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Tongan families and children with disabilities

Experiences within early childhood education settings in

New Zealand

Mele'ana Lahaina Koloto

*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

This thesis is a small scale qualitative research that explores the experiences, views and narratives of Tongan families who have a child with a disability within an Early Childhood Education (ECE) setting in Aotearoa New Zealand. The purpose of this study is to build on existing literature and research, albeit small, and provide insight into the cultural frameworks, values and principles that underpin the *anga faka-Tonga* – Tongan culture.

This research is the first of its kind with reference to Tongan families and children with a disability within an ECE setting in Aotearoa New Zealand, in particular *akoteu* – Tongan ECE centres. The conceptual framework that underpins this research incorporates Pasifika methodologies. The *kakala* model is used to describe the processes of research, including the selection of participants, data collection and analysis. The notions of *mālie* and *māfana* are employed. These were deemed to be culturally appropriate for this research and its participants.

The findings identified the importance of *anga faka-Tonga*, its values, and the Christian faith for families, and their appreciation for the incorporation of these at their child's *akoteu*. The findings also highlighted the need for teachers to be culturally responsive, and provide a learning environment that fosters children's development. Of particular interest was the ways in which families within this study expressed their perceptions of children as a *tāpuaki mei he 'Otua* – a blessing from God.

It is envisaged that this study will contribute to the existing research and literature on families' experiences within the ECE setting, with particular emphasis on Tongan families who have a child with a disability. It is anticipated that this study will provide strategies for how to work more effectively with Tongan families and their children. It is hoped that through this study, ideas may arise to further research within this area.

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Ki he 'Otua 'oku malava 'a e me 'a kotoa pē - With God all things are possible

(Matthew 19: 26b)

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of my very first mentors, my grandparents Rev'd Semisi Koloto and Vika Siulolovao Koloto, who first laid the foundation upon which my life and identity are built. They taught me the importance of loving and seeking God and His wisdom first. They are my role models and have set the example, showing me what love for my culture, my people, but most especially my family looks like. Without their love and teachings I would not have become the person I am today.

'Oku ou fie 'uluaki tuku 'a e fakamālō mo e fakafeta'i ki he Tamai Hevani koe'uhī ko e poto mo e 'ilo me'a 'oku Ne fakateunga 'aki hoku 'atamai. Kae 'uma'ā 'a hono 'omi 'a e mālohi mo e loto lahi fe'unga 'i he fononga mai he ngāue ko 'eni na'e fai. 'Oku ou fakamālō kiate Ia he fakaongo ki he'eku lotu mo tofa hoku hala, he ka na'e ta'e'oua 'a e 'Otua, 'e 'ikai te u a'u mai ki he toumui 'o e ngāue ko'eni.

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Glossary

This glossary contains non-English words that are used within this thesis. Majority of the translations are drawn from Churchward's (1959) '*Tongan dictionary*. Other terms have been translated from other formal sources such as literature and personal communications. Some of the terms have various meanings and interpretations however the definitions used here are in relation to the context in which it was used.

<i>Akoteu</i>	In New Zealand context it is used for Tongan ECE centres
<i>Ako'anga</i>	Educational institution; school
<i>Anga faka-Tonga</i>	Tongan culture and values
<i>Fāa'i Kavei Koula</i>	Four golden values identified by the late Queen Salote Tupou III
<i>Faka'apa'apa</i>	To respect
<i>Fāmili</i>	Family
<i>Fānau</i>	Children
<i>Fefalala'aki</i>	Establishing mutual trust
<i>Fetokoni'aki</i>	To help one another
<i>Ha'a</i>	Tribe/ descendants of
<i>Hiva</i>	To sing
<i>Kāinga</i>	kinship/ extended family
<i>Kakai Tonga</i>	Tongan people
<i>Kakala</i>	A garland
<i>Koloa</i>	Treasure, what one values
<i>Lālanga</i>	To weave

<i>Langa ngāue</i>	Within the context of ECE it is ‘culture building’
<i>Laulōtaha</i>	State of quality and excellence
<i>Lea faka-Tonga</i>	Tongan language
<i>Lototō</i>	Humility
<i>Lotu</i>	Prayer
<i>Luva</i>	Presentation of a <i>kakala</i> as a sign of respect and love
<i>Māfana</i>	Warmth, something that is heartfelt and has touched one emotionally
<i>Mahu ‘inga</i>	Important, valuable
<i>Mālie</i>	When an audience appreciates a performance; an expression of “bravo” or “well done”
<i>Mamahi ‘ime ‘a</i>	Loyalty and passion in application of self
<i>Mehikitanga</i>	A father’s sister (paternal aunt); among Tongans one’s <i>mehikitanga</i> is treated with special respect, and in many matters her decision is final
<i>Mo ‘oni</i>	Pure, authentic, real
<i>Nōpele</i>	Chief or noble
<i>Pou</i>	Pillars
<i>Tāpuaki</i>	A blessing
<i>Talanoa</i>	To talk (in an informal way), to tell stories or relate experiences
<i>Talanoamālie</i>	A term that generates dialogue which is concerned with thinking and acting
<i>Tauhi fānau</i>	To care for a child, child rearing
<i>Tauhi vā</i>	Maintaining relations or space

<i>Te Whāriki</i>	The national early childhood curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand
<i>Tofi‘a</i>	Inheritance
<i>Toli</i>	To pick or select materials for the <i>kakala</i>
<i>Tui</i>	Making of a <i>kakala</i> by threading
<i>Tui Faka-Kalisitiane</i>	Christian faith
<i>Tu‘i</i>	King
<i>‘Ulungaanga faka-Tonga</i>	Tongan way of life/ behaviour, attitude and practices
<i>‘Api</i>	Home
<i>‘Apiako</i>	School, A place of learning
<i>‘Ofa</i>	To love, be kind to

1. Introduction

*Ko hoku tauhi 'a Sihova 'e 'ikai te u masiva
'Oku fafanga au He'ene 'ofa, fakainu 'i he vai fakanonga
Tā 'e toupili mai 'a e lelei mo e 'alo'ofa, ki hoku ngaahi 'aho kotoa,
Ko 'eku nofo 'i he fale 'o Sihova 'e fai pe 'o lauikuonga
'Io neongo 'ete 'alu pe 'i he tele'a 'o e mate
'E 'ikai te u manavahe he ko koe hoku fale*

The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need.
He provides me with His love, and gives me water from peaceful streams.
His goodness and unfailing love will follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid for You are my shelter.
[Koloto family song adapted from Psalm 23:1-6]

1.1. *Ko e fakamanatu 'o 'eku ongo 'uluaki faiako: A tribute to my mentors*

In the opening of this chapter, I have drawn from our *hiva fakafāmili* – family song, that is adapted from Psalm 23. It encompasses the values that underpin the foundation that was laid by my grandparents the late Rev'd Semisi Koloto and the late Vika Siulolovao Koloto, for the Koloto family. It is a reminder that no matter where life takes us, we should not be afraid because God is with us. He will guide and protect us and his unfailing love will follow us. Although we may be in different parts of the world, we rest assured knowing that God's love is keeping us safe.

I pay tribute to my grandparents who have taught me through their actions, as well as through stories, the different types of 'ofa: 'ofa 'Otua – love for God, 'ofa kakai – love for others, 'ofa fāmili – love for family, and 'ofa fonua – love for your country. Although my grandparents have passed, the essence of their teachings and values are still influential and are being passed down from generation to generation through the actions of their children, and through their stories. As a recipient of such love and affection, this personally shaped the way I show 'ofa to others. It also drives the passion I have to help *e kakai 'o hoku fonua* – my Tongan people. I have a particular interest in helping those with a disability.

I am known as 'everyone's daughter', and growing up I was always given strange looks by my friends when I told them I had four mothers and two fathers. However, this was

very normal to me, because as a child I remember always being surrounded by family who looked after me. I was born in California, United States of America to Siosiua Tui'onetoa Koloto and Losivale Koloto, and at two months of age I was brought to my grandparents, who raised me in Tonga. At the age of five I moved to Aotearoa New Zealand with my grandparents and lived there with my two aunts Sinisia Tulutā Koloto and 'Ana Hau'alofa'ia Koloto, who are two of my many mothers. I then moved to Australia at the age of seven, and lived with my parents Mele'ana Koloto-Taufa and Vilisoni Taufa. At fifteen I decided to further my studies in Tonga. I lived in Tonga with 'Ana for eight years, where I completed both high school and my first degree. In 2016, I moved back to Aotearoa New Zealand to undertake postgraduate studies. Although in my 25 years of life I have travelled and lived in different countries, I still carry our family song with me. With it I feel a sense of comfort knowing that God's grace and love, as well as my family's love and support, are with me all the time.

Education is very important to my family, and they have always supported me throughout my academic journey. From my own personal experience in moving from country to country, and living with my many mothers and fathers, I understand the significance and value of education. This sits alongside the importance of family as a support mechanism. I believe that all children, whatever situation they may be in, whether they have a disability or not, should have access to good quality education. Equally important is a good family support system.

1.2. My Journey: A personal commitment

My journey begins in 2014 while studying at The University of the South Pacific in Tonga. I was completing my Bachelors of Arts in Language, Literature and History, together with a Graduate Certificate in Education. As part of the education programme, I took a course that required students to carry out a small research project. The project had a particular focus on the support facilities and services that were available for people with a disability in Tonga. My research project revealed a lack of sufficient attention and support in this area. The findings also showed that there is a need for education systems and policies to be put in place in order to provide quality education for children with a disability in their transition into high school. This research and its findings are what sparked the passion that I now have for this

particular subject and the determination to uncover ways to help my people - in particular support those with a disability. Upon my return to New Zealand to further my study, I knew that I wanted to continue research in this area, but with a focus on exploring this from within the context of early childhood education (ECE) settings in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Growing up I have always had the desire to help others and this thesis is important to me. As a Tongan, it would give me the opportunity to be able to help support and educate my people, specifically children who have a disability. This will allow me to give back to my community. Ultimately, it is my hope to return to Tonga and share what I have gained through the work of this thesis. I aim to use the findings and strategies from this work to provide quality education and care for children with a disability, by working alongside families and teachers.

1.3. The significance of this research

The overarching aim of this study is to explore the experiences, views, and narratives of Tongan families with a child with a disability within the context of ECE. Given the nature of Tongan families, parents are viewed as the first teachers of their child, and the home is recognised as the first *ako'anga* – school, which can provide insight into cultural frameworks, values, and principles that underpin the *anga faka-Tonga* – Tongan culture. This study will also seek to further explore strategies for working effectively with Tongan families and children who have a disability within an ECE setting.

Although there is very little literature on this particular subject, I will build on existing research and literature focusing on Tongan families' experiences and views of what works, or in some cases, what does not work when involved within an ECE setting. The study is also concerned with how families and their children are supported and provided with quality education and care. It is hoped that this study would pave the way in adjusting the ECE environment in New Zealand so that the needs of Tongan families with children who have a disability are met.

1.4. Research questions

This study set out to explore the following questions:

- *What are the experiences and views of Tongan families with children with a disability within ECE settings?*

1.4.1. Sub questions

The following sub-questions assist in addressing the overarching research question.

- What are the expectations and aspirations of Tongan families for their children attending an ECE setting?
- Why are these important?
- What do you understand about your child's disability?
- What support have you received regarding your child's disability?
- What recommendations have you received from your ECE centre?
- How have you accessed disability support services and/or Special Education Services?
- What are the constraints which Tongan families encounter when seeking ECE for their children with disabilities?

1.5. Thesis overview

The overall structure of this study is organised into six chapters, including this introductory chapter which incorporates my personal tribute to my first mentors – my grandparents. I then describe my journey, and my personal commitment to education for children. I outline where it all began and the reasons for embarking on such a journey, and my position within this research. The significance of this study is provided, followed by an overview of the chapters.

Chapter two explores the ideas, perceptions, research, and literature that are associated with children who have disabilities and education. It reviews a range of literature on inclusive education, quality education and care, and Pacific parents' aspirations for their children – in particular Tongan parents and the challenges that they have encountered. Drawing on aspects of *Te Whāriki*, the national early childhood curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand, associations made to an inclusive environment and practices, this thesis demonstrates the ways in which teachers can foster the kinds of relationships that are inclusive and empowering for families and children.

Chapter three describes the qualitative approach employed in this study, which incorporates an interpretivist framework combined with Pasifika research methodologies. The *kakala model* is introduced and the chapter outlines the concepts of *tolu*, *tui*, *lupa* which are the guiding principles and processes for this research. The concept of *talanoa*, *talanoamālie*, *mālie* and *māfana* are also used and discussed. The research framework used in this study is deemed culturally appropriate.

Chapter four presents the research findings from both the focus group and individual *talanoa*. Emerging themes and topics are highlighted and discussed. The findings are presented in both the English and Tongan languages, and transcriptions are presented in the words of the family members themselves. The translation of the transcripts are not literal, but are attempts to encapsulate the essence of what is being said.

Chapter five presents an analysis and discussion of the findings and highlights the following key emerging themes: *Ko e fānau ko e tāpuaki* – children are a blessing, *Mahu'inga 'o e 'ulungaanga faka-Tonga* – the importance of the Tongan culture and values, *Fāa'i Kavei Koula* – Four Golden Pillars (underlying principles), *Lea faka-Tonga* – Tongan language, *Kau faiako* – Teachers, *Tui Faka-Kalisitiane* – Christian faith and values, *Ngaahi pōto 'i ngāue* – knowledge and skills, and *Ngaahi tokoni* – Access and support services.

Finally, chapter six will conclude the overall thesis, summarising the main findings in relation to the overarching research question. The significance of this study will also be discussed, as well as its contribution to existing literature and research. Limitations and implications encountered within the process of this study are then presented, followed by suggestions for further study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the ideas, perceptions, research, and literature that are associated with children who have disabilities in the field of education. In particular, it is concerned with the impact these have on the teaching and learning of young children within the context of early childhood education (ECE) in Aotearoa New Zealand. Drawing from national and international scholarship in relation to disability and education, a historical overview of New Zealand's education system is presented. Education afforded to young children with a disability in New Zealand has had a grim history. Very little has been written concerning Pacific families, let alone Tongan families' experiences with regards to disability and education for their children. In order to understand and have an appreciation of the developments that have contributed to what we currently have today, it is important to revisit influential perceptions and factors.

The notion of inclusive education is explored, which provides a contemporary perspective in relation to a rights-based discourse concerning disability. This is followed by a commentary on Pacific parents' aspirations, in particular Tongan parents, for their children and the challenges that they have encountered. Quality education and care can be attributed in part to qualified teachers. The currently revised national early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2017), is a bi-cultural document and promotes the concept of inclusiveness. Teachers are guided by *Te Whāriki* in their practice and are called on to be responsive to children, their families, and communities. Therefore, an overview of what teachers can do to foster the kinds of relationships that are inclusive and empowering is provided. This sets the tone for how parents can be supported and involved within their respective ECE settings. Drawing from *Te Whāriki* provides a context and locates the research in its investigation of the overarching research question: *What are the experiences, views and narratives of Tongan families with children with a disability within ECE settings?* A summary of main points and concluding comments will complete this chapter.

For the purpose of this study, disability has been defined in accordance with The World Health Organization (WHO). Disability has been used as an umbrella term, and covers impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a

problem in body function or structure. An activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action. A participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual's involvement in life situations. According to WHO (2017), disability is not just a health problem, it is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives.

I will now provide a brief overview to the developments and history of Pasifika ECE, and in particular, the nature and purpose of *akoteu* – Tongan ECE services to contextualise this study. This is an important consideration for this literature review, as the ECE sector has the capacity to provide equitable opportunities for children to “learn and develop to their potential” (MoE, 2017, p. 18). All children need to be respected and valued.

2.2. Pasifika early childhood education (ECE) in Aotearoa New Zealand

Over the last twenty years, Pasifika ECE has been well documented (Airini, Leaupepe, Sauni, Tuafuti & Amituanai-Toloa, 2009; Airini, Toso, Sauni, Leaupepe, Pua & Tuafuti, 2010; Leaupepe, 2017; Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014; Mara, 1998, 2005, 2013; Mara, Foliaki & Coxon, 1994; Matapo & Leaupepe, 2016), and comes with the understanding that the cultural identities of young children continues to be an important aspect of ECE that needs to be nurtured and maintained within children of Pacific descent. The first type of a Pasifika ECE service was established in the 1970s in Tokoroa – this took the form of a Cook Islands play-group. Such a service was conceived in the hope of preserving *te reo Kuki Airani* (the Cook Islands Māori language) and endeavoured to ensure that cultural values and beliefs were embedded in young Cook Islands children. According to Mara (2017), the 1970s and 1980s saw Pacific women working in their ethnic and church communities. They were fully aware of what had happened to Māori who “were losing their language and culture” (Mara, 2017, p. 38). The realisation by Pacific women of this predicament led to a concern that their own children, being born into their ‘adopted’ country, would face the same dilemma. This was a concern they wanted to avoid. Pacific women were renowned for their tireless work and commitment to pursuing opportunities for their children to be educated (Airini et al., 2009; Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014; Matapo & Leaupepe, 2016; Mara, 2005; Smith, 2014).

