

Pepe Meamea as a Framework for Samoan Infants and Toddlers in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract

This article conceptualises *Pepe Meamea* (Samoan concept of infant/toddler) to ground Samoan cultural understandings, values and beliefs of the Samoan child as a collective, holistic and relational being. The Samoan worldview of children and childhood prioritises the whole child, and this has implications when positioned within a dominant Eurocentric early childhood curriculum (ECE) curriculum and pedagogy framework. The semiotics of the Samoan language references a collective position for personhood rather than an individual one which warrants further examination into Samoan conceptualisations of Pepe Meamea pushing back at normative assumptions. As an innovative practice and philosophy for teaching, Pepe Meamea already has deep Samoan cultural knowledges associated with its term. Pepe Meamea is understood and commonly referred to as infants or newborns. This presents initial talanoa (dialogue) with teachers from six Aoga Amata (Samoan early childhood centres) in a two-year research Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) project (2021–2022). Using Samoan language as the conduit for creation and cultural reference ensures Samoan children's cultural rights are adhered to through an Indigenous Samoan paradigm. As an innovative practice and concept, Pepe Meamea already has deep cultural Indigenous knowledge associated with its term; however, this article presents the possibilities of Pepe Meamea through the development of a pedagogical and relational framework that promotes its imple-

mentation in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECE environment. How the New Zealand *Te Whāriki early childhood education* (ECE) curriculum is responsive to Pepe Meamea is another dimension this paper will consider as the majority of the New Zealand Samoan population are born and raised in a New Zealand context. This research paper reports on the first phase of the project, the process of co-designing a Pepe Meamea pedagogical framework with Samoan teachers.

Keywords: Pepe Meamea, Indigenous knowledge, Samoan worldview, infants and toddlers

Introduction

From the outset, the framing of Pepe Meamea is explored within the New Zealand Early Childhood Education sector to give prominence to the voices of Samoan born infants and toddlers, including the unborn (people yet to come). This research, alongside other culturally-based studies in New Zealand shows the significance of cultural identity and the importance of sustaining cultural connection within ECE. Securing children's cultural identity is a targeted outcome for New Zealand education of which Wu (2009) explored for children of Chinese migrants and Māori children (Rameka, 2015) in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The historical and political threads of ECE in New Zealand can be traced back to social and critical advocacy movements, such as the feminist movement (post-war), the rise of Kaupapa Māori education in sustaining cultural knowledge systems and language loss. Kaupapa Māori education affirms Māori collective ways of being and knowing by exercising Māori knowledge systems, language, principles, and values in the teaching and learning context (Cram et al., 2018). The initiation of Pacific language full immersion ECE centres shared a similar purpose and intent; to affirm Pacific ways of being, to sustain Pacific knowledges, language and values for the young Pacific transnational peoples growing up in Aotearoa New Zealand (otherwise known as Pacific). Politically, both Te Kōhanga Reo (Māori full immersion ECE) and Pacific full immersion were activated by Pacific community leaders in response to the domination of English language and knowledge systems within the context of early years learning (Matapo, 2021). All these social justice movements have in some way influenced the purpose and design of the New Zealand ECE curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), which is New Zealand's first bicultural curriculum underpinned by Mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledges). Considering the unique position of *Te Whāriki* informed by Māori Indigenous concepts and understandings of childhood and being, we will briefly explore the historical and political context of ECE and then shift towards the development of Pacific ECE.

The Pacific peoples make up the third-highest population, with the majority of its third generation being born in Aotearoa New Zealand. Pacific Island peoples “is a multi-ethnic, heterogeneous group comprising different languages and cultures” (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006, p.3). “Pacific peoples” have been used in government and in particular education documents to make inferences to Pacific Islands that identify as Pacific due to their heritage or ancestry. Samu-Wendt (2015) similarly denotes the term Pacific has evolved from Pacific Islands, Pacific Islanders, Pacific Nations, Pasifika and now back to Pacific. However, the influence of the New Zealand Ministry of Education’s usage of the term Pacific has led to its widespread adoption by various government agencies legislations. Nevertheless, the two words refer to the same group of people regardless of the combinations of recent, first or second and subsequent generations and ethnicities. Its collective scope relates to men, women and children who identify with the islands and cultures of Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga, Niue, Tokelau, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and other Pacific or mixed heritages. To align clearly with New Zealand government policies and legislations that have recently changed to ‘Pacific’, this paper will follow suit. Finally, in advocating for specific Pacific philosophies and pedagogy in ECE, we will frame the Samoan Indigenous concept of Pepe Meamea through a Samoan critical analysis framework Tofāa’anolasi (Galuvao, 2018) coupled with critical participatory action research (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014). The three researchers in this study are also community partners with Aoga Amata (Samoan early childhood centres), thus affirming the relationality and engagement of the research process. This positionality grounds the Samoan cultural lens and ethos in this research.

