

# Early Education



Volume 66 *Spring / Summer 2020*

- Teacher Led Innovation Round 3
- Teacher Led Innovation Round 4
- Peer learning in ECE
- Privatisation in ECE
- Children, families in prison and ECE practice
- Reflexes and support early learning



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The University of Waikato

Dr Karyn Aspden,  
Massey University

## Design and layout

Margaret Drummond

## Our thanks to our reviewers

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## Contributions

Contributions of articles and photos are welcome from the early childhood community.

*Early Education* welcomes:

- Innovative practice papers with a maximum of 3,500 words, plus an abstract or professional summary of 150 words and up to five keywords.
- Research informed papers with a maximum of 3,500 words, plus an abstract or professional summary of 150 words, and up to five keywords.
- Think pieces with a maximum of 1500 words.
- Commentaries on management matters with a maximum of 1500 words.
- Book or resource reviews with a maximum of 1000 words.

Contributions can be sent to the 2021editors

Claire McLachlan:  
[cmclachlan@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:cmclachlan@waikato.ac.nz)

Karyn Aspden:  
[k.m.aspden@massey.ac.nz](mailto:k.m.aspden@massey.ac.nz)

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# A leai se gagana, ua leai se aganu u, a leai se aganu u ona po lea o le nu u

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*If there is no language, then there is no culture, if there is no culture, then all the village will be in darkness.*

**Janice Tauoma, Eneleata Tapusoa,  
Moasina Vili and Ashley Stanley**

This article is the result of a Ministry of Education Teacher Led Innovation Fund (TLIF) project. The inquiry explored how the older children in an immersion early childhood education (ECE) environment can expand their knowledge of the Samoan language using digital technology. Bilingual children learn better when their own language is recognised and valued. During early years of development children are endowed with "a hundred languages" through which they can express their ideas (Edwards et al., 2011).

The focus for the inquiry was to look at the importance of learning a second language using not only verbal and non-verbal communication but also digital methods. This article shares how the children and staff developed and changed teaching and learning practices as well as the way they relate to each other. As one teacher reflected, "The use of the digital devices provided unlimited opportunities, and our work with children has resulted in a positive ripple effect not only for those involved but to the wider community and beyond".

Our young children are growing up in a world where technology is integrated into the environments where they play, learn, interact and rest. Ensuring our children can access and utilise this technology to enable education, development and resilience is essential to nurturing lifelong learners. "Students and teachers can work together to find the most effective ways to integrate digital technologies into learning environments: removing barriers to learning, providing increased choices matched to student needs and interests, and expanding

collaboration opportunities" (Ministry of Education, 2019).

## **Purpose**

The focus for our inquiry was to improve the learning of the Samoan language in an immersion, ECE environment. This improvement was planned to complement (not replace) the current curriculum of verbal and non-verbal interaction with digital technology to drive and reinforce learning.

There is a lot of literature available on the effectiveness of bilingual and immersion education (e.g., Baker, 2001; Baker & Prys Jones, 1998; Cummins, 1996; May et al., 2004; McCaffery & Tuafuti, 2003; Tuafuti & McCaffery, 2005). Cummins (1996) reports that early childhood education experience in the mother tongue lays a foundation for later academic and linguistic success. Recent research on bilingual and immersion learning shows that language maintenance and bilingual enrichment programmes are most effective in fostering children's long-term bilingual fluency and literacy in both their first and second languages (May, et al., 2004).

We proposed that utilising digital technology could create greater opportunities to develop and access Samoan language content. When planning the inquiry, we thought digital technology may also provide greater opportunity to connect and collaborate with other students, teachers, parents and the wider community in developing Samoan language learning. Prior to the inquiry, the A'oga Fa'a Samoa used an offline computer suite for literacy and math games that were English based only. This was the only form of educational content delivered using digital media.

The intent of the A'oga Fa'a Samoa was to provide additional capability for teachers, children and their families to explore Samoan language and

cultural resources by using digital technologies. It is critical for our children to understand the Samoan language is an international language that can be transported into different environments.