The 1980s saw rapid changes to education, and a complete administrative overhaul had been experienced across all sectors. The influence of neoliberal thinking was prominent

and, under a Labour-led government, the care services for young children transferred from the Department of Social Welfare to the Department of Education (Mara et al., 1994; Matapo & Leaupepe, 2016). For the first time, the idea that young children under the age of five could be educated had been acknowledged. In relation to Pasifika ECE, Leaupepe and Sauni (2014) signaled that:

A renewed vision to how Pasifika ECE would survive in these changing climates saw a new set of challenges and called for another set of questions that needed to be asked and responded too. How do teachers who work predominantly with Pasifika children and their families gain a better understanding of the social, historical, ethical and political parameters that continue to influence the sector? What images do teachers hold of the Pasifika child and what does this mean for teacher practice? The need for critical reflection upon these questions required a kind of thinking that involved questioning our most basic assumptions and to consider how our ‘taken-for-granted’ beliefs about matters that concern us are being challenged (p. 1713).

There was an increase in the number of Pacific Island Language Nests being established, including *Aoga Amata* (Samoan), *Vangahau Niue* (Niue), *Akoteu* (Tongan), *Te Punanga o te Reo Kuki Airani* (Cook Islands), and Tokelauan groups (Burgess & Mara, 2000; Smith, 2014), and this served to reiterate the importance of Pacific languages and cultures. Pacific women led such groups and sought the necessary guidance and leadership from their religious organisations. The church would become an important site of learning for young children, and Pacific women would rely on these organisations within the community to provide support (Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014; Mara et al., 1994).

The 1990s established curriculum developments and the publication of the *Draft Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Programmes in Early Childhood Services* and *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum* (MoE, 1993, 1996). This was a response to an education system that Te One (2013) had described as being seen by many to be “over-centralised and unresponsive to community needs, and to have failed to deliver social and educational equity” (p. 19). Pacific women were involved in the decisions and designing of both the *Draft Guidelines* and the various versions of *Te Whāriki* (Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014; Mara, 2005, 2013; MoE, 1993, 1996, 2016, 2017). Mara (2017) points out that Pacific women were involved “in the establishment of playgroups in churches, garages and community halls, the pursuit of teaching qualifications and upgrading of qualifications, the establishment of the first home-based project *Anau Ako* Pasifika, and the licensing of their ECE groups” (p. 38).

The late 1990s and 2000s saw many changes across the whole ECE sector in New Zealand. The development of various Pacific Language documents designed to support curricular from ECE through to the secondary sector (Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014). Training programmes catering to meet the needs and aspirations of various community groups were developed ‘for Pacific, by Pacific’ and covered certificate to degree-level qualifications (Airini et al., 2009, 2010; Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014). The increase of Pasifika ECE research, Pasifika research methodologies and scholarship in a wide range of topics demonstrates a growing interest within the sector. Some issues confronting Pasifika ECE had been expressed through the various Pasifika Education Plans (MoE, 2001, 2009, 2013). Some targeted goals related to the increased participation of Pacific children in ECE settings, the intensification of qualified and registered Pasifika ECE teachers, the increase in the quality of education and care afforded to Pacific children, and the need for parents to understand the importance of early learning for their children.

2.3. Akoteu – Tongan ECE services

With regards to the nature and purpose of *akoteu* – Tongan ECE services, they hold the same aspirations as Pasifika ECE. According to Teisina (2011), Tongan ECE traditionally

Begins from the *‘api* (home) where one belongs to a *fāmili* (family), that belongs to a *kāinga* (kinship/extended family), linked to a *ha‘a* (tribe) that belongs to a *kolo tupu‘anga* (village) which belongs to a *nōpele* (chief/noble) that is governed by a *Tu‘i* (King) (p. 12)

Feki (2015) describes the important function of the family as encouraging “*faka‘apa‘apa* (respect), a value that is highly viewed as a Tongan *koloa* (treasure), is taught and passed on to children by their parents as part of their wellbeing and *‘ulungaanga faka-Tonga* (Tongan way of life)” (p. 41). She goes on to say that for *kakai Tonga* (Tongan people), language is the essence of their culture and identity. She believes that it is critical that Tongan ECE teachers teach Tongan children about the cultural value of being Tongan, suggesting this will support their wellbeing. Such a desire, or what Teisina and Pau‘uvale (2013) refer to as ‘culture building’ within the context of ECE is called *langa ngāue*. They believe *langa ngāue* signals the efforts of Tongan leaders and teachers to work together and establish “a degree of control over Tongan curriculum and pedagogy. Part of building ‘success’ for Tongan people

is knowing what ‘quality’ in early childhood education is, from a Tongan perspective” (p. 24).

Drawing on the work of Dorothy Pau‘uvale (2011) she examined what quality means for *akoteu*. Her research revealed the concept of *laulōtaha* as an important consideration. This conveys characteristics that are descriptive of a state of quality and excellence. The origin of the word *laulōtaha* is a concept that derives from the *lālanga* (weaving) of a certain mat called *lōtaha* in the context of Tongan people. The word *laulōtaha* is used to describe a high degree of excellence about someone or something in a particular context. The phrase *laulōtaha* is used by Tongan people on many occasions and in different contexts, but it can only apply when they recognise the significance of quality.

The quality of *akoteu* lies in the notions of what has been described as *Fāa‘i Kavei Koula* – the ‘Four Golden Pillars’. This was first introduced by the Late Queen Salote Tupou III during her speech at the opening of the Tonga Cultural and Heritage Society in 1964 (Fehoko, 2014). She made reference to the *pou* – pillars that underpin Tongan culture, societal views and beliefs. These same *pou* – *Faka‘apa‘apa* – respect, *Lototō* – humility, *Tauhi vā* – maintaining good relations with others and, *Mamahi‘ime‘a* – loyalty and passion in application of self, are acknowledged as being important to quality *akoteu*.

In her 2011 study, Teisina described how Tongan ECE teachers have paved the way to what they had viewed as building success in *akoteu* in Aotearoa New Zealand. Teachers expressed their vision of maintaining a strong sense of identity for Tongan children. This included embedding the cultural values and traditions in children at a very young age and upholding the importance of the Tongan language. *Akoteu* are designed to ensure the maintenance of the Tongan language and culture. A study by Taumoefolau, Starks, Davies and Bell (2002) revealed that the responsibility for this lies with Tongan parents, guardians, and the greater community of peers, ministers in Tongan churches, and leaders in Tongan communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Therefore *akoteu* becomes an important site for learning and a community of practice.

2.4. Disability and education: Influential ideas and concepts

Historically, New Zealand's response to the needs of children with a disability has been detrimental, and has often resulted in negative consequences. After the establishment of the *Education Act 1877*, the disability of children and their learning and education became more apparent. Schools were responsible for ensuring that all children received a 'basic' education as dictated by the compulsory nature of the primary sector. Unfortunately, when children did not experience success in education and failed to learn, they were characterised as 'deficient'. According to McLean and Wills (2008) "School-age children, identified as congenital idiots, were kept in crowded, inappropriate conditions in lunatic asylums with mentally ill adults" (p. 159). This had been, to some extent, influenced by international ideas concerning separate special education for such children. Special education services were established. For deaf children this occurred in 1880, followed by education for blind children in 1891, for intellectually challenged children, also identified as 'backward' children from 1908 to 1919, and for the physically 'handicapped' children in 1949 (McLean & Wills, 2008). Most of these children were not examined due to the low expectations regarding their likely achievement. The introduction of 'Ragged Schools' and the *Neglected and Criminal Children Act 1867* were indicative of the kinds of perceptions held concerning children (Wills, 2009).

The ideas from the development of psychology and the precipitous notion of eugenics then merged together, informing policy. This would also become the rationalisation for the segregation of children identified with a disability. Such ideas were made clear by the then Inspector-General Education, who expressed the sentiment that there was a "very real and serious danger that [imbeciles] would give birth to children who would perpetuate in our midst a race of degenerates" (Hogben, 1903, p. 3 cited in McLean & Wills, 2009, p. 159). In turn, children who had been identified as being 'different' were institutionalised, placed in farm colonies or training schools with the understanding that they needed to be equipped to become useful members of society. According to O'Brien, Thesing and Capie (1999), New Zealand had, historically institutionalised "nearly four times as many children and three and a half times as many adults as the United Kingdom" (p. 6).

The end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century hailed the inclusion of various policies and legislations to at least redress concerns about disability and education. The *1987 Draft Review of Special Education* (Department of Education, 1987) would claim the principle of equity for all. The *New Zealand Disability Strategy* (Minister for Disability

Issues, 2001) would reflect the kinds of thinking that made clear distinctions “between impairment (biological difference) and socially constructed processes of disablement. It envisions the full participation of all in an inclusive society as its goal” (McLean & Wills, 2008, p. 161). The Special Education Service (SES) was established to provide the necessary support and advice to schools.

Special Education 2000 (MoE, 1995) was a set of far reaching reforms that aimed to produce, by 2005, a world class inclusive education system for New Zealand. This meant that schools and ECE services were required to, at least in principle, plan for and manage the delivery of special education. The complex and interlocking provisions were comprised of a number of key elements. These are as follows: special education resourcing for children from birth to school entry; an ongoing resourcing scheme for school students with high or very high needs; a newly created special education grant for schools based on size and decile rating; and the provision of services for students with moderate needs who are not catered for by other components of the policy (MoE, 1995). Mitchell (2000) argued for greater accountability in these areas, suggesting further mechanisms were necessary in order to ensure schools are held more accountable for meeting students’ needs appropriately and successfully.

2.5. Models of disability: Social, medical, religious, and moral

During the 19th and 20th centuries, understandings about disability emerged from the fields of medicine, psychology, and sociology. According to Llewellyn and Hogan (2000), the advantages of employing a model enabled a representation of information in a way that would aid understanding. The use of a model provided different ways of examining the world of children with a disability and, as such, could serve as an initiator of new testable propositions. Thus, the use of models enabled consideration of future possibilities, as well as an enhanced analysis of the here and now. Models are able to help evaluate the effect of situations that are beyond our own sphere of influence. The use of models as forms of representation can be said to be particularly useful when working with children. Models of disability, according to Smart (2009), have been established as tools to define disability with the intention of providing a solution to barriers. Although there are many models to draw from, the social, medical, religious, and moral models are deemed important for this literature

review and are useful for explaining and understanding the experiences of Tongan families and children in this study.

2.5.1. The social model of disability

The social model of disability, according to Smeltzer (2007), considers society itself as being the cause of disability. This is further asserted by Anastasiou and Kauffman (2013) who aptly point out:

...it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society...(p. 442).

Anastasiou and Kauffman (2013) argue that there is a clear distinction between disability and impairment. With reference to the social model, disability is concerned with the loss or limitation of opportunities to participate in the community on an equal level with others, due to physical and social barriers. This includes the attitudes and behaviours of those who impose such barriers. While on the other hand, impairment is the functional limitation within the individual, which is caused by a physical, mental, or sensory impairment. Such distinctions are important for understanding the social model. Mara (2014) proposes that “conceptualising disability as a social construction allowed...possibilities for change and it opened up space for advocacy and expression of the ‘voice’ of people with disabilities and families” (p. 125).

2.5.2. The medical model of disability

The medical model views disability as something that is within the individual, caused by a medical diagnosis, illness, or trauma (Kaplan, 2000). Such a model promotes “the opinions of doctors, psychologists and specialists far above the knowledge and experiences of the disabled person themselves and those of the family” (p. 125). People are disabled by their impairments or differences. Under the medical model, these impairments or differences should be ‘fixed’ or changed by medical and other treatments, even when the impairment or difference does not cause pain or illness (McLean & Wills, 2008). The medical model looks

at what is ‘wrong’ with the person, and not what the person needs. It creates low expectations and leads to people losing independence, choice, and control in their own lives (Clapton & Fitzgerald, 2005).

The medical model of disability is one rooted in an undue emphasis on clinical diagnosis, the very nature of which is destined to lead to a partial and inhibiting view of the disabled individual (Marks, 1997). The solution posed by this view centres on intervention provided and controlled by professionals (Kaplan, 2000). However, people with a disability in New Zealand have identified the medical model as being a dominant discourse in education (Hawker, 1993). This model promotes discrimination by creating a distinction between what is deemed as normal and abnormal (Skrtic, 1986). This has influenced New Zealand policy to the effect that a series of medical criteria exist for defining categories of people, and for determining who can have access to disability services and benefits (McLean & Wills, 2009).

2.5.3. The religious model of disability

The religious model of disability has its roots in the understanding of bodily difference in particular, from a Western Judea-Christian perspective. According to Clapton and Fitzgerald (2005), ‘embodied states’ were seen as the “result of evil spirits, the devil, witchcraft or God’s displeasure. Alternatively, such people were also signified as reflecting the “suffering Christ”, and were often perceived to be of angelic or beyond-human status to be a blessing for others” (para. 6). Such ideas embrace notions of sin or sanctity, impurity and wholeness, undesirability and weakness, care and compassion, healing and burden. In the past, various labels have been used for such people. These include crippled, lame, blind, dumb, deaf, mad, feeble, idiot, imbecile, and moron. In some cases, this model has given rise to the view that disability is a form of punishment inflicted upon the family by God or an external force. Superstition and curses are associated with the religious model of disability (Leaupepe, 2015).

People perceived as having limitations often lived with their families. They were ascribed roles and tasks in line with their capabilities and were able to fulfil duties that contributed to the community. Others, however, could not stay with their families. Some were ostracised, and their survival threatened due to conceptions of such persons as monsters

and less worthy of human status. Some became homeless and dislocated for other reasons such as poverty or shame. Religious communities, often within the local precincts or parishes, responded to these groups of people in various ways. These included the promotion and seeking of cures by such actions as exorcisms, purging, rituals, or providing care, hospitality, and service as acts of mercy and Christian duty to needy strangers. During this time, religious values and modes were challenged by the uprising of reason and rationality (Clapton and Fitzgerald, 2005).

2.5.4. The moral model of disability

The moral model of disability has been regarded as the oldest model, and is less prevalent today. However, there are still many cultures that associate disability with sin and shame (Kaplan, 2000; Leaupepe, 2015; Mauigoa-Tekene, Howie, & Hagan, 2013). Such a model has been associated with shame being experienced by an entire family that has a member with a disability. In some cases, families have ‘hidden away’ the disabled family member, keeping them out of school and excluding them from having a meaningful role in society. To some extent, this has been viewed as a way of families protecting their loved one from the taunts and humiliation of others. While in other cases, parents may feel some sense of guilt associated with superstition, the result of a curse, or some kind of supernatural retribution (Leaupepe, 2015). Even in less extreme circumstances, this model has resulted in general social ostracism and self-hatred (Kaplan, 2000). In this instance, disability is often associated with feelings of guilt, even if such feelings are not overtly based in religious doctrine. Kaplan (2000) reports that for an individual with a disability, this model is particularly burdensome.

2.6. Disability: Pacific [ECE] case studies

The work of Mauigoa-Tekene et al. (2013) is useful here. Their study provides insight into Pasifika families’ cultural perspectives on special education. Leaupepe (2015) points out that a “component of the research was to gain a deeper understanding of how Pasifika families experienced and understood disability” (p. 27-28). The research was of a qualitative nature and involved in-depth interviews with 18 families and who had children who required special education and were attending either an early childhood centre or primary school. Of the 18

families, seven participated in an ECE service and were not engaged with SE provisions. It had been reported that six were not aware of such services, because “their early childhood teachers had not advocated for referrals” (Mauigoa-Tekene et al., 2013, p. 2).

Families reported a belief that child rearing is the sole responsibility of the parents and their families. Support from outside of the family was not normally sought after. This point is also noted by Mara (2014), who shares her experiences with her son, who is autistic and non-verbal, attending a private residential school. “I felt that somehow I had failed as a parent because by sending my son to boarding school I had to admit to the world that I needed a group of other people, who were relative strangers to us, to help me raise my child” (p. 127). While for some families it was the shame and stigma associated with having a child with special educational needs which parents found difficult to talk about.

The majority of parents reported that, in their culture, having a child with a disability was seen as a punishment or even a curse for something that they had done. Such views were strongly associated with the grandparents’ generation rather than parents themselves. Grandparents were influential in either encouraging or discouraging access to support, or their ability to provide direct support to parents. However, this was not the same for all Pasifika cultures. Mauigoa-Tekene et al. (2013) note that a Tokelauan participant had indicated a difference between Pacific Island and New Zealand born:

...suggesting community awareness and visibility regarding difference and disability is more pronounced when families come to New Zealand. Some participants reflected on how difficult it is to discuss with their elders at home the meaning of the concept of ‘disability.’ Their traditional views can sometimes contradict the meaning of this concept in the New Zealand context (p. 3).

Families talked about the struggles they had experienced with the ways in which they had been informed about their child's disability or impairment, noting their frustration at a perceived lack of empathy. To some extent, this could have been attributed to the lack of cultural responsiveness and care taken in reporting such news to families. In some cases, families expressed their distress at having to come to terms with the knowledge that their child had been identified as having a disability. The emotional grief and the deep sense of loss had been overwhelming. Some families shared the grieving process that they needed to endure, denying at first that there was something wrong with their child, before moving towards acceptance. As a response to such concerns, Mara (2014) advocates for the

usefulness of the concept of *Teu Le Va* and “describes the practices and relationships in which stakeholders act as knowledge brokers across the divides of cultural differences and diversities” (p. 124). This is concerned with how human relationships and interactions are nurtured and maintained.