Methodological Considerations

The Samoan proverb highlights the rationale and ethos of this research by reminding us that: (O tū, aganu’u, ma agaifanua, a le tamaititi o le a lē mafai ona ulufale atu i le potu aoga sei vagana ua fa’atāuaina ma fa’aulufaleina muamua i le loto ma le agaga o le faiaoga) “the culture of the child cannot enter the classroom until it has first entered the consciousness of the teacher” (Allen et al., 2009, p. 49). In the spirit of this proverb, this study positions a Samoan Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) framework to engage all teachers of Samoan Pepe Meamea in transforming practice, generating, and contributing to ECE communities and scholarship in the context of infant and toddler pedagogy. This research mobilises Samoan conceptualisations of Pepe Meamea as a valid contribution to local and international scholarship of infant and toddler pedagogy through deeply rooted Samoan collective ontologies. The importance of culturally appropriate practices in research, including Samoan protocols

and rituals, are respected and affirmed, and Samoan cultural knowledge paradigms by researchers as supported by the Pacific Education Research Guidelines (Anae et al., 2001). Culturally appropriate methods of engagement are considered through negotiated and co-designed with Samoan community partners as part of an extended community of inquiry (Davis & McKenzie, 2017). As a qualitative interpretive study situated within an Aotearoa New Zealand Samoan transnational context, complex layers (micro, meso, macro) are considered to reconceptualise and transform (Kemmis et al., 2014) Samoan pedagogy for Samoan infants and toddlers. Thus, the consideration of research methodologies engages a Samoan critical analysis framework Tofāa'anolasi (Galuvao, 2018). *Tofā* refers to a deep sleep in which one participates in ancestral dialogue or *moe manatunatu* as an incorporeal exchange (Tui Atua, 2009) with family members who have passed on. *Moe* is to sleep in the Samoan language. In reference to *tofā*, it is both the sleep and title of a person who holds a chiefly position known as a matai title. In the ancestral connection and process of *tofā*, the highest level of cultural wisdom is conceived and reconceived. *A'anolasi* illustrates the depth and breadth of Samoan knowledge systems that a person embodies to affirm ancestral agentic relations in the present. Tofāa'anolasi in its capacities to traverse cultural wisdom through specific genealogical ties brings forth opportunities for a Samoan research praxis; to engage critical analysis through a Samoan lens.

Pacific ECE in New Zealand

For more than 30 years, Pacific ECE has been documented (Airini et al., 2009a, 2009b; Airini & Mila-Schaaf, 2010; Burgess, 1988; Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014; Mara, 1997; Matapo & Leaupepe, 2016), and is deeply rooted in the Pacific cultural identities, languages, and histories of young Pacific children. Much of the Pacific ECE discourse affirms the importance of nurturing, Pacific languages, culture, spirituality and identity of Pacific children and advocate for the critical role of ECE in maintaining these. Over four decades, Pacific ECE has been grounded in grassroots cultural advocacy, pioneering for Pacific-by-Pacific community ECE services that privilege and embrace Pacific languages, cultures, values, and beliefs (Leaupepe et al., 2017) and were deemed necessary for generations that follow (Matapo & Leaupepe, 2016). The first Pacific playgroup was established in 1972 in Tokoroa, New Zealand. It was led and facilitated by a group of Cook Islands women at the Saint Luke's Pacific Islands Presbyterian Church (Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014). The 1970s-80s Māori social justice movements gave rise to the revitalisation of Te Reo Māori (Māori language) in early years education. The ECE provision of Te Kōhanga Reo (full immersion Māori ECE) was initiated by Māori, for Māori (Ritchie &