**E potō le tautai ae se lana atu i ama'**

(Knowledge is never complete, there is always something more to learn)

For many families that immigrated to New Zealand and other countries the Samoan language is often seen as a spoken language at church, in classes and for special occasions at home. Being able to access, create and utilise Samoan content digitally, for children and families was seen as an opportunity to encourage a positive learning tool to enhance the cultural educational experience. The goals of school programmes are achieved far more easily where the programme actively plans and seeks to enrol learners into a community of speakers and community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

## Rationale

Our foremost reason for exploring the use of digital technology was to enhance the way children learn to extend their Samoan vocabulary. Secondly, we were hopeful that through the use of technology parents would engage more not only with extending their knowledge of the Samoan language and culture but to be able to view the way their children were learning throughout the day in a communication channel they are familiar with. Meade (2012) has argued that communication and participation by parents is critical to enhancing learning outcomes for children, reflecting the principles of family and community that is reflected in the ECE curriculum document *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017).

The children eventually used digital technology to record and share their learning, discoveries and voices through the Seesaw app. By doing this, they were actively involved in their own learning, increasing digital knowledge and most importantly their Samoan vocabulary, in an authentic context.

Understanding the importance of bilingual learning and the environment and practices needed to encourage this helped the decision making relating to this research project. By using testing cycles to collect data through observations, after introducing technology, meant the faiaoga could see the impact the tools/choices were having on the children's learning of the Samoan language.

## Our approach

One of the aspects of the Ministry's visions for Lifelong Learners in a Connected World 2025 is that diversity will flourish, "Using technologies, learning programs can be tailored to identity, language, culture, location and learning needs" (Ministry of Education, 2019). As a leader in many areas of ECE the A'oga Fa'a Samoa has always been at the forefront of effective teaching practice.

With this opportunity we were able to help initiate and develop innovative teaching and learning practices that are aligned with the Ministry's vision, and our own, and utilise digital technologies to both enhance teacher practice and improve students understanding and connectivity to the world. In response to this fast-evolving world we have adapted our National Curriculum to now include digital technologies learning (Ministry of Education, 2019).

## Ethical considerations

With limited research in an immersion ECE environment, the ethical considerations for the project was underpinned by Samoan philosophy. The team needed to work with families from the beginning. Informed consent was needed from parents as the participants were children aged between 4-5 years old. Ethical considerations were mitigated by being transparent with parents and the wider A'oga community around what the project entailed, and we continuously encouraged feedback and communication during the project through parent evening nights, updates, and questionnaires and so forth.

Another ethical point to consider was the possibility of having children included in materials for the project. This was covered with the A'oga Fa'a Samoa Cyber safety and social media policy, as well as regular communication with parents and families. All material collected was private and closed off to the public. Access needed to be approved to join online groups and to access the seesaw app to safeguard children and faiaoga.

## Participants

Two groups in the over two area were chosen as participants in the project. The selection criteria were based on the age (development purposes) and practical reasons; these groups are closer to transitioning into primary school where technology is heavily utilised. Each group consisted of six children, so a total of twelve children were in the project to start with. As children moved on to

primary school the next group of children and their families were included.

## Data collection tools/measures

The data collection involved use of the following methods and tools:

- Notebooks
- iPads,
- learning stories—colour coding,
- parent feedback,
- videos,
- teacher reflections

**Table 1. Methods and Tools**

Observations Ene/Aunofa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular usage/how often?</li> <li>• Deliberate acts of teaching using digital technology (DT)</li> </ul>	Observations Ene/Aunofa Staff anecdotal notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children’s interaction with digital technology- Specifically language spoken when using it.</li> </ul>
Weekly	Observations Ene/Aunofa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of terminology</li> <li>• Integration of DATS using digital technology.</li> <li>• SEESAW app used to communicate with parents</li> <li>• New laptops for documentation of observations and learning stories.</li> <li>• Colour coding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement with digital technology</li> <li>• Language used</li> <li>• Open ended questioning</li> <li>• Role modeling good language</li> <li>• Positive feedback to children</li> </ul>
Daily or whenever being used	Photos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers take pictures of other staff using DT with students Children use to photograph areas of interest.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children using DT independently or with group</li> </ul> <p>Discussing photos taken and telling their stories.</p>
Monthly	Videos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliberate acts of teaching and impromptu/everyday use</li> </ul>	Language being used <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared to home.</li> <li>• Parent responses.</li> </ul>
As needed	Book creator	As projects are completed	Book library created can be read at home or at A’oga.
		Children develop books using ‘Book creator’	Language resource for all.