All who enter the *va* make a commitment to cherish, nurture or take care of all aspects of human relationships: spiritual, social, cultural, emotional psychological and what can only be referred to as *tapu* or sacred spaces of professional ethics and behaviour required of teachers (and other professionals in the disability sector) becomes an important aspect of taking care of all stakeholders within the *va* (Mara, 2013, p. 62).

Leaupepe (2015) had reported similar stories of Cook Islands families’ experiences relating to the kinds of stigma and marginalisation associated with a child's disability. Families experienced the exasperation of not knowing what was ‘wrong’ with their child, while some families expressed a sense of relief once a diagnosis had been made. Mauigoa-Tekene et al., (2013) referred to this as ‘acquiring a label’ – giving families some peace of mind. Families in the Cook Islands shared how they had kept their child's disability “out of sight and away from ridicule, taunting and harm invoking social isolation. These actions for some families have been deemed appropriate in order to keep their child emotionally safe” (Leaupepe, 2015, p. 28). The issues associated with ‘healthy parents’ having conceived a child with a disability, impairment or special learning needs became all too overwhelming for some families.

2.7. Inclusive education – a human rights discourse

In more recent times the notion of disability has come to be conceptualised as a socio-political construct within a rights-based discourse. The emphasis has shifted from dependence to independence, as people with disability have sought a political voice and have become politically active against the social forces of disablism. Inclusive education concerns itself with accepting disability as a normal aspect of life (Kaplan, 2000). Under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disabilities (UNICEF, 2007), the following articles are of particular interest.

- Article 7 – Parties shall take all necessary measures to ensure the full enjoyment by children with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children (para. 7).
- Article 24 – Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning (para. 24).

Within the Convention on the Rights of a Child (n.d), the following articles pay particular attention to children with a disability and access to education.

- Article 23 – (Children with disabilities): Children who have any kind of disability have the right to special care and support, as well as all the rights in the Convention, so that they can live full and independent lives (para. 23).
- Article 28 – (Right to education): All children have the right to a primary education, which should be free. Wealthy countries should help poorer countries achieve this right. Discipline in schools should respect children’s dignity. For children to benefit from education, schools must be run in an orderly way – without the use of violence. Any form of school discipline should take into account the child's human dignity. Therefore, governments must ensure that school administrators review their discipline policies and eliminate any discipline practices involving physical or mental violence, abuse or neglect. The Convention places a high value on education. Young people should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable (para. 28).

International recognition of children’s rights indicates the commitment of countries that have ratified such sanctions towards young children, and their commitment to the importance of education and social equality. Although such policies are well intentioned goals, achieving these has been difficult.

The New Zealand Disability Strategy (Minister for Disability Issues, 2001) was introduced as the rejection of a medical model of disability and, instead, viewed disability from a social, cultural and political position. Disability being viewed as the process which happens when one group of people creates barriers by designing a world only for their way of

living. In this case, the strategy aimed to overturn the power of the majority to exclude disabled people, indicating that it was time to ensure that all disabled children have the right to education at their local regular school as part of a process of creating a non-disabling society. Such measures would ensure that across the whole system no child would be denied access to an early childhood service or school because of their disability.

2.8. Parents' aspirations for their children

Parents and families of children with disabilities are often faced with the challenge of finding an ECE centre that is suitable for their child. For families, it was critical to find a centre that was welcoming and willing to accept their child (Grace, Llewellyn, Wedgewood, Fenech & McConnell, 2008). Parents have certain expectations regarding the types of service, programmes, and resources needed. According to Wills and Martin (2012), when parents were asked what they would ideally like to see provided in ECE for children with disabilities, responses indicated the importance of issues such as staffing – including more expertise and training – and a welcoming approach. In part, this can be attributed to what Bevan-Brown (2009) has identified as the lack of culturally appropriate programmes and services available for diverse cultures of children with a disability in an ECE setting. She also points out the shortage of culturally qualified special education professionals, and the adverse impact of this on what can be achieved.

Additionally, parents expect an ECE setting that is supportive and where professionals and the centre itself are skilful at developing and maintaining good relationships with them (Mauigoa-Tekene et al., 2013). It has been noted that families play an important role in a child's education and their involvement, especially in ECE, can have a positive effect on their child's learning (Lopez, Caspe, & Weiss, 2006). According to Mitchell, Haggerty, Hampton and Pairman (2006), parents valued the friendliness of teachers, the level of support provided to them, as well as the ability of professionals to communicate and work together.

2.9. *Te Whāriki* a precursor for social change: Responsive teachers

Te Whāriki offers an inclusive curriculum that holds the promise “that all children will be empowered to learn with and alongside others by engaging in experiences that have meaning

for them” (MoE, 2017, p. 13). The significance of parents as partners within an ECE setting is acknowledged through the principle of Family and Community. “The wellbeing of each child is interdependent with the wellbeing of their kaiako, parents and whanau” (MoE, 2017, p. 20). According to Leaupepe (2015)

Teachers hold a powerful position in shaping and influencing the kinds of images children perceive of themselves. If adults and teachers who work with children with disabilities are not aware of this, children are likely to be at risk of obtaining and developing biases about others, and an inaccurate image about self and others (p. 29).

Further to this, Mitchell et al. (2006) reiterate the importance of creating authentic relationships and partnerships with parents, families, and teachers in ECE, and the fact that these can affect children’s learning. The importance of children and their families feeling a sense of belonging in an ECE setting was noted by Mitchell et al. (2006), and is supported through *Te Whāriki*. Daniel Taikoko (1992, p. 15, cited in Leaupepe, 2015) highlights that “...teachers derive considerable satisfaction from feeling that they do their job well and the children in their care grow academically and socially because of their skills” (p. 26). She also cautioned that some teachers may “feel unqualified and unprepared” (p. 26) to teach children with a disability.

There is a wide diversity of Pasifika children. Understanding this diversity is essential to understanding them as individuals. In an ECE setting it is important that staff work together with parents, and individually with children. Drawing on using their culture, knowledge, and understanding of Pasifika children, families and communities can work together to design a curriculum that is meaningful and relevant for the child and his/her abilities, rather than creating broad strategies or approaches which are mainly based on western ideologies (Stocker, 2012).

2.10. Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter has highlighted historical events that have been significant to the ways in which disability and education have been perceived. The connections with Pasifika ECE services and, in particular, a focus on *akoteu* is discussed. The importance afforded to *akoteu* is concerned with what *kakai Tonga* (Tongan people) perceive

as being ‘valued’ learning. In this case, the Tongan language and culture. This also includes the nurturing of a healthy and strong Tongan identity while children are young. Dominant discourses and models of disability have been articulated alongside a description of how such models have impacted children with a disability and their families. There is no doubt that parents want the best for their children, regardless of the challenges they may be confronted with. ECE teachers alongside parents, families, and their respective communities all have part to play in the provision of quality education and care for children. They do, after all, have a ‘right’ to access education and be part of a socially just society.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

Researchers have a responsibility not only to their institution but also to their research participants on whom they rely during their search for knowledge. It is critical that the methods and processes used in research involving Pacific people are culturally appropriate and responsive. The need to ensure clarity concerning the purpose of such research has to take into consideration the ways in which the study seeks to honour the voices of those who share their knowledge, views, and experiences. This chapter provides insight into the processes involved in the undertaking of this study. There is a deliberate attempt to present Pacific research methodologies that are applicable for Tongan people, and which consider the participants, their culture, what methods would be most suitable for them, the questions that will be asked, and how in-depth, rich stories will be encouraged to surface.

Any research involving Pacific people, Pacific-centred subject matter or which impacts Pacific communities requires careful consideration, transparency, and ownership between both the researcher and the researched (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu, & Finau, 2001). The Pacific research guidelines “are intended to highlight significant issues that Pacific researchers, both Pacific and non-Pacific, should be aware of when conducting research on Pacific peoples” (Anae et al., 2001, p. 1). The authors claim that Pacific research should identify and promote a Pacific worldview through the recognition of Pacific values and the ways in which Pacific societies create meaning and structure, and construct reality. This research upholds the principles outlined within the guidelines and seeks to extend the knowledge base of disability and inclusive education from a Tongan perspective.

3.2. Theoretical framework

This research is designed to collect information from Tongan families of children with a disability, exploring their experiences within the ECE settings, in particular, *akoteu* in Aotearoa New Zealand. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the stories that will be uncovered, this study is underpinned by a qualitative approach. According to Creswell (2014) qualitative research is concerned with “exploring and understanding the meanings individuals

or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). This involves emerging questioning techniques, data collection in the participants’ setting and data analysis inductively built from particular to general themes. This study also incorporates an interpretivist paradigm that presumes the perception of reality is constructed inter-subjectively through meaningful deliberations established socially and experientially (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Through interactions, deeper meanings can be uncovered. A qualitative approach combined with Pasifika research methodologies is employed in this study to explore in depth the rich narratives, descriptions, thoughts, feelings and experiences of the participants (Sarantakos, 2005).

The *kakala model*, first introduced by Thaman (1999), is used to demonstrate the art of garland making and is employed in this study to illustrate guiding principles and processes. The concepts of *tolu*, *tui*, and *lupa* are key to *kakala* making. The ideas associated with *talanoa* and *talanoamālie* articulate how both the focus group and individual interviews are conducted. The concepts of *mālie* and *māfana* are important and relate to the quality of the research and how information is disseminated. These will be discussed further.

3.3. The research questions

The main research question underpinning this study was to find out:

- What are the experiences, views and narratives of Tongan families with children with a disability within ECE settings?

The following sub-questions were important in supporting the main research question.

- What are the expectations and aspirations of Tongan families for their children attending ECE setting?
- Why are these important?
- What do you understand about your child’s disability?
- What support have you received regarding your child’s disability?

- What recommendations have you received from your ECE centre?
- How have you accessed disability support services and/or Special Education Services?
- What are the constraints which Tongan families encounter when seeking ECE for their children with disabilities?

The following section introduces the research participants for this study. Background family information is provided. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of families and children.

3.4. Child and family background

3.4.1. Koloa and his family

Koloa is a five year old boy who comes from a family of four, and is the eldest of two children. He lives with his parents Kalonikakala and ‘Amanaki, a younger sister who is three years of age, and his paternal grandmother. Kalonikakala and ‘Amanaki are both immigrants from Tonga and have been in New Zealand for more than ten years. In their household ‘Amanaki is the breadwinner, while Kalonikakala is a stay at home mother who cares for her children, and her mother-in-law. Their family is one that is faith oriented, where family values are very much underpinned by their Christian faith. Koloa’s first experience within an ECE setting is a homebased service run by his aunty, where most of the children that attended were family related. During Koloa’s 3-year old check up with his Plunket nurse, she recognised that there was a delay with his speech development. It was her recommendation that Koloa would benefit from attending a general ECE service with licenced teachers that could assist in providing the right resources to help develop his speech. The Plunket nurse suggested an *akoteu*. At the age of three, Koloa and his sister were enrolled into an *akoteu* centre in Mangere. It is very close to their home. This was convenient for them as Kalonikakala does not drive and she can walk her children to and from the centre. The month of June is Koloa’s last at the centre and then he will be moving on to primary school.

3.4.2. Tāvite and his family

Tāvite is three years of age, and has a speech impairment. He is described as a bright and curious young boy who likes to explore. He currently attends an *akoteu* centre in Mangere. Tāvite is the first grandchild and is described as being a great blessing by his grandmother Siale, who is the main caregiver. Traditionally, according to Tongan custom, the eldest grandchild is often raised by his/her grandparents. Tāvite refers to Siale as his “mummy” rather than his grandmother. Siale views Tāvite and his sister as her own children rather than her grandchildren. She expresses the joy she feels having grandchildren, and being able to care for them, she describes this as a blessing for her. Siale is a family and faith oriented woman. Her household consists of her husband and six children; three boys and three girls, her son-in-law and two grandchildren.

3.4.3. Tominiko and his family

Tominiko is four years old and lives with his mother Lose, his father, and his twelve year old sister. At the age of two years, Tominiko spent six months in Tonga with Lose’s sister. When he returned he was pronouncing words clearly and was capable of completing sentences, however a couple of months later Lose noticed his speech was slowly declining and it was as though he was learning to speak again. Upon realising this, his mother requested a referral to a speech-therapist from their general practitioner, but was informed that she would have to make contact with Plunket. She made the request at Plunket for a speech-therapist last year, but this was not approved until early this year. Lose and her husband are full time working parents. They are both immigrants from Tonga, and their children are New Zealand born. The birth of their son was unexpected as eight years had passed since they had their daughter. Tominiko is currently attending an *akoteu* centre in Mangere. He will be five in September and will move into primary school, however Lose is hesitant as she feels he is not quite ready. Due to the status of his speech, Lose has decided that Tominiko will start school next year.

3.4.4. Atonio and his family

Atonio is two years old and lives with his mother Heilala, father Tui, and his older brother who is four years old. Atonio has a speech impairment and attends an *akoteu* centre in Glen Innes. He appears to have an interest in music and enjoys playing with the drums. Tui is in a band, and works within the music industry. He also has had experience working in a school

serving children with a disability. Atonio is described by his parents as a smart and talented young boy, who has a unique ear and interest in music. It was under the observation of the head teacher at the centre, that Atonio's speech impairment was initially noticed. Despite many attempts to inform Atonio's grandmother, concerns were not taken any further. A day prior to the *talanoa*, Atonio's parents were informed about their son's condition. Both parents are faith-based, culture and education are foundational to their family.

3.4.5. 'Isileli and his family

'Isileli is a four year old boy and lives with his mother Maile, his father, older sister, and younger brother. His father's sister also lives with them and has played an important role in nurturing and caring for the children. In this case, she is 'Isileli's *mehikitanga* — a significant female who is treated with respect. At birth, 'Isileli was born with a spinal defect which has caused a lump to grow on his lower back. This has affected his ability to walk. He relies on the use of a posture control walker to help him stand and walk. Maile enrolled 'Isileli at an *akoteu* centre in Glen Innes primarily because her daughter had been enrolled there and she was familiar with the staff and the environment. This year is 'Isileli's last year at the centre and will be moving on to primary school next year.

The next section outlines the Pasifika research methodology of the *kakala model* and the concepts that are associated with this.

3.5. The *kakala model*

The making of *kakala* involves women sitting together on a mat with scented flowers, and stringing them together into a garland. The women use a variety of needles and *fau* (string) stripped from the bark of the *fau* tree. According to Fua (2014), the making of *kakala* "is a communal process that demonstrates collaboration, sharing of resources and the passing of skills from one generation to the next" (p. 50). Processes that are carried out have a distinct focus on design and they take into consideration a specific occasion, with a particular person in mind. Principles and values that underpin *anga faka-Tonga* – Tongan culture are ensured within this study. The *kakala* represents the coming together of both older and younger females where knowledge is shared. Particular attention is paid to the design and pattern of the *kakala*, on the understanding that it will be eventually presented as a gift With reference

to research, Thaman (1999) has used the *kakala model* “as an articulation of her conceptualisation of teaching and learning” (Fua, 2014, p. 43). Other contributors who have extended the *kakala model* include Doctors ‘Ana Taufe‘ulungaki, Seu‘ula Johansson Fua, with additional ideas from the work of Doctor Linitā Manu‘atu. This is an important acknowledgement, as the *kakala model* has paved the way for other Pacific research models.

3.5.1. Toli

The process of *toli* describes the selection and collection of various flowers. *Toli* means to “pick a flower, or choose an object” (Fua, 2014, p. 53). This is concerned with the selection of the most appropriate flowers for special occasions. This is a critical stage of *kakala* making and sets the tone for the desired patterns and design. During this stage there are opportunities for the older women and younger girls to work together. The young girls are responsible for gathering flowers from different gardens around the village. Consideration is given to colour, types of flowers [based on availability], scent, and the person for whom the *kakala* is being made. *Toli*, in this case, is used to illustrate the criteria and selection process of the participants and the gathering of data. Koloto (2003) acknowledges that it is within this process that the reviewing of interview data and the preparation for analysis can occur. This process of “data collection and ethics used to access the knowledge are critical to obtaining authentic and accurate data” (Fua, 2014, p. 53).

In accordance with the ethics proposal, identifying and selecting participants had to be carried out through making contact with head teachers of *akoteu* centres in South Auckland. The head teacher, once in agreement, would then place the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and Consent Forms (CF) on the parents’ notice-board so that anyone interested in the study could make contact with the researcher. Such an approach almost jeopardised the study, as families were not responding to this particular method of contact. This proved to be problematic, since despite having a clear rationale and justification for personally approaching families, this approach was not approved in the original ethics approval submission. In Tongan culture, it is important to meet with and develop a trusting relationship with the one who is undertaking research. Drawing on personal community networks for assistance, and personally going to the centres and meeting with families had a more favourable outcome.

3.5.2. *Tui*

Although in the Tongan language *tui* has several meanings, it is used here to make reference to the process required to ‘string a garland’ (Fua, 2014). In the weaving and making of the *kakala*, the concept of *tui* equates in the research process to the interpreting and analysing the data (Thaman, 1999). In the case of the older women and younger girls collaborating together, this takes a collective approach (Fua, 2014). Here, the process of negotiating, and redesigning the pattern of the garland is evident. With reference to this study, *tui* is the process for identifying emerging themes, looking for patterns, similarities and differences. It is also an opportunity to engage in further conversations with the participants to ensure that the captured information is correct and seeks further clarification. Koloto (2003) explains that this part also involves discussions of results and presenting these in the form of a final report.