Skerrett, 2014). The renaissance of Māori-centred Kaupapa as a political movement also encouraged the advocacy of Pacific peoples in seeking the establishment of Pacific language nests across Aotearoa New Zealand. Pacific languages as a medium of instruction later informed the inception of Pacific ECE bilingual and total immersion and services (Mara & Burgess, 2007; Leaupepe & Sauni, 2014; Leaupepe et al., 2017). For the nurturing of Samoan identity, culture, language, and spirituality research asserts that there must be further consideration of Samoan epistemology to inform culturally sustaining pedagogy in ECE (Kesi, 2014; Matapo, 2021; Mauga, 2020; Palea'i-Foroti, 2013; Tagoilelagi, 1995; Utumapu-McBride, 2013). Culturally sustaining pedagogy positions the cultural capital (cultural knowledges, languages, identity, prior knowledge) of the child and their family as integral to shaping pedagogy, curriculum and learning environment to sustain culture (Paris, 2012).

SAASIA Sosaiete Aoga Amata Samoa i Aotearoa (Samoan ECE Association in New Zealand)

Aoga Amata was established over 30 years ago with community aspirations for their children to live and thrive in Aotearoa whilst maintaining their cultural identities. Aoga Amata are full immersion Samoan ECE centres and translate to mean 'first school'. The history of Pacific early childhood can be historically traced back to their respective Pacific nations. In the early 1980s, the leaders of the Samoan ECE movement in Samoa pursued government agencies to continue this passion for Samoan children in Aotearoa New Zealand. These included support for pre-service teachers and teaching across ECE. In 1987, the first Aoga Amata was established in Wellington and Auckland. In that same year, the only Aoga Amata teacher training was launched in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Samoan church communities were the backbone of Aoga Amata development of which SAASIA (Samoan Aoga Amata Society in Aotearoa) was incepted in 1989 by communities in Wellington (Ete, 2013; Tagoilelagi, 2013). The recent advocacy to a New Zealand parliament Select Committee in 2019, whereby the SAASIA chair spoke about reconsidering the IELTS (International English Language Tests System) upon entry to teacher training programmes in the country.

More than 30 years on, SAASIA has a governing board comprised of national board members and an operational arm that contracts or sub-contracts directly to the Ministry of Education and other agencies. SAASIA's strategic goals are i) Culture, Language and Christianity ii) ECE Curriculum iii) Research and iv) Resources. The organisation has always grounded its philosophy upon children's Samoan culture, lan-

guage, alongside Christianity as vital in securing children's Samoan cultural identity. The organisation driven by Samoan ECE teachers, leaders and scholars demonstrate the intergenerational reach of Samoan values and principles in sustaining Samoan language, culture and identity for all Samoan children and their families within Aotearoa New Zealand. The level of collective service and responsibility which underpin SAASIA and all its respective Aoga Amata across Aotearoa New Zealand demonstrates the power and reach of Samoan culture and language.

Why is a Samoan-specific framework needed for Samoan infants and toddlers in ECE?

Samoan peoples growing up and identifying as Samoan-New Zealand born brings complexity in subjectivity, particularly navigating culture and Samoan epistemology within a location other than their ancestral or heritage lands (Anae, 1998; Podmore et al., 2006; Toso & Matapo, 2018). The highest proportion (48.7%) of all Pacific peoples in NZ are Samoan and are primarily NZ born (Ministry of Social Development, 2016; New Zealand Statistics, 2013). NZ has the largest transnational Samoan population (approximately 77.3%) living in one country (Batley, 2017; United States Census Bureau, 2018). Most of the Samoan-NZ population live in Auckland, NZ (65%). Although the Samoan language is the third most common language spoken in NZ, only 44% of New Zealand born Samoans can speak Samoan (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020).