## Methods of analysis

Faiaoga referred to the A’oga Fa’a Samoa Research framework and approach (see Figure 1) as they are familiar with it, having used it previously in other research projects at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa (Podmore et al., 2006).

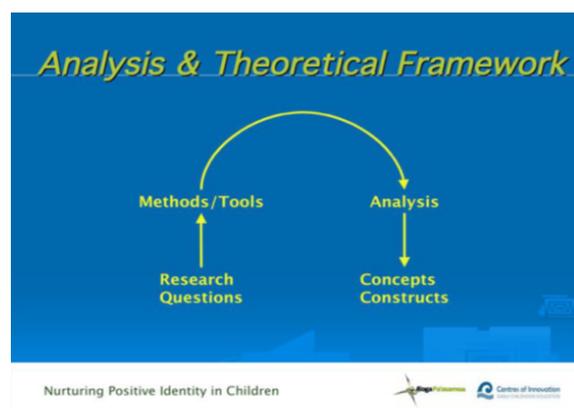


Figure 1. A’oga fa’a Samoa research framework.

We also used the following framework in our data collection and analysis (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Research Questions, Data Collection and Analysis**

Research Question	Methods/Tools	Data Analysis	Theoretical Analysis and Constructs
<p>1. How now can the A’oga Fa’a Samoa extend the learning of Samoan language to incorporate technology?</p> <p>(2 action research cycles)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent/teachers surveys</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• SEESAW app</li> </ul> <p>Recording</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language documentation</li> <li>• Diary records</li> <li>• Language survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coding, sorting and categorising</li> <li>• Coding across the strands of Te Whāriki</li> <li>• “ “ “ &amp; reflections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language continuity</li> <li>• iPad use</li> <li>• Videos</li> <li>• BWECC</li> <li>• Continuity of group</li> <li>• Continuity of teacher</li> <li>• Parent Evenings</li> <li>• Samoan language continuity &amp; development</li> </ul>
<p>2. How can the key elements that help language continuity be implemented in practice?</p> <p>(3rd action research cycle)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bilingual evening, teachers, parents, RRS school and community</li> <li>• Interviews with children</li> <li>• Full staff discussion</li> <li>• Meetings</li> </ul>	<p>As above</p> <p>Translation, categorising under research questions (&amp; Te Whāriki strands)</p> <p>Reflections across the strands of Te Whāriki on teacher’s role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aiga and as above</li> <li>• Identity and communication</li> <li>• tools and artifacts</li> <li>• scaffolding/</li> <li>• co-construction;</li> <li>• community of inquiry;</li> <li>• transformation</li> </ul>

## Main findings

The main findings for the project included the following:

- Major teaching practice shifts with the introduction of technology to complement the curriculum;
- Learning shifts with the introduction of technology;
- Significant increase in engagement with families with online communication methods;
- Increase in confidence in children and faiaoga trying new learning practices; and
- Two-way learning opportunity with children teaching/guiding faiaoga on use of technology

The purpose and intended outcomes focused heavily on improving learning. Although learning shifts were experienced by the children in this project (as outlined in this report and the previous checkpoint reports, the faiaoga also experienced major learning outcomes). The finding of an increase in confidence in children aligns with the intended outcome to have primary school ready children who are confident, bilingual learners. With the introduction of technology teaching practices shifted significantly which is reflected in the accounts from the faiaoga. This outcome was not explicitly outlined in the project purpose. However, an inquiry into improving the learning of the Samoan language is dependent on teaching practices.