3.5.3. *Luva*

Luva means “a gift from the heart” (Fua, 2014, p. 54) and when a person chooses to *luva* a gift, it “usually means that the gift is given with heartfelt sincerity, humility and honour” (p. 54). This is the presentation of a *kakala* when completed. The main purpose of the *luva* is to honour those who have given their knowledge and who have participated in the research. In this study, it is used to authentic the voices of the participants. It describes the dissemination of information and new knowledge gained from the research for the benefit of the community and others (Thaman, 1999). It symbolises the importance of ‘*ofa* (love), *faka‘apa‘apa* (respect), and *fetokoni‘aki* (to help one another). The return of new knowledge is viewed as a gift and a blessing.

3.6. The concept of *talanoa* and *talanoamālie*

The *talanoa* method, first formally designed by Vaioleti (2006) refers to “a personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations” (p. 21). Fua (2014) refers to *talanoa* as “a conversation, chat, sharing of ideas and talking with someone” (p. 56), carried out mainly face-to-face, and which can be formal or informal. *Talanoa* removes the barrier and distance between the researcher and participant, and provides them with a human face they can relate to. It also provides participants with the sense that they can have a safe relationship with the researcher and that their stories are being valued (Vaioleti, 2006).

According to Otunuku (2011), *talanoa* helps to build better understanding and co-operation within and across human relationships. Through *talanoa* Tongan people seek to find connections when meeting each other for the first time. This is ideal for this study because relationship is the foundation upon which most Pasifika activities are built (Vermeulen Vaoleti & Morrison, 2002). It was important for the researcher to make an emotional connection with participants, as this is deemed critical to building relationships. Pasifika people appreciate the development of relationships and believe that it is an integral element to most activities. In order to make such connections, the researcher may be required at times to ‘de-role’ from a professional identity to connect on a personal level (Health Research of New Zealand, 2004). This is important because participants may only share information with people they trust.

With reference to this study, *talanoa* is used to describe the conduct, behaviour and attitude of the researcher. Being a young Tongan female, the need to understand how *talanoa* unfolds is deeply rooted in knowing one’s place in the family, community, and society. This was used in the study to uncover the stories and experiences of Tongan families with children who have a disability in ECE. All *talanoa* were recorded using a digital audio recorder. This design allows more *mo’oni* (pure, authentic, real) information to be available for Pasifika research.

Fefalala’aki (establishing mutual trust) between the researcher and their participants is very important. According to Otunuku (2011), establishing equality between the research and their participants is essential. In the Tongan culture, this can be done by the researcher establishing their family genealogy and providing the opportunity for participants to make connections, rather than introducing themselves as a professional. This in turn may start to lead to trust and confidence being generated, which can initiate honest contributions to the discussions.

The extension of *talanoa* is the concept of *talanoamālie* and draws on the work of Doctor Linitā Manu‘atu. She proposes that *talanoamālie* has a characteristic that “generates dialogue...and awakens Tongan peoples’ pursuit of cultural survival through holistic living” (Manu‘atu, 2003, para. 4). Such conversations are concerned with thinking and acting. “*Talanoa* articulates a Tongan sense of thinking and acting as an inseparable relationship. It is a Tongan cultural relationship expressed in words, senses, and body language” (para. 4). Further to this, Manu‘atu and Kepa (2006) refer to *talanoamālie* as involving critical thinking

that “gets under the skin” (p. 171). The concepts of both *talanoa* and *talanoamālie* endorse a qualitative approach and are deemed to be appropriate techniques for this research, as they both adopt an oral interactive approach. These forms of communication guided how both the focus group and individual interviews were conducted.

3.7. Focus group and individual interviews [*talanoa*]

There are many different types of interviews, and selecting the most suitable type for a particular study is determined by the research purposes and questions. Semi-structured interviews enable in-depth exploration of participants’ experiences and interpretations. As a qualitative method of inquiry, it combines a pre-determined set of open questions (designed to prompt discussion), with the opportunity for the interviewer to explore further particular themes or responses (Punch & Oancea, 2014). For this study, it is deemed an appropriate approach for both the focus group and individual *talanoa*. In the focus group this approach will allow the researcher to draw out the strength of participants’ beliefs and subtleties about the topic that may have been missed during the individual interviews (Campbell, 1988). According to Morgan (1988) this allows data and insights to be produced that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group. Being in a group situation can encourage participants to convey their stories, views, perceptions, and reasons more explicitly. A focus group *talanoa* can bring about opportunities for participants to clarify and modify their ideas through discussion.

With regards to an individual *talanoa*, the one-on-one type between an interviewer and interviewee can lead to deeper insights and unravelling of what could have transpired with the focus group. Sometimes disagreement may arise and, for whatever reasons, an individual may not feel comfortable or safe to engage in further deliberations. Weiss (1998) makes reference to such situations as opportunities for the researcher to observe the participants’ commitment to their views through their body language and gestures.

An important note for consideration is the role of the researcher, particularly within a focus group. This could mean that while interacting on a more personal level with participants, the researcher may have to ‘step out’ of the role of researcher. Focus group interviews can change the role of the researcher, who then becomes less of an interviewer and more of a moderator or facilitator (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Facilitating, moderating,

monitoring and recording group interactions are a process directed by questions and topics supplied by the researcher. Participants need a safe space where they feel free and comfortable to share their experiences and views, and disagree with one another, so that a range of experiences and opinions of the group are expressed (Walston & Lissitz, 2000).

The individual *talanoa* took place first due to the longer time period taken to find consenting families. Three families had initially agreed in the beginning however one family was in the middle of moving and ended up relocating themselves to another suburb. The distance and locking down a time and date proved difficult, and a month later another family consented to be a part of the *talanoa* interviews. Two months after completing the first three interviews, another two families had given their consent. Within a one week period, the last two individual *talanoa* had been completed. Unfortunately out of the five families who originally started the study with the individual *talanoa*, only three had participated in the focus group *talanoa*. Despite many attempts to make contact with the other two families they did not respond. Only the families of the children were present in both the focus group and individual *talanoa*. Both English and Tongan languages were used, and transcripts reflect this.

3.8. The concept of *mālie* and *māfana*

In the Tongan culture, when a traditional performance has been executed that demonstrates excellence, the audience shows their appreciation by calling out or shouting the word *mālie* to the performers. Fua (2014) suggest this can be viewed as being the equivalent to the “expression of ‘bravo’ or ‘well done’” (p. 54), to further encourage and support the performers. There is a shared understanding between the performers and the audience. Manu‘atu (2003) notes that *mālie* is a term that is difficult to translate into English as it relates to an experience. She goes on to say that *mālie* is a central concept to Tongan ways and “draws upon the passion, knowledge, and nuances of the culture and moves the heart, mind, and soul of the participants to a realm of deeper understanding, beyond what is experienced” (para. 6). In relation to this study, *mālie* refers to the evaluation of the whole research process. Fua (2014) proposes important questions for consideration with regards to research:

Was it useful? Was it worthwhile? Who was it useful for? and Who benefited from the research process? Were the *Talanoa* sessions meaningful, honest, exciting and worthwhile? Did it make sense? Did it serve the needs of our communities and was the process meaningful? (p. 55).

With reference to the concept of *māfana*, this is explained as “warmth, something that is heartfelt and has touched one emotionally” (Fua, 2014, p. 55). In relation to Tongan traditional performance it is concerned with how such a performance may move a person. “The moment of transition from being a mere spectator to being part of the performance is a moment of great exhilaration, of *māfana* and willingness to be part of something exciting (Fua, 2014, p. 55). In this study, it is used to describe how research can have the potential to bring about transformative changes. When research is done well and the participants are pleased with the results, they are ‘moved’ and willing to step forward and be part of the solution. In essence, *māfana* is an empowering process that recognises peoples’ ability to be agents of social change.

3.9. Thematic analysis

A thematic analysis method was used to identify, analyse, and report emerging themes within the data. It is a flexible analysis method that is not part of any pre-existing theoretical framework and can be adapted into different research approaches. In this case, a thematic analysis sits well with and alongside the *kakala model* and *talanoa, talanoamālie* framework. In addition, it is important that the assumptions about the nature of the data, what they represent in terms of the work and reality, are made transparent. Good thematic analysis will ensure this occurs (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

It can employ a realist method, where events, realities, meanings, experiences are examined to identify the ways in which these are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society. This is appropriate for this study as it seeks to identify how the experiences and stories of Tongan parents of children with a disability are affected within the context of ECE and/or *akoteu* settings in Aotearoa New Zealand. Thematic analysis is a method that works to not only reflect reality but to also unravel the surface of reality, whereby it can also be a contextualist method. This acknowledges how individuals make

meaning of their experiences and the ways in which the broader social context affects those meanings.

It is important that, as a researcher, one must immerse themselves in the data in order to become deeply familiar with the content. Through repeated reading of the data, searching for meanings, patterns or themes, a fuller understanding begins to emerge. As both the focus group and individual *talanoa* were digitally voice recorded and transcribed, the researcher was able to revisit recordings and scripts. This process requires viewing information in ways that is true to its original nature. The transcribing will allow a thorough understanding of data, as well as foster close-reading and interpretative skills (Lindsay & Lapadat, 1999).

The coding process is when data is organised into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005). This step identifies features of the data that may stand out to the researcher, and is the most basic element of the raw data that can be assessed in a meaningful way with regards to the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998). The coded data is different from themes, which are often broader, and which is where the interpretative analysis of the data takes place. However, they do depend on each other to some extent.

Once all the data has been coded and organised, the next step involves analysing the different codes and considering how they can be combined to form an overarching theme. Relationships between codes, themes, and sub-themes can be identified during this step. Some initial codes may form main themes, while others may form sub-themes. Once themes have been developed the reviewing and refining of themes begins. Two things are important, the establishments of clear themes and considering the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set. The research presented in this study ensured that considerations discussed were carried out.

3.10. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology that underpins this research. Care has been taken to articulate the theoretical framework of this study. The research questions are presented and a deliberate attempt is made to bring attention to children and their families. Drawing from the qualitative approach, an interpretivist paradigm provides the framework for this research. A Pasifika research methodology is important to this research and thus, the *kakala model* is

employed. Complementing the *kakala model* are the concepts of *talanoa*, *talanoamālie*, *māfana* and *mālie*, which are viewed in Tongan culture as being important for understanding how research is to be conducted and the principles that guide and influence the relationships and interactions within the research. These were also used to access traditional knowledge systems that can often be protected and guarded by families. By paying particular attention to the *kakala model*, demonstrates its relevance to this research. This is especially the case when research involves Tongan people.

4. Findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from both the focus group (FG) and individual interview (II) *talanoa* sessions. This comes with the aim of exploring the experiences, views and narratives of Tongan families who have a child with a disability. In addition, it is concerned with the ways in which children and their families have been supported through their educational experiences within ECE services, in particular within *akoteu* – Tongan ECE centres. Adopting a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to the research questions, responses from families are presented individually in accordance with the following overarching themes:

- Expectations and aspirations for the child: Why these are important?
- Family experiences and views: Understanding of disabilities
- Experiences in *akoteu* centres: Recommendations and Constraints
- Accessibility: Support services

For the majority of the participants in this study, English is a second language. The quotes and statements presented are exactly how they had been recorded and transcribed, with the removal of superfluous utterances. In cases where the Tongan language was the main medium of instruction in the *talanoa*, these are presented and translated to capture the essence of what is being said. Some families used code-switching and these are indicated by the use of brackets for an English translation. Families have used the word ‘school’ and ‘centre’ which refers to *akoteu*. Responses from each family will be presented.

4.2. Koloa

4.2.1. Expectations and aspirations for Koloa: Why these are important?

The expectations and aspirations for Koloa are concerned with his ability to do well academically. While at the centre, his parents talked about how important it was for Koloa to learn basic knowledge, for example, his ability to write his name, read simple words,

distinguish colours, and to count. These were skills that parents had identified as being encouraged at the centre and viewed as being helpful for his preparation in transitioning into primary school. Others skills their son had learned related to being able to carry out simple tasks, such as retrieving or giving something to someone when asked to.

(II [A]) *Kapau 'e to 'o mai ha peni pea te u talaange ke 'alu 'o tohi 'e ne hingoa, pea 'oku ne lava pe 'e ia 'o tohi 'ene hingoa. Taimi 'oku va 'inga ai 'oku ne lau leva 'a e lanu, hange ko 'eni yellow car, blue car, black car. Te ne fokotu 'utu 'u ha fo 'i me 'a pea ne pehē one, two ka 'oku te 'eki ke ne fu 'u ma 'u lelei ke taha 'o a 'u ki he honogulu* – If he has a pen and I tell him to go write his name, he can. When he plays he can identify the colours of the cars. He is able to recite numbers but does not fully know one to ten yet.

Along with preparing him for primary school, Kalonikakala and 'Amanaki hope that through the ECE centre, Koloa may learn more about God. This was noted as a priority and was related to the fact that they had viewed Koloa as a miracle and a gift. Their aspirations for Koloa is for him to be a *faifekau* [pastor].

(II [A]) The first important thing for me is for Koloa to know God first, *pea u pehē pē* [and so I thought] that is the right preschool for us.

(II [A]) *Hanga 'e he 'Eiki 'o 'omai 'e ma tofi 'a*, [The Lord gave us our child/inheritance] and it's a miracle for the both of us *ke talamai* [when we found out] that she's pregnant. That's why she thought and her plan for his future when he grows up to become a preacher.

However, Kalonikakala also shares her frustrations relating to receiving negative comments from family members regarding her aspirations for Koloa. This relates to his disability.

(II [K]) *Ko ho 'o tamasi 'i ena ke tala ko e ki 'i tamasi 'i 'e faifekau ka ko ena 'oku te 'eki ke sai 'ene lea* - You say that your son will become a minister but he cannot speak properly yet.

As an immigrant family, Koloa's parents have an expectation that the Tongan culture and language will be supported at the centre. This is critical to Koloa's identity as a Tongan.

(FG [K]) *Ko e mahu'inga ko ē 'a e anga 'etau tauhi fānau kapau 'oku tau hanga 'o taukave'i 'etau tui faka fonua, 'etau culture, 'a e mahu'inga 'etau ako'i 'etau fānau ki he me'a ko e lea faka-Tonga – We need to hold on to our Tongan values, culture as it is important in the way we raise our children, and in teaching them the Tongan language.*

4.2.2. Family experiences and views: Understanding of disability

Initially Kalonikakala and 'Amanaki had asked if their child would meet the criteria for this study. This was based on their understanding that a disability was something that you could physically see. They did not view Koloa's speech impairment as a disability until this was brought to their attention by the head teacher of the centre. Being involved in this research has made them more aware of what a disability can entail and made them pay particular attention to Koloa's language development.

(II [A]) *Ma fakatokanga'i 'e kima'ua 'oku 'alu pē 'aho ia 'oku develop 'ene lea, hanga lea 'e au he taimi 'oku fa'a talanoa mai ai 'o toe tanaki'i atu koe'uhī ke 'alu e fo'i talanoa. Ka ko e me'a lahi pe ia hangē ko e 'oku lea ngata'a – We noticed as time went by his speech was developing. Whenever he would talk to me I would continue to keep the conversation going. But the main thing is it's hard for him to pronounce words.*

Further recommendations by Koloa's Plunket nurse suggested that he would benefit from experienced trained teachers who could help with his speech. She believed that attending an *akoteu* centre would be beneficial. Both Kalonikakala and 'Amanaki were open to this suggestion.

(II [K]) *'Alu ange 'ena Plunket 'o sio ki he lea 'a Koloa 'ene tuai, pea ne talamai 'oku sai pe 'a e lele 'a e homebase ka 'oku 'ikai ke tatau mo e 'ave ki he fanga ki'i ECE koe'uhī ko e kau experience 'a e kau faiako mo e me'a he ko 'enau mala'e kuo nau 'osi 'alu 'o ako ki ai, pea u talaange ki ai 'io – Their Plunket noticed that there was a delay in Koloa's speech, and she told me that a homebase is good but it's not*

the same as mainstream ECE because they have teachers who have training and experience, and I said yes.

The importance of sharing the story of how Koloa had been conceived was an emotional moment for both Kalonikakala and ‘Amanaki. They married at a later stage in life and they had believed that their chances of having a child were low despite their many attempts to fall pregnant. They describe having Koloa as a miracle and their gift from God.

(II [A]) *‘Oku ma tui ta ‘eveiveiua ko e tofi ‘a ia mei he ‘Otua - We believe without a doubt that he is a gift from God, and without Him we wouldn’t have our kids.*

However, Kalonikakala and ‘Amanaki have experienced family members using Koloa’s ‘disability’ as a way of explaining his behaviour. This is related to how Koloa had been viewed when he displayed elements of disobedience. For example, Koloa not listening was negatively associated with Kalonikakala and ‘Amanaki’s aspirations. For Kalonikakala and ‘Amanaki they see this as Koloa being like any other two year old child who at times has a tendency to not listen.

(II [K]) *Ko ‘ene to‘onga mo ‘ui ‘ana ‘oku ‘ikai ke fe‘unga mo ha faifekau – Your son’s behaviour is not fit for a minister.*

Despite these negative comments, Kalonikakala continues to perceive Koloa as a gift from God, and because of her faith she continues to pray for him.