With the increased numbers of Samoan born in New Zealand, this paper gravitates to the increasing vulnerability of our children's access to their cultural knowledge during their early stages of learning and teaching, such as infants and toddlers. The Ministry for Pacific Peoples' Strategic Plan goals is recorded in a plan called Lalanga Fou. The Ministry of Education's Pacific Education Action Plan amplifies the significance of culture, language, and identity for Pacific peoples. The Lalanga Fou comprises four goals: i) language, culture, and identity ii) prosperous Pacific communities iii) resilient and healthy Pacific people and lastly iv) confident, thriving and resilient young Pacific peoples. Other documents such as the Tapasā; Pacific Cultural Competencies (Ministry of Education, 2017) proposed three competencies for teachers of Pacific learners. One of the competencies prioritises the importance of language, culture, and identity. The new *Kōwhiri Whakapae* (Ministry of Education, 2021) assessment tool in early childhood education designates a section on culture, language, and identity to amplify the significance of these for Pacific and Māori children. The *Te Ara Pou-tama Indicators of quality for early childhood education* (Education Re-

view Office, 2020) are review processes the New Zealand Education Review Office uses to ensure early childhood services uphold their licensing commitment to quality provision. Within the curriculum criteria, two are explicitly ensuring the children's language, culture, and identity are promoted in their learning and teaching.

Cultural rights are a critical imperative given the substantial contribution to children's successful learning. The importance of culture and language as a human right has been the focus of many international conventions. These include:

- UNESCO *Culture for Development Indicator Suite* (UNESCO, 2011), which is pioneering research in developing a set of indicators that will pinpoint how culture impacts development;
- UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, countries have committed to the preservation of their cultures and languages (UNESCO, 2003) and intangible cultural heritage;
- The *UNCRC Rights of the Child* acknowledges the child as a 'human being' and is protective of children's right to their language and culture (UNCRC, 1989).

Children enter this world with cultural values that, if not nurtured properly, may lead to an insecure cultural identity (Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017). The dominant discourse on infants and toddlers presents normative conceptualisations of childhood and when applied to ECE research of Samoan children (and childhood), must be challenged as universalistic. A report by the New Zealand Human Rights Commission confirmed that "children who identified as Pacific also talked about the importance of culture in the context of family, wider community and religion" (New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2020, p.17). As the only surviving Pacific Early Childhood Education umbrella organisation for Aoga Amata, SAASIA leads the Pacific ECE movement in Aotearoa New Zealand, both in numbers and in Samoan ECE professional development (Ete, 2013; Leavasa-Tautolo, 2013). The organisation has provided teacher and leadership professional development for Aoga Amata, such as the published inaugural text *O Pelega o Fanau*, an Indigenous reference for Samoan children in early learning.

Furthermore, SAASIA is being recognised in New Zealand¹ as a guardian for Samoan children's cultural identity. As Aoga Amata was birthed from a collective Samoan community aspiration, of which the Samoan churches were the backbone (Ete, 1993), the Aoga Amata philosophy continues to prioritise Samoan children's cultural identity alongside Christian values. How cultural and Christian values are

enacted in Aoga Amata are taken into account through the research process, bringing traditional and contemporary cultural practices to light. The prevalence of Eurocentric infant and toddler philosophies negotiated within ECE are areas hoped to be explored by this Pepe Meamea framework.

The genesis of a Pepe Meamea pedagogical framework in a New Zealand context

The Pepe Meamea (TLRI – Teaching and Learning Research Initiative) research project for which this study is developed, engaged six Aoga Amata across Auckland in several research talanoa (dialogic) fono (meetings) to talanoaga (talk freely and openly in Samoan) about Faiaoga (teacher) understandings and conceptualisations of Pepe Meamea. The Aoga Amata invited to participate in the study were all ECE centres with Samoan infants and toddlers enrolled in their respective ECE services. Faiaoga who participated are positioned in either infant and toddler classrooms or are in mixed-aged centres. Faiaoga who participated in the research talanoaga ranged from 1 to 20 plus years of teaching experience in New Zealand ECE, including teaching in full immersion Samoan in Aoga Amata. The talanoaga was co-designed with teachers to generate culturally inclusive processes and provocations for dialogue. From one research fono, a Faiaoga mentioned in her explanation of Pepe Meamea as:

O Pepe Meamea o le saolotoga e gafā ai aiga ma atunuu.