## Intended outcomes

To have primary school ready children who are confident, bilingual learners that are able to design and build with traditional resources and with digital technology. Giving them the knowledge and skills to navigate the different concepts of virtual worlds and explore and identify resources that support language acquisition and development. Teachers and parents have all reflected on this outcome being achieved which is documented further on in reflections of the inquiry.

## The role of experts in our inquiry

Having experts in different areas within the project team meant they were able to contribute and offer advice when needed for certain parts of the research. Similar to the technology complementing the curriculum, the lead expert worked closely with the

faiaoga throughout the project to complement their expertise and teaching practices with suggestions and direction. Spending time to build relationships and provide guidance and support added immense value to the faiaoga and research as maintaining trust and reciprocal relationships is of utmost importance in Samoan culture.

## Implications for ECE settings

The implications of this project are massive regarding children's learning, teaching, and the Samoan community. Introducing technology to complement the curriculum in a full immersion Samoan ECE has shown the positive effects within and beyond the classroom.

As outlined in our key findings, extending the learning of the Samoan language beyond the A'oga Fa'a Samoa is now possible with technology. Families are better connected with the use of technology and more engaged in comparison to previous practices. This is evident in the examples and feedback provided by parents and extended family in the surveys and informally through conversations over the duration of the project.

The application of this teaching and learning approach may also be used in primary school settings, especially in the transition from A'oga Fa'a Samoa to Mua I Mulae (Samoan unit), as technology is being used in their classrooms and will provide a consistent experience for the children.

Part of our dissemination was to include teachers from other immersion ECE centres who attended our presentation evenings (along with Richmond Road Primary School Principal, Deputy Principal and families) to learn how technology could be applied to extend the Samoan language in their school environments.

The parent sharing dissemination evening consisted of an interactive PowerPoint presentation demonstrating:

- language gains of children and parents;
- book making;
- learning through song.

QR Codes were displayed around the hall and parents were able to use either the iPads or their phones on the codes, to watch and listen to their children taking part in various activities. Parents were amazed at the content of the presentation and loved the QR codes, sharing with each other their children's learning.

## Some parts of the presentation

The below excerpt is from the presentation which used the *Early Childhood Curriculum* (Te Whariki), to show how the inquiry linked to the curriculum goals and strands).

### *Soifua Laulelei-Sao-So'otaga-Feso'otaiga-Ola Su'esu'e*

(Wellbeing, Contribution, Belonging, Communication, Exploration)

Learning to see Samoan language in written form and have digital experiences using Samoan language assists in valuing Samoan as a global language.

When language is recognised and valued children will learn positively. Language is culture and cultural knowledge informs every part of “who I am”. (Ministry of Education, 2017)

### *Sharing of parent survey responses*

The survey feedback received from parents was positive. Comments included having access to online resources is invaluable in the learning and retention of our culture and language, the transition into primary school is vital as digital technologies are already in use and upskilling opportunities for teachers will ultimately benefit our children.

## Examples of using technology to enhance the Samoan language

### *Faiaoga observations*

The teachers commented that parents were very excited while posting videos and photos of what had been going on with their child while at the centre. The teaching team got some responses straight away and even sharing more about the learning when families came into the centre. As one of the teachers commented:

When sending those learnings, I always write the comments in Samoan, in that way parents would be trying to read and the iPads can translate it for them. In that way, it helps to support and keeping that language alive for both the children, their parents and whanau.

The teaching team also gained new insights into children's learning through the use of the technology, as the following example of learning language through song illustrates.

A came to school and heard a new song all the children sang during their mat time, so she just listened and saw the teacher's action and how to pronounce the words of the song. The second round she tried her best and she really wanted to know the words. I took a video of the children and the teacher singing the new song. I sent the video on the seesaw app on her profile and wrote all the words under the video to let her mother read and teach the new song to A and her too.

When she came back to school the next day, we all sat down with the babies and I started to sing the new song to the babies, and I heard A sing the whole song's two verses. I was surprised and happy when A sang the new song as she had just heard it from the first day she came back to the A'oga. She learnt the whole song when her mother played the video at home on seesaw.