(II [K]) *Pea neongo ‘a e ‘ū me ‘a ‘oku hoko kia Koloa he taimi ni, tuai ‘ene lea, pea kuo ‘osi ha ‘u ‘a e negative comments ia, ‘oku ou falala pe au ki he ‘Otua, koe ‘uhī ‘oku ‘i ai ‘eku palani mo ‘eku fokotu‘utu‘u ki hoku foha. Eiki kapau kuo ke fakakoloa, tuku a hoku foha ke hoko ko ha ‘o talafekau ke ke nima ‘aki – Despite what has happened with Koloa’s speech, and the negative comments, I trust in God because I have plans in place for my son. Lord if you have enriched, let my son become your messenger for you to use.*

4.2.3. Experiences in *akoteu* centres: Recommendations and constraints

Kalonikakala expressed how anxious she was at first in attending the centre. This was a different environment from that of the familiar homebased service that was run by family members.

(II [K]) *Ko 'ema view ki he preschool na 'e 'ikai ke ma 'ilo 'e kima'ua 'a e ngaahi me 'a 'oku ako ai, toki find out pe 'e au kimui 'i he 'eku fa 'a visit atu ki ai 'o sio ki he anga 'enau hanga 'o raise up e fānau – We did not know at first what they taught there, after visiting the school I later realised how they raise up, and take care of the children.*

Akoteu values are primarily underpinned by Christian faith, and supported through the teaching of Tongan culture and language. Kalonikakala and 'Amanaki are happy with the centre because it holds very similar values that they themselves instil in their children. They acknowledge that as Tongans they understand the importance of these values, however it may be hard for non-Tongans to agree with them.

(II [A]) *Pea na 'a ku interest ai 'i he me 'a ko hono 'ako 'i ke 'ilo 'e he fanga ki 'i tamaiki 'a e 'ū memory verses from the bible, pea u pehē pē that it is the right preschool for us. Talanoa pe au koe 'uhī ko e Tonga, kapau na ko ha view eni ha pālangi they wouldn't agree, ka ko 'eku 'uhinga for me being Tongans mo e anga hono ohi 'aki 'a e fānau 'i he preschool – I was interested because they taught the children to memorize Bible verses, and so I thought that it is the right preschool for us. I say this as a Tongan in the way we feel that children should be brought up in the preschool, if this was a Caucasian they wouldn't agree.*

They did not receive any constraints from the centre regarding Koloa and his disability. Their family were welcomed, and they are aware of the benefits their children gain from the centre. They also felt more confident with Koloa transitioning into primary school because they feel the centre has prepared him for that.

(II [K]) *'Oku fakafiefia hono 'ave ki he fanga ki 'i ako pehē. 'Oku tokoni lahi e fanga ki 'i akoteu ke 'ave ki ai 'a e fanga ki 'i fānau hangē ko Koloa, 'oku 'alu ia 'o feohi, ha 'u e 'aho mo e 'aho 'oku mahino mai 'ene lea, teuteu eni ke hū ki he ako lahi 'oku mahino mai 'ene lea kia au – It's a delight to take him to those sort of schools, they*

are a huge help to children like Koloa. He goes and interacts with others and day by day his speech is becoming clearer, and as he prepares for Primary I can understand his speech.

‘Amanaki shared that there are no specific programmes or assistance offered by the centre to address Koloa’s speech impairment. He participates in the activities that are prepared for all children for his age group.

(II [A]) *‘Oku ‘i ai pe faiako ‘oku ne tokanga ‘i ‘a e fanga ki ‘i ta ‘u ko ē, koia mahalo ko ‘enau daily task ‘oku ne palani ke ako ‘i that’s it – They have a teacher that looks after that age group, and it’s the daily task that she has planned to teach, that’s it.*

4.2.4. Accessibility: Support services

Their family has received support from a speech-therapist for Koloa. His speech-therapist meets regularly with him. On some days they will meet at the centre, and other days at his house. Koloa’s speech-therapist has reassured his parents that they will continually meet with Koloa and will help him with his transition into primary school.

(II [A]) *Na ‘a nau talamai te nau hanga ‘o muimui ‘i mai ia ‘o a ‘u ki he ‘ene hū ki he ako ‘i Sune next month – They told us that they will support and follow his progress when he goes to primary school in June next month.*

His speech-therapist had given advice on ways his family can help Koloa at home, which includes not laughing at him if he mispronounces words but instead to encourage and correct him so that he can learn how to pronounce the word properly.

(FG [K]) *Ko e taha ia e ngaahi me ‘a na ‘e ako ‘i mai he speech-therapist ka ‘oku ‘i ai ha ngaahi fo ‘i lea ‘oku ‘ai atu ‘oku nau toutou ‘ai, ‘oua na ‘a te kata ka te ‘alu atu ‘o fakakakato e lea ke tonu koe ‘uhī ke fanongo ki ai ke ne ‘ilo – One of the things the speech-therapist taught us is if there’s a word he’s struggling with, to not laugh but to say the word correctly so they can hear it and know how to say it.*

4.3. Tāvite

4.3.1. Expectations and aspirations for Tāvite: Why these are important?

Siale's aspirations for Tāvite's future are for him to live a life that is useful to others, and most importantly to live a life fulfilling God's will.

(II [S]) I want him to be pastor or someone to help people, to help people bring to their salvation, that's my own belief and that's the only thing that's important.

Siale believes it is not common for Tongan families to discuss their hopes for their child's future, but rather, they focus mainly on the caring element of the child. However, in Tāvite's case, she recognises the importance of discussing as a family the aspirations for their children.

(II [S]) *Ko e kau Tongan we just ngaahi e kau leka kae 'ikai ke fai ha talanoa pe ko e hā e taumu 'a ki he tamasi 'i* – For Tongans we just raise our children but there's no talk of goals for the child.

Siale believes that education is important in determining one's future, and her aspiration for Tāvite is for him to have a good education. Tāvite displaying good manners is also something that she expects from her son.

(II [S]) I hope *ke ne ma 'u e* [for him to have] respect, *ke ne lava 'o* [for him to] have a good education *he 'oku kamata* [because it starts] *mei heni* [from here], because a good start will end good. That's the key manners to say thank you, please, and if he do something wrong he says sorry, and that makes me happy *neongo pe 'oku tuai 'ene lea* [even though his speech is slow, but that's the main thing].

4.3.2. Family experiences and views: Understanding of disability

At the age of two, a visit to Tāvite's general practitioner (GP), Siale brought to the GP's attention that Tāvite was not able to pronounce words clearly. He could not form sentences that are expected of a child his age. He was then examined by the GP and diagnosed with speech impairment. The GP wrote a letter to the centre asking that he be referred to a speech-therapist.

(II [S]) *Nau take him to the doctor pea ko e fehu 'i mai 'a e toketā kia au pe 'oku lava 'e Tāvite 'o talanoa, pea u talaange ki ai ko 'ene talanoa ko e fo 'i lea pē 'e ua, pea na 'a ne talamai leva 'e tohi mai ki he ako ke nau 'ai ha referral ki he potungāue – I took him to the doctor and he asked if Tāvite can talk, I told him that when he talks he can only say one or two words. The doctor then told me he would write a letter for Tāvite's school to make a referral to the ministry.*

Siale's understanding of Tāvite's disability was concerned with his speech, his ability to form sentences and pronounce words clearly. She is very hopeful that with the support of the centre, the speech-therapist and herself, Tāvite will improve, because she believes he has a gift.

(II [S]) *It's a matter of waiting, 'oku ou tui pe au ko Tāvite [I believe that Tāvite] will come right. As I said before 'oku 'ikai ke u hanu pe te u pehē 'oku ou give up, he 'oku ou 'ilo ko Tāvite 'oku 'i ai e koloa 'i ai [I am not complaining, nor am I giving up], because I know that Tāvite has a gift in him.*

As a family that is faith-based, Siale appreciated that the centre incorporates Christian values and practices into their daily activities. For example, praying, learning bible memory verses, and singing gospel songs. She says that through these Tāvite's speech is improving.

(FG [S]) *Ko e me'a 'oku tokoni lahi pe hangē ko 'enau fa'a hiva, he ko e me'a 'oku ou fakatokanga 'i 'i he 'eku ki 'i mokopuna ko 'ene talanoa 'oku 'ikai ke fu'u mahino fēfē, kā ko e taimi 'oku hiva ai 'oku mahino, 'oku ne pu'aki lelei pe 'a e lea – What has helped the most is them singing at school, because I've noticed with my grandson when he talks it doesn't really make sense, but when he sings it's clear, and he pronounces the words clearly.*

4.3.3. Experiences in *akoteu* centres: Recommendations and constraints

Siale has received support from the centre through the referral for a speech-therapist for Tāvite. When they found out about Tāvite's speech impairment she was informed by the head teacher that the centre could only support Tāvite through being assigned to one of teachers. The head teacher reassured Siale that Tāvite's condition is not a problem, and that it is normal for children to have difficulty with their speech. No other recommendations have been made.

(II [S]) *Na 'e talamai 'oku tokoni pē 'enau kau faiako ki he 'ene speech, na 'e pehē 'e ia that it's normal for kids, 'oku 'ikai ko ha fu'u palopalema ia e fa'ahinga me'a*

pehē – I was told that their teachers will help with his speech, that this was normal for kids, and that it was not a problem.

4.3.4. Accessibility: Support services

Tāvite’s speech-therapist has supported him with his speech development. Siale has also been given advice on how she can help Tāvite, which includes continuously talking to him, and correcting him when he mispronounces a word. These are helping her understand more about his disability and the ways she can help him.

(FG [S]) *‘Io ko e speech-therapist ‘oku tokoni lahi ‘aupito, ‘oku ne to e tanaki mai ‘ene fa‘ahinga founa ke tokoni mai ki hono feinga ‘i ‘a Tāvite ke vave ‘ene lea* – His speech-therapist provides a lot of support, and she also gives me advice on what I can do to help with his speech development.

4.4. Tominiko

4.4.1. Expectations and aspirations for Tominiko: Why these are important?

Education is very important to Lose and her family. She expresses her aspirations for both her children to have a good education, thus preparing them for their future. This is so that they may be able to look after themselves.

(II [L]) I have plans for my kids and I’m working hard right now for them to have a good future. I want them to have a good education and that’s the main thing, so they can look after themselves.

Tominiko first attended a private centre, but was later taken to his current *akoteu* centre. This was because Lose and her family are Christians and she appreciated that they included morning prayers into their daily routine. She also aspires for Tominiko to acquire knowledge and skills that he may not be able to learn at home.

(II [L]) I sent Tominiko over there because they do *lotu* [prayers] in the morning, and it helps because we grew up very religious Tongan. I send him to the centre so that what he doesn’t get from here, he will get from the centre.

Lose hopes that Tominiko's speech will improve in the near future, especially as he prepares to transition into primary school. She believes the centre will help with this. Lose and her husband are happy when they hear Tominiko is learning new words at the centre.

(II [L]) I believe that sending the kids to those centres it encourages them, make them learn and prepare them for primary school.

(II [L]) I just hope he gets to talk soon as other kids do because the level of his speech now is like those kids that just starting to learn to talk, and that's how Tominiko is. So we are very happy with whatever new words he comes with every week, and we can see there is improvement in Tominiko's speech.

4.4.2. Family experiences and views: Understanding of disability

Lose and her husband noticed Tominiko's speech was declining when he was two years of age, and they became very concerned for him. She made a request last year to Tominiko's GP for a referral for a speech-therapist, however was informed that he was unable to. She was advised to contact Plunket or their district nurse. The GP advised her that her son had a speech impairment and encouraged Lose not to worry. Lose is quite concerned for Tominiko especially as he is getting older.

(II [L]) My doctor told me that his son was like Tominiko with his speech, he didn't talk until he was six and he said to me 'you don't have to worry because Tominiko is only [three]', I said 'it's easy for you to say, but I am worried because it's not normal for kids his age, they should be starting to talk but it is hard.

Lose is concerned with the amount of time Tominiko spends on his iPad and believes that it contributes to his speech impairment. She explains that there is little interaction at home because most of his time is spent on his iPad. There is a big age difference between Tominiko and his sister, so they do not have much in common. She added that both her and her husband work throughout the week and so they do not spend as much time as they would like with Tominiko. She has taken Friday's off work so she could spend time with Tominiko.

(II [L]) I blame the iPad, for Tominiko he spends hours and hours during the day on his iPad at home. I don't work on Fridays so I'll get Tominiko to stay with me, I don't send him to school so I can spend time with him and see what I can do.

4.4.3. Experiences in *akoteu* centres: Recommendations and constraints

Lose and her family has had a positive experience with the centre regarding Tominiko. Although she has seen little progress in her son's speech, it is the relationship with the staff and the inclusive environment that entices her to keep Tominiko at the centre.

(II [L]) I was thinking the school would help but I can see it's very slow, I really like sending him to that school. I really like the teachers and the principal, everyone else they're very nice for Tominiko, they also understand him as well.

The centre is currently working together with the speech-therapist to provide the assistance Tominiko needs while he is there. However, Lose talks about her concerns that teachers are not clear in their instructions to her son or firm enough. She believes the teachers need to be more assertive.

(II [L]) He wants to do his own thing and they just let Tominiko to do that, *'oku 'ikai ke* [he doesn't] listen *ia kia kinautolu* [to them] because he thinks they're too nice. I think *'oku vaivai 'enau lea ki ai* [they are weak when they talk to him] that's why he's like that, *fa'ifa 'iteliha pē ia* [he just does what he wants].

She did not experience any constraints with the centre. However, she believes that Tominiko's transition from an English speaking ECE centre to an *akoteu* where Tongan is the main form of medium contributed to his difficulty in speaking. She believes it may have caused some confusion for Tominiko between the two languages.

(II [L]) He used to say something in English all the time when he went to the other one, and when he swapped to the Tongan one it was even harder for him. *Mahalo pē na'e faingata'a* [maybe it was hard] for him to talk *pea toe 'alu mei he* [and then he went from] English *ki he lea faka-Tonga* [to Tongan].

Lose and her husband have noticed that Tominiko enjoys his time at the centre and is learning new skills. For example, he is able to count, and to carry out simple tasks such as tidying up his toys. They also noticed that he is developing social skills at the centre and is making new friends.

(II [L]) Once I seen him over there, they were told it was *taimi fakamaau* [it's cleaning time] to tidy up their toys. He has new friends. On our way over there he goes "yay school", so I know there's something good over there that he's so excited to go school.

4.4.4. Accessibility: Support services

Lose made a referral with Plunket for a speech-therapist, but it was not approved till early this year due to them having many cases to work on. Lose expresses her concerns for Tominiko's transition into primary school. She believes there would have been much more progress with Tominiko's speech and she would be more confident with his transition if he had received help from a specialist sooner.

(II [L]) If it was from last year there would a difference now, but I'm just worried because he's going to school. I'm not that confident to send him to school this year.

Tominiko's speech-therapist informed Lose that whenever she does decide to enrol Tominiko into primary school, she will continue to make regular visits to help and ensure that he is settling in well into the new learning environment.

(II [L]) It's hard for me to send him to school if it's like that, so I'll just leave him until the beginning of next year. They said they're still going to go to school to help him over there.

Lose is receiving support from the speech-therapist. She has been advised as to how she can help at home. For example, it is recommended that she regularly talks with Tominiko, to keep repeating herself in order for Tominiko to absorb what she is saying and know how certain words are pronounced.

(II [L]) We get up in the morning and I tell him no iPad. We'll get up, have breakfast and I'll try to talk to him as much as I can. The lady was telling me 'just don't worry you'll keep talking, repeating yourself, because you saying those certain words, it'll come to his mind that this is how you say it.

4.5. Atonio

4.5.1. Expectations and aspirations for Atonio: Why these are important?

The expectations that Heilala and Tui have for their son Atonio stem from the family values learned from home. His parents are pleased that the centre upholds these as well, as they are very family orientated.

(II [T]) My expectations have been met with this ECE, it's the best. The values that's been instilled into our children, I think because it's a real family oriented ECE my kids just fit right in.

The main priority for them is their faith and for Atonio to know God first. They chose the *akoteu* because it is owned by a Methodist church, and their children learn about God there.

(II [H]) But first plans are to know Jesus, to know God and to help them with their education. This is a bonus because this is a preschool and it's a church one, it's not like other preschools [where] they don't talk about God, Jesus and things like that.

(II [T]) Overall the thing we love about this place is the fact that it's Christianity, they teach about and imbed culture to the kids at a young age.

Education is very important for both Heilala and Tui. They express the need for Atonio to be well educated, as it will ensure a good future for him.

(II [T]) Education is everything. Having an actual qualification I think it's very important.

Being New Zealand born Tongans they acknowledge having been blessed to have had access to full time education. As children of Tongan immigrants, both Heilala and Tui acknowledge the struggles and sacrifices their parents made in order for them to have a good education. Now, as parents themselves, they hope the same for their children.

(II [T]) For us we're blessed to have a full time education here in New Zealand and my parents migrated from Tonga for that very reason so that we can better ourselves than what they had in the islands. For us as full time parents, growing up here in New Zealand we would like our children to better themselves.

The Tongan culture also underpins their family's foundation. Heilala and Tui aspire to teach the Tongan culture and language to their children, with the help of the centre. These are important because they believe it helps them to identify who they are as Tongans.