Pepe Meamea is the freedom to genealogise family and nation. (Samoan teacher voice, shared at Pepe Meamea Research Talanoa Two, May 2021)

Framing Pepe Meamea requires faanōnōmanū (Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017) through the collective tapuaiga (blessings) of the family to ensure the pregnant mother's wellbeing becomes a communal responsibility. Faanōnōmanū is a shared responsibility and commitment of the collective to seek divine blessing from God to ensure the *tapu* (sacredness) of the living and the non-living that surrounds the unborn foetus till death (human lifespan) is guarded. This *tapu* is crucial to highlight the Samoan point of difference in the teaching and learning of Pepe Meamea. When faanōnōmanū is practised in its entirety, the outcomes are holistic successful living. Thus, Pepe Meamea rightly deserves its own framework to ensure harmonious living (Tui Atua, 2009). As noted in the Samoan world view the Creator God, people and resources are crucial elements in maintaining a harmonious relationship. These are vital to living a good life for family and community members (Du Plessis &

Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2009). Similarly, Pepe Meamea aims at exploring how the framework would result in creating harmonious relationships.

Culture as a right to identity

Views of culture as a learned and shared heritage and as fundamental to people's sense of place and identity has their genesis in the Samoan world view: Samoan people have always emphasised the importance of culture as giving meaning to life (Vaai, 2006), as answering questions of 'who am I', upholding and binding the family structures and communal organisation (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1991), and as a process of legitimising Samoan knowledge from the past to the present and to the future (Gegeo, 2001).

As noted, the Pacific worldview is essentially the Samoan worldview. Thus, most of the theologians who are church ministers from various denominations argue that children are gifts or blessings from God. Christianity has evolved into the "belief system within the Samoan" culture, otherwise called *fa'asamoa* (Tagoilelagi, 1995, p.5). Keesing (1974) argued that Samoans took Christianity and made a place for it in *fa'asamoa*, making it part of their culture. Prominent Samoan historian Meleisea (1987) posits that *fa'asamoa* or culture was robust to endure change, thus despite some Samoan practices contradicting Christian ideals, Christianity was absorbed and Samoanised.

First, Tima (2013) posit that children are a *tofi*, a heritage and a gift from God (p.2). Similarly, Liuaana (2013) describes children as a *tofi* from God (heritage from God) 'passed down from previous generations for the benefit of a nation and the next generation" (p. 2). Children have a profound calibre of spiritual value as carriers and agents of culture. For example, Pisi (2014) proposes *tofi* as a cultural responsibility; through *tofi*, one's existence is justified. From a spiritual dimension, Samoan children are the outcome of the family, village, and the nation's collective blessing. Thus, a *tofi* continues populating the *vā* (relational space that is sacred) designated for them. Samoan children continue the 'ancestral traits' (Anae, 2010) as cultural imprints. The place and value of a child in Samoan culture are how Samoan children are 'engraved' with a *tofi*, which cannot be removed or renounced. For example, when a young woman wanted to give up her *taupou* (ceremonial virgin) title, she was told by her father, "you have the title until you die" (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1998, p. 54). Thus, some children enter Aoga Amata already being bestowed these titles.

Secondly, our children's roles in *fa'asamoa* are as *suli* (descendants or heirs). As a *suli*, descendant or heir (Schultz, 1911; Turner, 1884), Sa-

moan children have ancestral or family rights to titles, land, name, history, genealogy, and everything that encompasses their *aiga* (family), *nu'u* (village), an *itumalo* (district) and into a *malo* (nation). For example, it is within the *suli* that one is entitled to a *matai* or chief title. In addition, it is through the *suli* that Samoan children enter the journey as carriers of their generation's rights (Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017, 2018).

Thirdly, children enter *Aoga Amata* as a *feagaiga*, a sacred kinship relationship between a sister and brother (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1998; Schoeffel, 1995; Tui Atua, 2009). The protectorate role of the brothers in Samoan culture is to protect their sisters is indicative of the females' ideal role as holders and transmitters of sacred power, with the brothers holding secular power and authority (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1991).