## Parents' reaction to videos and stories

Parents responded positively to the use of the digital technologies with children and their ability to access them from home, as the following quote from one parent suggests:

We're loving this so much especially the videos where we see T. interacting in class and being taught. It is helpful to see the teaching method in Samoan so that I can use it at home with T.

This child's grandparents also commented that it was great to see T. interacting and singing Samoan songs and reciting Samoan poems. Some comments from other parents support this finding:

A. We love watching videos and looking at her work on Seesaw. A. loves explaining what she was doing and showing it to her sisters too.

Al. I really enjoy the videos that you are posting on Seesaw! It is wonderful to see the curriculum in practice.

N. Sings her Samoan songs around the house and she uses Samoan words in her conversation with us

## Learning language through reading

In another example, one of the teachers (Nofo) used the iPad to create a book in Samoan for children to read. Her account of how this resource was received follows.

I made a Samoan book on different cars with a Samoan title, “Ta’avale Eeseese.” using **Book Creator** on the iPad. I took pictures of different cars that the children are playing with and read about in books at A’oga, and those cars that they usually see on the road every day. I wrote simple Samoan sentences to describe the pictures of different cars underneath them.

As I was finishing the last sentence for the book, A came over and asked if she could use the iPad. “Faamolemole Nofo, fia mana’o i le iPad” she said in Samoan. (“Please Nofo, can I use the iPad?”)

“Ioe, e mafai pe afai e te faitauina muamua le tusi lea,” o la’u tala lea i le teine.

“Of course, if you are able to read this book first,” I said to A.

“Ok” she replied.

A read the book all in Samoan just by looking at the pictures.

“Well done,” I praised her. “Can you read the sentences please?”, I asked her again. Knowing all her letters of the Samoan alphabet, she managed to read and sound every word correctly. She did not know that I was recording her. “Brilliant”, I said. After she read the book, I played back the recording to her and she was surprised to listen to her voice reading. I shared the book with the rest of the children and A’s family.

The audio recording encouraged the children to read in Samoan whatever they read in the A’oga. Like A, they loved listening to their own voices, and sharing what they have read to their families.

## Reflection on the inquiry

As one of the teachers commented, “I am pleased with the new learning that I have been blessed with by using these iPads”. Some key reflections from teachers included the following points:

- Able to use the iPads to relate and share children’s learning with their families everyday through “seesaw”.
- The teachers’ connection and good relationships with parents and families is amazing.
- Sharing of children’s work from home gave the children confidence to share it with their friends and teachers in Samoa.
- Children love using iPad to record their own work and reading in Samoan. When we share these learning to the parents, the children here are always excited to explain what they were doing at A’oga. They teach their parents new words in Samoan, from their work on seesaw.
- Teachers and children are able to connect with children on holidays in Canada or Samoa, sharing the fun they enjoy there. Sending photos on seesaw from overseas countries widen children’s knowledge of the differences and similarities of such places. There come more Samoan words to learn.
- Using iPad to record songs and poems learnt in A’oga and sharing it to families through seesaw gives some of the children the opportunity to learn them at home, or when they are by themselves using the iPad at A’oga. Every child has a different learning style.
- I as a teacher now have some knowledge of how to use an iPad. It gives me more confidence to share and build a **reciprocal relationship** with my peers as well as parents. I am still learning, but the best part of this learning curve is that, these iPad not only widen the learning of more Samoan words by the children, but by their families as well. Grandparents who live far away from their grandchildren are always looking forward to seeing their grandchildren’s learning of the Samoan language and culture in A’oga through seesaw. To them, teachers are trying to rekindle the embers of the fire, teaching our young generations to maintain our language and culture, so that these children can grow up as proud Samoans. Grandparents are always keen to share their part of teaching their children through seesaw. We wouldn’t be able to do this without these iPads.

## Final thoughts

There are now 12 new children and two new teachers carrying on the use of digital technology to build and develop on their knowledge of Samoan. Our whole community of learners will continue to be involved as families and aiga become part of digital learning to increase knowledge of Samoan.

‘O le lā’au ola e tū, ‘ae ‘ua ōia

(The tree stands but has been marked to be felled. Unless we act now Pacific languages will be gone before very long).

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