(II [H]) Coming here and learning the language and the Tongan culture and it exercises their minds that they're Tongan and to be proud of their culture. That's why I especially love it because how they can come and learn the Tongan language.

4.5.2. Family experiences and views: Understanding of disability

Heilala and Tui do not have much understanding of their son's disability and were only informed a day before the *talanoa* interview. However, they are eager to find ways to help their son.

(II [T]) We're still new to this, to understanding it but now that we're aware of it I want to start looking up the best exercises to go through it with my son.

Following our *talanoa* they are now paying more attention to his speech, and researching more about speech impairment in order to better understand it.

(II [H]) We started examining him, I kept trying to start a conversation with him to see.

(FG [T]) After we had our talk, the next day I went and bought heaps of books, I looked up on google the best books to read to our kids, it's more interactive ones.

4.5.3. Experiences in *akoteu* centres: Recommendations and constraints

Positive relationships have been established between Atonio's family and the staff at the centre. His parents describe a sense of feeling welcomed. They expressed the relationship as one between a grandparent and their grandchildren. Staff treat the children as one of their own. It is through this act of love that Heilala and Tui feel they can trust the staff.

(II [T]) they lead by example through the teachers, they express themselves through love, even to the kids like it's their own grandchildren or children. They greet us with a smile, farewell us with a smile. It gets to a point where I don't even care if they growl my kids because we trust them.

(FG[H]) The teachers here are so amazing, we see a difference in our kids and they're so happy here, and they learn a lot. We're grateful to the teachers they do such a good job.

Within the centre environment, Tui talks about the importance of ensuring that their child does not feel separated and different from other children. Especially in the centre, they talked about the need for teachers to ensure that they do not feel distant and alienated from the mainstream children.

(II [T]) When you do have a kid that has a disability you'll just invest everything that you've got into your blessing which is your child to not make them feel distant from the mainstream kids. We do have schools where they have a group of autistic kids, ADHD, Asperger all in one class together with the mainstream that way they to mingle with each other, that way when they go into college it's no surprise for them.

At the centre, children are taught how to pray, and in particular the importance of praying before one eats. Tui describes how Atonio and his older son are constantly reminding him to pray before he eats.

(FG [T]) Before we eat or do whatever they're like, daddy we've got to do a prayer.

4.5.4. Accessibility: Support services

Atonio has not yet had access to any support services. However, his parents are willing to make a request for a speech-therapist for Atonio because they would like a confirmation of their son's disability, as well as more information so that they could better understand it.

(FG [T]) For me I wouldn't mind a speech-therapist, with having a speech-therapist then we can determine where my son is in terms of his speech, because we may think it's a speech disability but then it might be something else so then that gives us a piece of mind that it's not that, that it's something else. I wanted to see in the spectrum where mild was and where severe was, and where mild was, and where mild was my son was still way better than the mild, and severe that's why I was confused if my son actually had this problem or is it just him still developing.

4.6. 'Isileli

4.6.1. Expectations and aspirations for 'Isileli: Why these are important?

Maile's aspiration for 'Isileli is for him to be independent, and to be able to take care of himself in the future.

(II [M]) It doesn't matter *pe 'e lue fēfē* [how he walks], as long as he walks and he can survive by himself, and he is able to help himself.

Maile explains that 'Isileli is able to do certain things on his own without requiring assistance. For example, he is capable of standing and walking on his own with the help of his posture control walker. He is able to carry out simple tasks such as using the bathroom,

dressing himself and making his food. These are important steps towards developing independence.

(II [M]) *'Oku lava pē 'e 'Isileli 'o tui hono vala* [‘Isileli can put on his clothes], he can walk, go to the toilet. *'Oku lava pē 'e 'Isileli 'o fai hangē ko e fiekaia 'oku 'alu pē ia ki peito* [when ‘Isileli is hungry he is able to go to the kitchen and can do his own food].

Education for ‘Isileli is important to Maile and her family. They hope that he may learn the necessary knowledge for his transition into primary school next year. Maile also aspires for ‘Isileli to learn everyday life skills, and to develop his socialising skills.

(II [M]) *Ko e 'uhinga 'oku 'omai ai kinautolu ki heni ke ako 'i ke nau poto he ABC, 123, ke ne 'ilo mo poto he* [That’s why I bring them here so they learn their ABCs, 123s, and to be good at trying to] go toilet, stuff like that. Also getting to know each other and how to behave.

4.6.2. Family experiences and views: Understanding of disability

Maile was not aware of ‘Isileli’s disability until she gave birth to him. Her faith and view of children is reiterated in her understanding of ‘Isileli’s disability.

(II [M]) *'Oku 'ikai ke tau 'ilo kita ki loto ki he manava pē 'oku fēfē 'a e ki 'i fānau 'oku 'omai*, but it’s a pleasure for us *tatau ai pē pe 'oku* disability *pe ko ha fa 'ahinga* way, *'oku te kei fakafeta 'i pē* – We don’t know what our child will be like in the womb, but it’s a pleasure for us whether they have a disability or are any other way, we are still thankful.

Maile and her family are struggling to get the right kind of support they need for ‘Isileli. In caring for ‘Isileli both financially and physically, ‘Isileli’s *mehikitanga* is currently the main source of support for Maile and her family.

(II [M]) *Ko Puatonga 'oku si 'i tokanga 'i 'a 'Isileli 'o support ki ai he taimi ni* – Puatonga looks after ‘Isileli, she’s the one who supports him right now.

Maile is also concerned about their current home situation and expressed the need for a house that is more suitable for ‘Isileli and that will cater for his needs. For example, there is a need for accessible ramps. She shared that she and her husband have tried for three years, however there has been no success.

(II [M]) we need a house for him, a house *'oku sai ki ai* [that's suitable for him], and everything, because it's hard we've tried for three years and nothing.

4.6.3. Experiences in *akoteu* centres: Recommendations and constraints

Maile did not experience any difficulty with the centre in regards to enrolling 'Isileli. She describes that staff were very supportive and were willing to help. She explained that staff worked together with her to find out how they could better care for 'Isileli during his time at the centre.

(II [M]) *'Ikai ke si 'i 'i ai ha faingata 'a 'i he 'eku feinga ke fakahū 'a 'Isileli, na 'a ku 'omai pē ki heni na 'a nau tali pē, pea u fakamatala pē me 'a 'oku fiema 'u pea nau tali fiefia pē* – I had no problems when I enrolled 'Isileli, I brought him here and they accepted him. I explained to them what he needs and they happily welcomed him.

Being concerned for her son's future, Maile shares that she appreciates that the centre is preparing him for that, at the same time teaching him about the Tongan culture and language.

(II [M]) *Fale 'i pē mei he ako ko 'eni 'a e lea mo e 'ulungaanga 'ete tama, mo e me 'a ke 'oua mole e lea faka-Tonga, 'uhinga pē 'oku sai 'ia he 'omai kinautolu ki heni ke nau fale 'i 'ete fānau pe ko e ha e me 'a te nau fai he kaha 'u* – The advice I've gotten from the school is in regards with language, and my child's behaviour, and to not lose the Tongan language, that's why I like bringing them here, and so they give advice to my children on what they are going to do in the future.

4.6.4. Accessibility: Support services

Maile and her family have access to a few support services, including access to 'Isileli's disability allowance from the government, as well as a supply of nappies and other toiletry equipment from the occupational therapist (OT).

(II [M]) At the moment *ko e tokoni pē ko e ki 'i vahe 'a 'Isileli* [the only support is 'Isileli's allowance], but it's not that much, it's a disability allowance *pea mo e 'ofa pē hangē ko e 'omai e* [and they also gave us] nappies, his toilet trainer, *mo e 'ofa mai pē 'a e occupational therapist (OT) mo e kautaha hangē ko e me 'a ki he toileti* [and support from the OT and the company that provided the stuff for the toilet].

Although they do have access to these support services, Maile feels this is not enough to fully cater for 'Isileli's needs. She is concerned for her family and the support they can provide for

'Isileli, as the disability allowance they are receiving from the government is not enough to provide for his necessary everyday needs.

(II [M]) *'Oku toe fiema 'u pē e ki 'i tokoni hangē ko 'eni pe 'oku ou lava pē 'o* [We still need help for example if I can get] pay, or if Puatonga can get paid because she is looking after him, if we can get income to help us with 'Isileli to get what he wants. *Ko 'ene ki 'i vahe* disability *'oku hangē pē ia ha loi*, but *'oku 'ikai ke to e 'i ai ha 'ū tokoni* [his disability allowance is like nothing, but there's no other help].

4.7. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings that explore Tongan families' experiences, views and narratives concerning their child with a disability. Families have shared insights into some similar experiences that have included expectations and aspirations for their child, while viewing their children as blessings and a gift from God. They also shared their concerns and frustrations when their child's disability was not understood and the negative comments received from family and friends. All families shared the potential of their children having a bright future and doing all they could to ensure that this occurs.

5. Discussion

5.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of the set of findings based on both the focus group (FG) and the individual interviews (II). It highlights the following key emerging themes for further discussion: *Ko e fānau ko e tāpuaki* – children are a blessing, *Mahu‘inga ‘o e ‘ulungaanga Faka-Tonga* – the importance of the Tongan culture and values, *Fāa‘i Kavei Koula* – Four Golden Pillars (underlying principles), *Lea Faka-Tonga* - Tongan language, *Kau faiako* – Teachers, *Tui Faka-Kalisitiane* – Christian faith and values, *Ngaahi pōto‘i ngāue* – Knowledge and skills, and *Ngaahi tokoni* – Access and support services . The discussions presented will demonstrate how Tongan families’ experiences, views and narratives of their child with a disability have impacted the ways in which they have understood the importance of education. Access to services that support families will be discussed. Barriers for families will be identified and will provide direction for ways in which teachers can continue to support children with a disability. Concluding comments will summarise the chapter.

5.2. *Ko e fānau ko e tāpuaki* – Children are a blessing

In both the focus group and individual interview *talanoa* sessions, families expressed how they believed their children are a blessing from God. Initially, they did not see their child as having a disability. This was especially the case for families whose children had a speech impairment. Throughout the *talanoa* sessions parents did not focus on their child’s disability but rather on what they had identified as being their children’s strengths, special skills, and talents. Families were very clear in their minds and hearts that regardless of their child’s disability, they were viewed as a *tāpuaki mei he ‘Otua* – a blessing from God. Such responses are not uncommon in Pacific cultures and this holds the same for Tongan culture (Amituanai-Toloa, 2009; Leaupepe, 2015; Mauigoa-Tekene et al., 2013). The following quotes best sum up these points.

(FG [T]) For me it’s *‘Ko e fānau ko e tāpuaki mei he ‘Otua’* [Children are a blessing from God], it’s probably the one that we value the most. I think to us what we appreciate and what we know for a fact is that our children are a blessing to our lives and we value that

(II [M]) There's heaps of *ngāue 'oku lava pē 'e 'Isileli 'o fai hangē ko e fiekaia 'oku 'alu pe ia ki peito* [things 'Isileli is capable of doing, when he is hungry he can go into the kitchen], and make his own food. Also after he goes to the toilet he's able to wash his hands, and he can help his little brother too, play and things. *'Oku lahi pē ngaahi ngāue 'oku lava pē ia 'o fai 'oku 'ikai ke mau tokoni ki ai* [There are many things he can do without our help].

Families talked about how they would praise the efforts of their children for things that they were able to complete and which demonstrated their abilities and skills. This was related to drawing attention away from the child's disability. Brown (1999) reveals parents frustration concerning the ways in which their child's disability has been singled out. In her study parents shared the need to disrupt deep-seated beliefs concerning disability, to celebrating what children are capable of doing. For example, Maile and Puatonga described 'Isileli as having an interest in singing. They noticed his interest and expressed how this was also supported in the centre.

(II [M]) Most of the time he likes to sing.

(II [P] *'Oku ou sio kia 'Isileli 'oku poto pē 'a 'Isileli he ako, hangē ko e hiva ko e sai ia 'ene ha'u ki he ako. Ko e ngaahi me'a pē 'oku ako mei heni 'oku 'alu ange pē 'o fai 'i homau 'api* - I can see that 'Isileli is clever in school, for example a benefit of coming to school is the singing. Things that he learns from here he comes and does at home.

Establishing what the interests of the child are, can be a way of highlighting such skills. Teachers play a critical role in supporting such interests, and this can actually draw attention away from the child's disability. Rather, time and energy can be put into further nurturing and developing these skills. Teachers are well positioned to collaborate with families in these situations. *Te Whāriki* requires teachers to create environments where there are "equitable opportunities for learning, irrespective of gender, ability, age, ethnicity or background" (p. 24).

Personal thoughts were shared with regards to the types of stigma and stereotype attitudes families have encountered. One parent expressed how he understands the difficulty for families to seek support from Tongan communities because of fear and embarrassment of what others might say. He articulates that for some families, coming to terms with their child having a disability can hinder the kinds of support needed. Such fears and concerns are raised by Leaupepe (2015) and the work of Mauigoa-Tekene et al. (2013). According to Brown (1999) a child who is not "...labelled by your society...no one expects you to have to go out into the community and argue for access to the same resources in health, education, and

welfare provisions that other children receive as a right of citizenship” (p. 29). The following quotes illustrate these points.

(II [T]) We need to stop with this stereotype that disability is a bad thing and that your child is unwanted. It’s wrong what we’re doing is not good. Our children are a blessing and we’re stopping them from receiving their blessings and we need to support them with whatever they’re going through.

(FG [T]) You see, it’s the type of mentality that our Tongan people have; “oh nah I don’t want to go to these types of meetings, I don’t want to hear about it, my son or my daughter is fine”. But that’s what I’m talking about, with that type of mentality sort of shadowing our kids from achieving their true potential.

To some extent this has been expressed as revealing the lack of attention afforded to children with a disability. Anastasiou and Kauffman (2013) express the importance of families avoiding social isolation, as this can have devastating effects. However, such actions are not uncommon. This is demonstrated through the following statement.

(II [K]) *‘Ikai fu ‘u tokanga ‘i he kakai Tonga e longa ‘i fānau iiki (fānau fāingata ‘ia) koe ‘uhī pe ko ‘etau ‘ulungaanga fakafonua, ‘e lava pē ke tuku pē ‘i ‘api ‘o nofo pē ai he ngaahi kui ke nau tokanga ‘i* -Tongans aren’t really concerned with children (children with a disability) because of our culture, they can be left to stay at home with their grandparents.

Some expressed how ‘other’ families have dealt with their child’s disability. This has led to parents keeping their child home and minimising interactions with those in the community for fear of their child being harmed or mocked. Kaplan (2000) identifies this as being related to the moral model of disability and is associated with a family’s sense of guilt and shame. Families have taken measures to keep their child ‘hidden’ and excluded from activities crucial for development, such as education. The following statements demonstrate these points.

(II [T]) Our Tongan people or Pacific Islanders they know their kid has a disability but they leave them at home because they might get hurt or kids might mock them. It’s one of the biggest fears that us parents have.

A father expressed his experience in coming to terms with his son’s disability. Initially he struggled, however his advice to families is to quickly come to terms with this. In both the FG and II *talanoa*, all families expressed how important this process is. The importance of accepting their child’s disability is concerned with the necessity to demonstrate support, the

ability of being involved in their child's life and education, and showing them love and care. Leaupepe (2015) notes that families need to be supported through this process, and requires sensitive engagements with all those involved with the families and children. The following quotes illustrate these points.

(II [T]) Even me as a younger generation Tongan parent it was quite hard to still understand that my son has a disability. But the matter of accepting it, you accept it and it's over with, now the challenge now is to support our kids through the process of whatever support that they need.

(FG [A]) *Fai 'a hono tokoni 'i 'o e fanga ki 'i fānau pehē kae 'oua 'e ignore them kae 'omi kinautolu* and show them we love them – We need to support our children instead of ignoring them. We need to show them we love them.

5.3. *Mahu'inga 'o e 'ulungaanga faka-Tonga – Importance of the Tongan culture and values*

All families expressed the importance of *anga faka-Tonga* – Tongan culture and values as well as *'ulungaanga faka-Tonga* – behaviour, attitude and practices. Morton-Lee (2003) describes how this encompasses values, beliefs, and practices that are regarded as elements of the Tongan culture and tradition. This was also about families sharing with their child what it means to be Tongan, and developing a sense of pride and strong identity (Teisina, 2011).

(FG [T]) With our culture as Tongans, this is what makes me proud to be a Tongan, our culture is totally different to anyone else.

Families shared stories of their own upbringing and learning the *'ulungaanga faka-Tonga* from their parents. The desire to continue and pass such knowledge down to their children was important. The work of Frengley-Vaipuna, Kupu-MacIntyre and Riley (2011) revealed that this is the case for most Tongan students migrating to New Zealand. They are likely to reflect the beliefs of their parents and *kāinga* – extended family. The majority of families in this study shared their concerns about raising their children in a predominantly Western country because of the fear of losing *'ulungaanga faka-Tonga*. It is this fear that drives them to preserve and teach their children *'ulungaanga faka-Tonga* at a young age.