Lastly, children's *gāfa* or knowledge of pedigree (Stair, 1896) and *fa'alupega* (formal village salutations) together with the previous cultural responsibilities, all become Samoan children's cultural shelter to ensure their identities are protected. The value of children in the Samoan culture is of great importance to continue the genealogy of families. A common proverb, "*O tamaiti, e taulia tele i le aganuu, auā o le lumanai manuia lea o se aiga*" (Simanu, 2002, p.66), refers to Samoans valuing children, as they are the future of a family.

Thus, we argue that these cultural rights have a default role in awakening subjugated knowledge. Tui Atua (2009) posits the need to tread carefully when dealing with *tapu* knowledge, these cultural rights platforms from the Samoan Indigenous knowledge systems, thus the connections amongst them.

Role of women in Aoga Amata

Samoan women have long been strong and consistent advocates for the Samoan Language Nest movement since the 1980s, now called *Aoga Amata*. Today those preschool services are now referred to as *Aoga Amata*. The high level of commitment and passion of educators, mainly mothers and grandmothers in providing preschool education mainly from the venues of Samoan church facilities (which are predominantly Samoan Christian Congregational church; Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, and the Assembly of God) or held in primary school rooms, community halls or private homes or garages (Utumapu, 1998). Utumapu's Auckland based study (1998) further affirmed the important role of *Aoga Amata* as educational sites for parents and families to access their language, culture, and parenting skills. These *Aoga Amata* reinforced women's maternal roles in changing the way they relate to their children, and the women's support

groups encouraged women to assert their rights as women. The level of commitment by women was evident in the ways mothers and parents contributed to their children's education. Thus, Samoan women are the 'Poutu' backbone of their families, including the church and community. The word 'Poutu' refers to the centre pole in a traditional Samoan *fale* (house). It is the largest and strongest pole, which holds up the *fale*.

In addition, a recent master's research by Samoan NZ born Togiasso (2017) investigated six Samoan women who helped establish three licensed Samoan Aoga Amata in Christchurch NZ. Using an autoethnographic methodology, Togiasso included her own life story as a mother who took her daughter to Aoga Amata. She went from parent helper to ECE teacher and now to ECE university lecturer.

These findings confirm that Aoga Amata is a place of cultural transmission "where they could pass on *fa'asamoa* – the values, beliefs, knowledge and practices to their own children" (Togiasso, 2017, p. 116). Aoga Amata is seen as a place of belonging, such as "an extension of the Samoan village and church for children, family and the Samoan community" (p.118). Samoan women as Poutu of Aoga Amata, whereby Togiasso (2017) also confirms that women are "the strength of her family, of the church and Aoga Amata" (p. 120).

Faiva o le Faatufugaga fa'a le Faiaoga (Pedagogies in Teaching) – endorsed by the spirit of collective

Pepe Meamea warrants specialised pedagogy that would amplify the strengths and uniqueness of Samoan children's *agatausili* or cultural values (Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017). These are *alofa* (love), *fa'aaloalo* (respect) and *tautua* (service). Tima (2013) argues that "the essence of *tautua* relies heavily on obedience, loyalty and mutual respect, but foremost in *alofa* or love" (p. 51). Liuaana (2013) unpacks *alofa* whereby '*alo*' refers to one's stomach facing '*fa*' or four directions; to imply how love is unconditional. That to show love when in the company of Pepe Meamea, mere presence is insufficient but to always 'face the child' when talking with them. Similarly, Palea'i-Foroti (2013) proposes *alo mai alo atu* (face to face), which mirrors the Māori *kanohi ki te kanohi* (O'Carroll, 2013) to illustrate the depth of love and respect in a culturally relevant manner. *Fa'aaloalo* also warrants care and respect to be demonstrated with people facing each other (literally means stomach to stomach).

The stomach is a special part of the human body as it is the home for a newborn after conception. *Ma'itaga* refers to being pregnant,

which Tui Atua (2009) elaborates as *ma'itagata*, meaning “to be ill with a new *tagata* (human being)” (p.180). The stomach or *alo* is the home of a new life and as the foetus grows, so does the physical appearance of the expectant mother to highlight living. *Alo* is also a polite reference to children, for instance, ‘*e toa fia ou alo?*’ (How many children do you have?). Positioning the body by means of facing stomach to stomach and face to face is the absolute illustration of respect, love, and service.

