consent form, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

All participants will be given a copy of their interview at the end of their session. You will also receive the first and final drafts of the analysed data. The thesis upon acceptance by the research examiners will be available online.

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 Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop : Email - Peggy.fairbairn-dunlop@aut.ac.nz, 921999

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of ATEC, Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz , 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details: Salilo Ward : salilo.ward@gmail.com or wjy7292@aut.ac.nz, 02102285435.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee 28/4/2014 (date of ethics application approval was granted), 14/40 (ATEC Reference number).

APPENDIX C – Ethics Approval



**AUTEC
SECRETARIAT**

12 May 2014

Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Peggy

Re Ethics Application: **14/40 Te Whaariki early childhood curriculum, from Samoan teachers' perspectives.**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 28 April 2017.

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/researchethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 28 April 2017;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 28 April 2017 or on completion of the project.

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 responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this. 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 there.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

All the very best with your research,

Kate O'Connor
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Faapulou Salilo Ward salilo.ward@gmail.com

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

**WA505F Level 5 WA Building City Campus
Private Bag 92006 Auckland 1142 Ph: +64-9-921-9999 ext 8316 email ethics@aut.ac.nz**

APPENDIX D- Consent Form

Consent Form For interviews



Project title: *Te Whāriki* early childhood curriculum from Samoan teachers' perspectives

Project Supervisor: Professor Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop

Researcher: Salilo Ward

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated _____
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that any information shared with the researcher will remain confidential throughout the study and my personal details will not be shared with a third party.
- 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 all relevant information including unedited interview notes, transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to give consent for my name to be acknowledged individually in the final report for my contribution to the study (please tick one)

Participant's signature: Date :

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 28/4/2014 (date of AUTECH approval), 14/40 (AUTECH reference number)

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.