(II [K]) *Ko e ki'i 'ulungaanga fakafonua ia 'a kitautolu, 'i he fonua muli ko 'eni 'oku ou tui 'oku fiema'u ke 'oua na'a mole e malu 'etau 'ulungaanga fakafonua, ke tau 'ave ki he 'etau fānau ke nau mo 'ui 'aki mo tupu hake mo ia* – With our Tongan culture in this foreign country I believe we need to not lose the morality of our Tongan custom. We need to pass it on to our children so they can live and grow with it.

Some families believe that in order to be a proud Tongan one must have knowledge of the culture and language. This belief coincides with Morton-Lee's (2003) study which showed that Tongans believe that to be 'really' Tongan, one must not only have Tongan ancestors, but must also have knowledge of *'ulungaanga faka-Tonga*.

(II [H]) Learning the language and the Tongan culture, it exercises their minds that they're Tongan and to be proud of their culture.

Families reported positive experiences at their *akoteu* centre. Each conveyed emotions of satisfaction at having access to a centre that is culturally responsive and which incorporates culture into their teachings.

(II [T]) My expectations have been met with this ECE, it's the best, [through] the values that's been instilled into our children.

Bevan-Brown (2009) suggests a culturally responsive environment is one where cultures are valued, affirmed, and developed. These are necessary in ECE services to enable the celebration of diversity. Mauigoa-Tekene et al., (2013) highlights the need for paraprofessionals to be culturally aware when working alongside families and children with a disability, this includes the ways in which language is used, approaches regarding interactions, and establishing trusting relationships. Pau'uvale (2011) revealed that for Tongan children, culture is an essential element in their learning.

According to Frengley-Vaipuna et al., (2011), their study on talented-gifted Pasifika children identified that Tongan children in New Zealand are deeply affected by *'ulungaanga faka-Tonga*. Within the education sector, teachers would do well to understand how they can further develop the talents and gifts of children. In relation to this study, it can be suggested that in general, there needs to be understanding of *'ulungaanga faka-Tonga*. In doing so, teachers can connect on a more personal level and assist families more effectively. Families in this study relate such ideas as their child being a 'gift' from God.

5.4. *Fāa'i Kavei Koula* – Four Golden Pillars

In talking about Tongan values, families expressed hope for their children to acquire aspects of *Fāa'i Kavei Koula*. Of the four values, *faka'apa'apa* – respect is the one they agreed was the most important because it integrates aspects of the other three values and *'ofa* – love. Kavaliku (1977, cited in Morton-Lee, 1996) states that *faka'apa'apa* encompasses Tongan thought, love, humbleness, respect, and much more. This is reiterated in the following statements.

(FG [A]) *Te mau fanafana me'a lelei, fakahā ki ai mo e Tongan custom, teach them e kavei koula 'e fā, 'oku kau ai 'a e faka'apa'apa, ke tau hanga 'o fa'o ki he'etau fānau he nau kei iiki, ke nau 'alu hake 'o lalahi pea te nau lava 'o ma'u 'a e me'a ko ia* – We will whisper good things, show them the Tongan custom, teach them the four golden values, which includes respect to instil in them while they are still young, so they have it as they grow up.

(FG [T]) *Faka'apa'apa* [Respect] I know for a fact it takes you a long way. If we can instill those values [*faka'apa'apa*, humility] into our kids.

The concept of *'api* – home being the first *'apiako* – school, was talked about by a few of the families in the *talanoa* sessions. They explained that their role as parents was to set an example for their children at home. When their children attended the centre then teachers would reinforce these values. Feki (2015) makes references to the importance of teachers having an understanding of families' social and cultural backgrounds, this also includes understanding the significance of spirituality. Families expressed how teachers were teaching children these values not only in their daily lessons, but also through their actions.

(FG [S]) *Kiate au ko kita pē, ko e 'uluaki 'apiako pē 'a 'api, kapau 'e kamata pē 'e kita pea toki 'alu pe ki he ECE 'o tokoni* – For me it's up to us, the first school is home, if we can start it and then they to the ECE for further helps.

(FG [A]) Agree.

(FG [T]) Those are some of the qualities this school has to offer to our kids, they may not teach the whole thing but just through their examples as teachers the kids just work off that.

5.5. *Lea faka-Tonga* – Tongan language

Another theme that arose was the importance of the Tongan language and the need to preserve and teach it to their children. One of the concerns for most families was children not being able to speak the language. Families believed this was in part, due to the exposure to English as the dominant language. According to Taufe‘ulungaki (1993), vulnerable language communities and their cultures, like Tonga, are helpless against other powerful and dominant cultures and languages. Parents shared how desperate they were to preserve, maintain, and promote their cultural heritage and language.

Families acknowledged that language is vital in their attempts to hold on to their culture and history. This belief is in accordance with Frengley-Vaipuna et al. (2011), who express that having fluency in the Tongan language allows understanding of Tongan concepts, including those that encompass *‘ulungaanga faka-Tonga*. Families shared the importance for Tongans to hold onto their language, since failing to could mean a loss of culture (Taufe‘ulungaki, 1993, 2003; Thaman, 1996).

(II [K]) *‘Aonga ‘emau hanga ‘o kamata ‘i hono ako ‘i e lea faka-Tonga pea ‘e tokoni lahi ki he pukepuke ‘etau culture - Teaching them the Tongan language is useful, and it helps a lot in holding on to our culture.*

Families highlighted that one of the characteristics they admired about the centre was that the main form of communication is the Tongan language. They reported noticing an improvement in their children’s ability to understand and speak the language since starting at the centre. The 2013 New Zealand Census states that among the Tongan community English was the most widely spoken language, spoken by 89.9% of the people, with the Tongan language coming in second with 53.2%. This was a 5% decrease from the 2006 data. It was also found that those born in New Zealand were less likely than those born overseas to speak Tongan, at 34.9% and 80.4% respectively (Statistics NZ, 2013). Families expressed how happy they were with the centre’s approach.

(FG [A]) *‘Oku ou fiefia he ki ‘i ECE he ‘oku ako ‘i ai ‘etau lea – I am happy that the ECE centre teaches our language.*

Teachers have informed families that they see this as an opportunity to teach the Tongan language to children because once they transition into primary school, English will become their dominant language.

(II [K]) *Talamai he faiako 'oku nau hanga 'o ako 'i pē e lea faka-Tonga heni koe 'uhī ko 'enau hū pē ki he ako lahi 'oku 'ikai ke nau toe lea faka-Tonga* – The teacher told us that they teach the Tongan language here because once they move onto Primary school they won't speak the Tongan language anymore.

For one family, their children were attending an *akoteu* centre during the individual *talanoa*, but were later enrolled in a mainstream centre at the time of the focus group *talanoa*. This was based on the suggestion of the children's *mehikitanga* (father's sister) despite the mother's disapproval. The mother expressed that her disapproval was due to her concerns about her children no longer being exposed to the language, cultural and Christian values that was part of the *akoteu* centre. She noted how her children were speaking English more than Tongan since their move to the mainstream centre. She realises that her work is cut out for her, and expressed that this was something missing in mainstream ECE. The need to speak the Tongan language is highly regarded as an important value for identity formation (Feki, 2015; Pau'uvale, 2011; Taufe'ulungaki, 1993, 2003)

(FG [K]) *Ko e me'a nau fiefia ai ko e ako faka-Tonga, ko 'ete lea faka-Tonga atu 'oku na mahino 'i. Ka ko e 'alu ki he ki 'i ako ko 'eni ko e ki 'i ako muli ia, pea hangē ko ē 'oku ngalo* – I was happy because it was a Tongan ECE centre and when I spoke to my children in Tongan they could understand, but with this new school I can see they are starting to forget.

5.6. *Kau faiako* - Teachers

All families in this study shared the positive relationships they have with teachers. Mauigoa-Tekene et al., (2013) reported that families appreciate an ECE setting that is welcoming, supportive, and where teachers are skillful in developing good relationships with them.

(II [H]) Yeah, they love it here and we know they are happy because it shows at home with how they talk about the school, teachers. You trust the teachers, and you can see it's a safe environment for our kids.

It can be seen that once a welcoming environment is established, and a positive relationship is developed between families and teachers, this creates an environment where families and their children feel welcomed. *Te Whāriki* advocates that a child is more likely to feel comfortable when they regularly see their culture and language being valued. Teachers need to be responsive to their cultural ways of knowing and being.

Families expressed a sense of relief when teachers understood their child's needs. It is important that families and centres work together.

(II [L]) I really like sending him to that school [centre]. I really like the teachers and the principal, everyone, they're really nice to Tominiko. They also understand him as well, so it makes me feel a little bit better.

Families appreciated that the teachers' forms of *tauhi fānau* – child rearing practices were similar to personal practices. They treated children as their own, creating an environment that was safe and secured.

(II [T]) The teachers, they express themselves through love, even to the kids like it's their own grandchildren or children, and it gets to a point where I don't even care if they growl my kids because we trust them.

(FG [H]) What I like about the teachers here they're not shy to tell your child off in front of you, like "*tuku ia 'oku kovi ia*" [stop that, that's bad].

(FG [CH]) For us we don't hold anything towards them when they do growl our kids because we know how much of a great job they do, and if they don't growl them then our kids won't know what's right and what's wrong.

5.7. *Tui Faka-Kalisitiane* – Christian faith and values

All families in this study are Christians. They shared how their faith is important to them. Christianity plays an important role within the Tongan community (Ahio, 2007; Taumoefolau, 2005). As immigrants, or as New Zealand born Tongans, there is a desire to carry their Christian beliefs with them (Auckland Regional Public Health Service [ARPHS], 2004).

(FG [T]) Even though we may not say our prayers every day and thank our Heavenly Father for the wonderful blessings, but we do truly know deep down in our hearts that that's what we work around, that's the foundation we have at home with our kids.

(II [L]) Tominiko went to a private school before, but I sent Tominiko over there [Tongan ECE centre] because they do *lotu* [prayer] in the morning, and it helps because we grew up very religious Tongans.

For most families, the academic aspect of education came second, whilst the main priority was for their children to learn about God first.

(II [A]) *Kia au mo 'eku [For me and my] own belief individually, ko e poto e tangata 'oku kimui ia, [man's knowledge is secondary], the first important thing for me is for Koloa to know God first.*

An interconnected relationship between one's culture and religion was portrayed throughout the *talanoa* sessions. Families believe that both cultural values and religious beliefs work hand in hand when raising children. This is in accordance with the ARPHS (2004), and MacIntyre's (2008) studies. Describing that Christian faith for Tongans together with cultural values, beliefs, and language are what they viewed as essential and effective in children's social, moral, and academic education.

(FG [K]) *'Oku kei mahu'inga 'etau tauhi 'e kitautolu 'etau fānau mo 'etau 'ulungaanga fakafonua 'o fakatatau ki he fa'ahinga tui fakalotu – It's still important when we raise our children, and keep our culture/values in relation to our religious beliefs (Christian).*

Appreciation towards the centre was expressed by families. Centres have incorporated prayer time in the mornings, singing hymns, memorising bible verses, and teaching children about Jesus and the bible. For some, they felt that, as working parents, they are not able to teach their children as much about the Christian faith and values as they would like and appreciated that the ECE centre was able to help them in that regard.

(II [K]) *Ko 'ema fiefia ia he ki'i akoteu koe'uhī 'oku base e me'a kotoa pe hono ako'i e kauleka ke nau 'ilo 'a Sisū - We are happy with the ECE centre because everything is based on teaching children about Jesus.*

(FG [T]) The support we've gotten from them is around the whole Christianity values; saying prayers, bible verses and things like that. If we're not giving it at home they're getting it from here. That supports us because our kids bring those values home.

(FG [K]) *Tokoni lahi 'a e ECE ia ki he'eku ki'i fānau ki he fakakaukau pē 'a'aku fakaeau pē mo 'eku mo'ui ke 'uluaki ako'i naua ke na 'ilo'i 'a e 'Eiki, pea ko e me'a na'a ku fiefia lahi ai ko 'ena lau e veesi lauloto, ko 'ena fai e lotu pea u 'ilo leva 'oku maama 'e na 'atamai – The ECE has helped my children a lot, in my opinion and my way of life our children need to know God first. That's why I was happy when they were learning their bible verses, prayed, and then I knew their minds have been enlightened.*

Families also shared their own personal aspirations and hopes for their child to become a church minister or to share God's word with others. Several studies have noted the

importance of listening to and, hearing the aspirations for their children (Brown, 1999; Leaupepe, 2015; Mara, 2014; Mauigoa-Tekene et al., 2013; Skudder & Leaupepe, 2015).

(II [S]) I want him to be a pastor or someone to help people, to help people bring to their salvation.

(II [K]) *ko 'eku faka'amu kia Koloa ke hoko ko ha faifekau, sai'ia pē au he fo'i taumu'a ko ia koe'uhī ko e fa'ahinga tui 'oku ou nofo ai* – My hope for Koloa is for him to be a pastor, I just like that goal because of the kind of faith/belief I live by.

It was found that aspirations were not restricted because their child had a disability. Despite parents experiencing negative comments from friends and family members, parents are very strong in their faith and continue to have high hopes for their child.

(II [K]) *Pea neongo 'a e 'ū me'a 'oku hoko kia Koloa he taimi ni tuai 'ene lea, pea kuo 'osi ha'u 'a e negative comments ia, hanga hoku fāmili 'o fakatatau 'aki hoku lotu* – No matter what is happening right now with Koloa's speech. Negative comments have been made by my family, comparing it [his disability] with my faith.

Families agreed that the Christian faith is an important element in their children's learning, and this was influential in their decision making regarding their choice of ECE service.

5.8. Ngaahi pōto 'i ngāue – Knowledge and skills

When asked what expectations they had for their child attending a centre, responses related to having a good education, developing social skills, etiquette and preparing their child for their future. Families aspire for their children to be independent in the future.

(II [L]) Yes I have plans for my kids and I'm working hard right now for them to have a good future. I want them to have a good education and that's the main thing, so that they can look after themselves.

Having a good education was one aspect families believed would be beneficial for their child. This is more about having a good education, but accessing education with a rights based discourse (Brown, 1999; Leaupepe, 2015; McLean & Will, 2008). One father described education and knowledge as being a powerful weapon that provides an advantage and access to different aspects of one's life.

(II [S]) I hope *ke ne ma 'u e* respect, *ke ne lava 'o* have a good education *he 'oku* start *mei heni* because a good start will end good – I hope for him to have respect, for him to be able to have a good education, because it starts from here, because a good start will end good.

Etiquette skills such as saying 'please', 'thank you', and 'sorry'; being respectful, having good manners, being kind and loving towards others, was important for families. Feki (2015) promotes how important it is for Tongan to acquire such skills at a young age. These were skills families witnessed and encouraged further at the centre.

(II [S]) That makes me happy *neongo pe 'oku tuai 'ene lea pe ko e ha* [it doesn't matter if his speech is delayed], but that's the main thing, *ke ma 'u e kauleka* [is for children to learn] how to say 'please', to say 'sorry' and say 'thank you'.

Developing the necessary social skills to get along with others was important. Parents saw this as being critical for the transitioning to primary school. One parent shared how learning the alphabet and the ability to count was viewed as important. Supporting toiletry skills in preparation for independence at primary school was also felt to be important.

(II [M]) *Ko e 'uhinga 'oku 'omai ai kinautolu ki heni ke ako 'i ke nau poto he ABC, 123, ke ne 'ilo mo poto he* - That's why I bring them here so they learn their ABCs, 123s, and to be good at trying to go toilet, stuff like that; also getting to know each other and how to behave.

For most families their goal is to prepare their child for their future, as individuals and as leaders of their family or nation. The role of ECE, according to families is educating and helping in preparing their children for their future.

(FG [K]) *Ko 'e ma ki 'i foha 'oku tokotaha pē pea ko e me 'a pē 'oku ma focus ki ai, ko ia te ne hanga 'o tataki 'emau ki 'i fāmili 'i he kaha 'u pea 'oku fiema 'u ia ke ma hanga 'o tokanga 'i lelei, 'ave ki he ako, 'oku ma fiema 'u ke ne ma 'u 'a e poto mo e maama* – We only have one son, and he will be the one to lead our family in the future, so right now our focus for him is to look after him, take him to school because we want him to be educated and enlightened.

There is an expectation for children to be prepared for their transition into primary school.

(II [L]) I believe that sending the kids to those centres it encourages them, make them learn and prepare them for primary school, and it's good.

A father shared his views and concerns regarding the separation of children with a disability from other children. He highlights that an inclusive classroom allows room for children with a disability to learn from their peers, and to develop social skills.

(II [T]) Yeah you're right we have those systems in place where they have a group of autistic kids, ADHD, Asperger's all in one class together with the mainstream that way they get to mingle with each other that way when they go into college it's no surprise for them. Whereas having them in a different room, having their own teacher and separating them from the mainstream kids, they're separating our kids.

5.9. *Ngaahi tokoni* – Access and support services

The majority of families currently have access to and are receiving support for their child's disability. Of the four families who have a child with a speech impairment, three currently have a speech-therapist. While the fourth family has not yet been referred, however they are willing to receive support from a speech-therapist.

One of the main services provided for children with a disability in ECE is the Special Education Early Intervention Service. They work with children from birth until they start school. They work closely with specialists from the Ministry of Health to ensure that children who need extra support are able to access it. Once a referral is made to the Ministry, the early intervention team works together with families to find out what their concerns and priorities are for their child, and to gather further information from ECE teachers. A plan is then developed for how they can achieve their goals.