How Samoan Pepe Meamea learns requires teachers to be constantly interacting using *alo mai alo atu* to ensure watching, listening, and practising (Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017) is fully enacted to support children’s learning. Observation is paramount for children’s learning (Morgan, 1993). How Samoan IKS is learnt requires informed, cultural, and skilful observation, intentional or non-intentional (Gaskins & Paradise, 2010). Others, such as Lancy (2008), initiated ‘chore curriculum’ (p. 235) to argue that children learn by watching adults. Samoan children enter Aoga Amata with observational experiences from watching their parents, siblings, families, churches, and community events (birthdays, weddings, funerals, to name a few) which provide “models for imitative learning and provide structure to and connections between these experiences” (Berryman, 1991. p.3). Samoan children are valued by the *fa’asamoa* (Simanu, 2002) due to their responsibilities enacted in their cultural roles and rights. Samoan children’s learning relies on ‘observational choring’ such as *mulimulita’i* (Pepe Meamea Cluster, August 2021). The ‘chore’ of observing supports their learning. In sum, children learn by listening, watching, and doing.

A view from Tomasello (1999) of children constantly learning cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes through “joint attention and imitative learning” (p.513) is popular amongst many similar arguments; however, what remains the point of difference for Pepe Meamea to start with, is the importance of positioning. Conceptualising *alo mai alo atu* as the initial pedagogy for Pepe Meamea framing is the point of connection between children and teachers physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. The reciprocated nuances depicted in encountering a physical display of stomach to stomach is a point of connection between generations.

Conclusion

This article presents the initial phase of a Samoan TLRI research project that seeks to affirm Samoan collective IKS in Pepe Meamea and its relevance to ECE in New Zealand. Pepe Meamea is holistic, collective, intergenerational, and ancestral, with deep ties to Samoan histories, ancestral lands and lifeworlds. As a unique contribution to ECE

within New Zealand, special attention is demanded by Pepe Meamea to affirm cultural belonging and wellbeing as part of teacher culturally inclusive pedagogy within early childhood settings. Pepe Meamea is the beginning of an internationalising of Samoan IKS pertaining to the love, respect, and service of our young treasures.

Glossary

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Agatausili | Cultural values |
| Aoga Amata | Samoan early childhood centres |
| Alo | Children and/or stomach, abdomen |
| Alo mai alo atu | Face to face |
| Alofa | Love |
| Fa'aaloalo | Respect |
| Fa'asamoa | Samoan culture |
| Faanōnōmanū | Collective requesting and asking God for divine blessing |
| Fa'alupega | Formal village salutations |
| Faiva o le Faatufugaga | Pedagogies in Teaching |
| Faa-le faiaoga | |
| Fale | House |
| Feagaiga | Sacred kinship relationship between sister and brother |
| Gāfa | Knowledge of pedigree (genealogy) |
| Itumalo | District |
| Kanohi ki te kanohi | Face to face |
| Ma'itaga | To be pregnant |
| Ma'itagata | To be ill with a new tagata |
| Malo | nation |
| Moe manatunatu | Ancestral dialogue during deep sleep |
| Mulimulita'i | Watching observantly (observational choring) |
| Nuu | Village |
| Pepe Meamea | Infants |
| Poutu | strongest pole that holds up the fale, used as a metaphor in this paper referring to women as the backbone of their families and communities (Samoan ECE Association in Aotearoa) |
| SAASIA Sosaiete Aoga | |
| Amata Samoa I Aotearoa | |
| Suli | Descendants or heirs |
| Tagata | Human being, people |
| Tapu | Sacred |
| Tautua | Serving others |
| Te Kōhanga Reo Māori | full immersion ECE |
| Tofāa'anolasi | Samoan Critical discourse analysis |
| Taupou | Ceremonial virgin title |
| Tofā | Sleep of a high chief |
| Tofi | Heritage from God and ancestors |
| | Cultural responsibility |
| Vā | Relational space |

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Note

- ¹ SAASIA Sunpix Award winner (2020) The New Zealand SunPix Awards recognise outstanding individuals in six awards categories - Pacific Community Leadership, Pacific Education, Pacific Enterprise, Pacific Emerging Leadership Award, Pacific Health and Wellbeing, and Pacific Service Excellence.

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