A speech-language therapist is able to work with the family or a member of the family who spends most time with child to assist with how they can support the child through communication. Of the three families that have access to a speech-therapist, they all shared the advice, the kinds of support and help they provided. They shared what they can do at home to assist with their child's speech development. The speech-therapist at times will work with the child in the home or ECE setting as this is the most natural setting for the child. This was evident in the families' experiences. One father shared his experience where his son's speech-therapist often works with his child at home and as a result of this he expressed how he has learnt how to support his child.

(FG [A]) *'Oku 'alu ange pē 'a e speech-therapist ki 'api 'o ngāue mo 'eku foha pea 'oku te sio leva 'oku 'i ai e develop 'i he anga 'o 'ene 'ilo, mo e tō nounou 'i he*

tafa'aki 'o maua, pea te sio leva ki he ngaahi gap koia, ta ko ē na'e fiema'u 'ema input ki he'e ma foha kae mālō mo e 'alu ange 'a e speech-therapist 'o te 'ilo leva 'a e anga ke fai kae lava ke fetokoni'aki, 'aonga lahi 'aupito – The speech-therapist comes home and works with my son, and I can see there's development in his knowledge, and also shortcomings from our end. I can see the gaps, we realized that we need to have input for our son, and thankfully the speech-therapist came so that we knew how to work with each other, this was very useful.

However, for one family with a child with a physical disability, the mother explained that they are receiving support through the disability allowance from the government. They also receive supplies of nappies and toiletry equipment from the occupational therapist (OT). However, she is concerned that she needs more support, especially with finance. She expressed that she would like to know what other types of support she is able to receive.

Although preparation for transition to school is essential, a mother explained that her son had started late with his speech-therapist. She feels that her son is not prepared and ready to make that transition. She talks about the need for her son to have received support earlier.

(II [L]) If it was from last year there would a difference now, but I'm just worried September is really fast and I'm not that confident to send him to school this year.

5.10. Conclusion

For Tongan families in this study, the importance of Tongan culture, language and Christian faith were critical to establishing a strong Tongan identity and belief in self. Children had been viewed as a blessing from God, regardless of whether they had a disability or not. The associated stigma towards children with a disability is not as strong as it has been known to be, although a few families have faced negative remarks regarding their own child. Families themselves are becoming more aware of the term 'disability'. They are aware of the kinds of support they have access to and what they can do at home to help their child and strengthen relationships between families and the centre. Each family valued their role as caregiver and saw the importance for them building the right foundation for their family, and the preparation of their child for their future. Families play an essential part in the education and support of their children. Their involvement is very much crucial. In addition, an inclusive, positive and welcoming ECE setting plays a critical role in creating a learning environment where children with a disability and their families feel welcomed and valued. The sharing of

family stories, their hopes and aspirations for their children has been a journey of courage and discovery for all.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

The experiences, views and narratives of Tongan families who have children with a disability have been central to this research. Equally important has been the ways in which *akoteu* centres have been critical to maintaining and encouraging the Tongan values, language and culture embedded within young children. The thesis was underpinned by the following question:

What are the experiences and views of Tonga families with children with a disability within ECE settings?

The overarching question was explored through using focus group and individual interviews by way of *talanoa* and *talanoamālie*. The study sought to understand families' aspirations for their children and challenges that confront them. The study provides valuable insight into what families in collaboration with teachers and special support services within ECE settings can do. Strategies and considerations have been noted. Key findings are revealed. This is followed by the significance of this study and how it has contributed to existing literature. Limitations experienced within the process of this study, as well as implications are then presented, followed by suggestions for further study.

6.2. Experiences, views, and narratives of Tongan families with children with a disability within an ECE setting in Aotearoa New Zealand

This research findings suggest that for Tonga families with children who have a disability, their view of children relates to them being *tāpuaki mei he 'Otua* – a blessing from God, to their family. In talking about their child, their focus was not solely on their disability but more so, on his/her abilities. As a result, families worked more on providing the necessary support to meet their child's needs, and doing what they can to help develop important skills they believed would support them in their transitioning to school and future endeavours.

In addition, the Tongan culture, values and Christian faith were key elements that the majority of the families focused on as essential for their child. In turn, these played a role in the choices of ECE centres families deemed as being suitable. It can be seen that *akoteu* – Tongan ECE centres were identified as being the most suitable for the families in this study.

Akoteu held similar values and principles which meant that children not only learnt these from home, but these could be further encouraged at the centres, which all families appreciated.

The gathered stories of families' experiences contribute to the literature in which provides evidence that a welcoming and culturally responsive ECE setting is crucial. All families expressed how they had experienced a positive and welcoming environment within their respective ECE centres. This allowed them to build a positive and trusting relationship between themselves and the ECE teachers. It also provided a learning space where children were able to feel 'at home' and where the development of their skills and abilities was encouraged and supported.

The critical role of support services was essential to providing families with some sense of relief and agency. Working alongside occupational and speech-therapists was very beneficial for most families. And for one family, identifying further support was taken advantage of. As a result of working with specialists, families were able to see an improvement in their child's speech or physical development. They were also able to learn techniques from their specialist regarding how they can better help support their child at home. The ECE settings were in a position to provide extra support, making the necessary referrals where required.

6.3. Significance of study

This study is among the first of its kind and it contributes to the limited literature, adding information and knowledge on the experiences of Tongan families who have a child with a disability within an ECE setting in Aotearoa New Zealand. As very little research has been conducted in this area, this study gives voice to families and allows them to share their stories and experiences. It also provided insight into the cultural frameworks, values and principles that underpin the *anga faka-Tonga*. Strategies for working effectively with Tongan families and children with a disability within an ECE setting add insight.

6.4. Limitations and implications of the study

A limitation to this study was the relatively small number of participating families. It can be suggested that a larger sample size is used in order to provide more conclusive data, and to provide further information on the cultural frameworks, values and principles that underpin

the *anga faka-Tonga*. This study has provided a platform for important deliberations to continue.

The ethics process proved problematic. Western research designs can be confrontational when having to apply procedures that are deemed appropriate from this standpoint. Research involving Pacific people is about ensuring that the ways in which researchers engage with their participants are culturally appropriate and responsive. Despite explaining the importance of making personal contact with potential participants, this concept was not understood by the ethics committee and compromised the study. Ethics approval for this study was received later than originally anticipated and concerns were raised whether the research would take place.

It was quite difficult in the search for families to participate in this study, and the small number of families was due a number of reasons including; few Tongan families who have a child with a disability enrolled in an *akoteu*. It would be interesting to know whether numbers are high in mainstream ECE settings. In searching for families, one centre had indicated that they had the facilities and resources ready to cater for children with a disability, however, they received little support from the Ministry. They have made a number of requests for professional training for their teachers, however the Ministry has not made much progress in their response to this. The centre feels they need more professional support from the Ministry in order to fully cater for the child and their family. Secondly, the children of some families were identified by their ECE teachers as having issues of concern and needing a referral, however the families declined to follow up on the recommendations made.

Part of the Tongan culture is respecting your elders, and to question them is deemed as being *talahu'i* – disrespectful and or inappropriate. As a young Tongan female, this had implications for this study. At times, I felt quite intimidated, mainly because the majority of the participants were a lot older than me. I also found that some of the families that were older seemed more hesitant to be open because of my age. This affected my self-confidence. However, after the first two individual *talanoa* with two of the families my confidence grew and I became more comfortable in interacting and conducting the *talanoa*. This was noted by a participant who appeared to understand my frustration.

Families not attending the focus group *talanoa* was also problematic, as I believe their presence would have provided more insight. Of the five families that participated in this study, only three took part in the focus group *talanoa*, which was disappointing.

6.5. Suggestions for further study

It is suggested that further studies may focus on Tongan families who have a child with a disability within a mainstream ECE centre.

There may also be benefit in conducting a comparative study exploring ECE teachers' experiences working with Tongan families who have a child with a disability here in New Zealand and in Tonga. This would respond to the need for professional development to increase teachers' knowledge and understandings in order for them to work effectively with families. It is important to gain insight from the perspective of teachers.

6.6. Conclusion

This personal journey with and alongside the families in this study has been one of enlightenment and an eye-opener to the everyday struggles families encounter. Listening to families share their stories has been a privilege and a humbling experience. I have been blessed to have witnessed the courage and aspirations of families as they speak about the potential future for their children. I have gained a deeper understanding of their struggles as well as their hopes, and this is evident in their unshakeable faith to keep believing for the best, regardless of the situations that the families might find themselves in.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

Office of the Vice-Chancellor
Finance, Ethics and Compliance



The University of Auckland
Private Bag 32019
Auckland, New Zealand
Level 10, 49 Symonds Street
Telephone: 64 9 373 7599
Extension: 87830 / 83761
Facsimile: 64 9 373 7432

UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE (UAHPEC)

16-Mar-2017

MEMORANDUM TO:

Mrs Manutai Leaupepe
Critical Studies in Education

Re: Application for Ethics Approval (Our Ref. 018021): Approved

The Committee considered your application for ethics approval for your project entitled **Tongan families and children with disabilities: Experiences within early childhood education settings in Aotearoa New Zealand.**

We are pleased to inform you that ethics approval is granted for a period of three years.

The expiry date for this approval is 16-Mar-2020.

If the project changes significantly, you are required to submit a new application to UAHPEC for further consideration.

If you have obtained funding other than from UniServices, send a copy of this approval letter to the Research Office, at ro-awards@auckland.ac.nz. For UniServices contracts, send a copy of the approval letter to the Contract Manager, UniServices.

In order that an up-to-date record can be maintained, you are requested to notify UAHPEC once your project is completed.

The Chair and the members of UAHPEC would be happy to discuss general matters relating to ethics approvals. If you wish to do so, please contact the UAHPEC Ethics Administrators at ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz in the first instance.

Please quote reference number: **018021** on all communication with the UAHPEC regarding this application.

(This is a computer generated letter. No signature required.)

UAHPEC Administrators
University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee

c.c. Head of Department / School, Critical Studies in Education
Miss Meleana Koloto

Additional information:

1. Do not forget to fill in the 'approval wording' on the Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms, giving the dates of approval and the reference number, before you send them out to your participants.
2. Should you need to make any changes to the project, please complete the online proposed changes and include any revised documentation.
3. At the end of three years, or if the project is completed before the expiry, please advise UAHPEC of its completion.
4. Should you require an extension, please complete the online Amendment Request form associated with this approval number giving full details along with revised documentation. An extension can be granted for up to three years, after which a new application must be submitted.
5. Please note that UAHPEC may from time to time conduct audits of approved projects to ensure that the research has been carried out according to the approval that was given.

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet



**EDUCATION AND
SOCIAL WORK**

School of Critical Studies in Education
74 Epsom Avenue, Epsom
Auckland 1023
NEW ZEALAND
Phone +64 9 623 8899

Head of School: Associate Professor Carol Mutch: c.mutch@auckland.ac.nz
Supervisor: Manutai Leaupepe: m.leaupepe@auckland.ac.nz
Researcher: Meleana Koloto: mkol675@aucklanduni.ac.nz

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Research Project: *Tongan families and children with disabilities: Experiences within early childhood education setting in New Zealand.*

Malo e lelei, my name is Meleana Koloto and I am enrolled in the Master of Education programme with the Faculty of Education and Social Work (FoE & SW), at The University of Auckland. I am currently a full-time student and my research focuses on the views, experiences and narratives of Tongan families and children with a disability within the context of early childhood education (ECE) settings. My supervisor is Manutai Leaupepe. Your participation in this research is sought after and greatly appreciated.

Project description and invitation: The aim of my research is to explore the views, experiences and narratives of Tongan families who have a child with a disability. The context of my research is within early childhood education settings. In addition, the study is concerned with the ways in which families and their children are supported and provided with quality education and care. The study endeavours to address the impact of these provisions to the teaching and learning afforded to young children with a disability. Extensive research in ECE demonstrates the benefits for both children and their families, however there is very little research that addresses the needs of Tongan families and children with a disability in ECE. It is hoped that this research will find ways to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for Tongan children with disabilities in ECE within Aotearoa New Zealand. This research will provide a platform to explore and identify promising practices, strategies and engagement that view children with a disability within a rights-base discourse strengthening relationships of Tongan families within ECE settings.

I would like to invite you to participate within this research project. My research seeks to investigate the following question: *What are the experiences and veivs of Tongan families with children of a disability within ECE settings?* This is voluntary and if you are willing to be involved, you will be given a Participant Information Sheet and a Consent Form. You will be asked to return the signed Consent Form to the researcher using the self-addressed envelope provided.

Your participation would involve one Focus Group Interview that will take approximately 45 minutes to one hour. This will happen at the Lotofale'ia Methodist Church located in Mangere at a time and day that is convenient to you. You will also be involved in an individual *talanoa* session that will take approximately 1 hour at a time and place that is convenient to you. Both the Focus Group and *talanoa* sessions will be digitally audio-recorded. I will transcribe these, however only a copy of the individual *talanoa* interview will be made available for you to peruse. You can withdraw from the research project at any time, however, once the data analysis commences this may not be permissible. Access to data will be restricted to the Principal Investigator and myself. The results will be included in the development of a Master thesis and disseminated through relevant journals, publications and conference presentations. All information will be kept locked securely within the office of the Principal Investigator for a period of six years and then destroyed.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Due to the nature of the research and the small sample, there is the possibility of participants' identification whereby anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identities of all participants. The summary of the findings will be made available upon request.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Malo aupito,

Meleana Koloto

Enquiries about the research can be made to:

Researcher: Meleana Koloto mkol675@aucklanduni.ac.nz

For any concerns of an ethical nature you can contact the Chair of The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz The University of Auckland, Office of the Vice Chancellor, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142, Telephone (09) 373-7599 ext. 87311.

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 16th March 2017 for three years. Reference number 018021

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form (Focus Group)



**EDUCATION AND
SOCIAL WORK**

School of Critical Studies in Education
74 Epsom Avenue, Epsom
Auckland 1023
NEW ZEALAND
Phone +64 9 623 8899

The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland 1142
NEW ZEALAND

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (Focus Group)

This Consent Form will be held for a period of six years

Title of Research Project: *Tongan families and children with disabilities: Experiences within early childhood education setting in New Zealand.*

Researcher: Meleana Koloto
mkol675@aucklanduni.ac.nz

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and I have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.

- I understand that my consent is important and necessary for my participation in this research.
- I agree to take part in this research and understand that information shared is kept confidential.
- My participation is voluntary.
- I understand that I will be involved in one Focus Group interview that will take approximately 45 minutes to one hour.
- I understand that the information shared in the Focus Group interview may be used for publication and/or in conferences.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw participation at any time without giving a reason.
- I agree to not disclose information shared within the Focus Group interview.
- I understand that the Focus Group interview will be digitally audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher.
- I understand that data will be kept for 6 years after which time data will be destroyed.
- Any data published will not identify individual participants as its source.
- I wish to receive a summary of findings which can be emailed to me at this email address:.....

Name:.....

Signature:.....Date:.....

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 16th March 2017 for three years. Reference number 018021

Appendix D: Participant Consent Forms (Individual Interview)



**EDUCATION AND
SOCIAL WORK**

School of Critical Studies in Education
74 Epsom Avenue, Epsom
Auckland 1023
NEW ZEALAND
Phone +64 9 623 8899

The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland 1142
NEW ZEALAND

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (Individual Interview)

This Consent Form will be held for a period of six years

Title of Research Project: *Tongan families and children with disabilities: Experiences within early childhood education setting in New Zealand.*

Researcher: Meleana Koloto
mkol675@aucklanduni.ac.nz

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and I have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.

- I understand that my consent is important and necessary for my participation in this research.
- I agree to take part in this research and understand that information shared is kept confidential.
- My participation is voluntary.
- I understand that I will be involved in one Individual interview that will take approximately 45 minutes to one hour.
- I understand that the information shared in the Individual Interview interview may be used for publication and/or in conferences.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw participation at any time without giving a reason.
- I agree to not disclose information shared in the Individual interview.
- I understand that the Individual interview will be digitally audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher.
- I understand that I will receive a transcript of my interview one week when completed for my perusal.
- I understand that I have two weeks to return the transcript back to the researcher from the time I have received it.
- I understand that data will be kept for 6 years after which time data will be destroyed.
- Any data published will not identify individual participants as its source.
- I wish to receive a summary of findings which can be emailed to me at this email address:
.....

Name:.....

Signature:.....Date:.....

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 16th March 2017 for three years. Reference number 018021

Appendix E: Interview Questions

Interview Questions (Focus group and Individual interviews) *Talanoa*

Title of Research Project: *Tongan families and children with disabilities: Experiences within early childhood education setting in New Zealand.*

Main research question: *What are the experiences and views of Tongan families with children of a disability within ECE settings?*

Sub-questions:

- What are the expectations and aspirations of Tongan families for their children attending an ECE setting?
- Why are these important?
- What do you understand about your child's disability?
- What support have you received regarding your child's disability?
- What recommendations have you received from your ECE centre?
- How have you accessed disability support services and/or Special Education Services?
- What are the constraints which Tongan families encounter when seeking ECE for their children with disabilities?

Prompts: These will be used to initiate conversations with the research participants.

- When was your child first diagnosed?
- How did this make you feel?
- What were your concerns for your child?
- How have these concerns been addressed? – by who, support services, extended families, church
- What message/s do you have for other parents/caregivers/families?

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