

**Early Childhood Centres of Innovation (COI)
Action Research at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa**

Report 8
**Further Update Report On
Action Research At The A'oga Fa'a Samoa**

**Progress Report for the Ministry of Education
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Introduction

This project investigates the relationship between learning and language continuity as children and educators at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa (the Pasifika early childhood education centre of innovation) make transitions from the point of entry through to beginning school. A related intention is to document aspects of the identity, strength, and confidence of the children.

In November 2004, a fully detailed research report on this project at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa was submitted to the Ministry of Education. The present report provides updated details of progress on the action research from September 2004 to March 2005.

Research Questions

The project focuses on two key research questions:

1. What helps learning and language continuity as children make transitions within and from the A'oga Fa'a Samoa?
2. How can the key approaches that help learning and language continuity be implemented in practice?

The action research project is designed to address the above research questions, within the context of the A'oga Fa'a Samoa and its community, and for the benefit of its community. Collaborative, active involvement of key staff members is a key feature of this action research.

The sampling design includes children at two transition points and the staff at the centre. The transition points are (1) the move at around 2 years 6 months from the infants' and toddlers' area to the over-2s area and (2) the transition from the A'oga Fa'a Samoa to the primary school on the adjacent site.

This report updates the progress of the research, focusing on analyses of data collected as part of a further cycle of action research (September 2004 to March 2005).

Action Research Processes

Action Research Cycles

At the A'oga Fa'a Samoa, the Samoan-language immersion centre of innovation, action research approaches are similar to those used recently in New Zealand studies, to implement an action research spiral approach (Cardno, 2003; Carr, May, & Podmore, 2002). The spiral approach includes observing, planning, acting and reflecting (following a model derived from Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, and with reference to Cardno, 2003, and Wadsworth, 1991). An overview of the research literature on action research and relevant Pacific research was presented in the November 2004 progress report. For details of the ethical considerations and methodology for this project, refer also to the November report (Podmore, Airini, & the A'oga Fa'a Samoa, 2004, November).

Centre educators have continued to track small groups of children as they make these transitions:

- the move at around 2 years 6 months from the infants' and toddlers' area to the over-2s area;
- transition from the Samoan-language early childhood centre to the primary school on the adjacent site.

The children's transitions have guided the timing of the cycles and spirals of the action research. As small groups of toddlers have moved to the over-2s area, and as small groups of children have made the transition to school, centre educators observed the transitioning children.

Action Research Tools

Focus Group Interviews

An initial advisory group (convened 20 February 2003 to consult and finalise the research proposal) continues to provide advice for the research project. Key interviews/discussions of the focus group have yielded useful data for the study. In-depth discussions around the focus group topics/questions have provided background information pertaining to the first research question: "What helps learning and

language continuity as children make transitions within and from the Samoan language immersion centre? The advisory group continues to serve as a focus group, and in-depth focus group interviews were organised for the key informants. A copy of the key questions for the focus groups is presented as Appendix A.

During the recent action research cycle, the voices of parents of the participating children (that is, the groups of children currently making transitions) have been included more specifically. Parents of participating children were invited to a focus group meeting held on 11 August 2004. Another parent focus group meeting took place on 10 November 2004.

Observations

Teachers observed individual children, and small groups of children, as they make transitions (together with their “A’oga Fa’a Samoa primary caregiver”) within or from the early childhood centre. Centre teachers who have a key role in the COI research have systematically coded their observations of both children’s and teachers’ interactions across the strands of *Te Wh_riki* (Ministry of Education, 1996).

The intention is to record and reflect on examples of practices which teachers found to be facilitating transition, and/or encouraging children’s Samoan language learning and development. During the research spirals, other staff members also continued their regular practice of writing learning stories about children, and these are a further rich source of data.

Diary Records

Alongside their observations, teachers who have a key role in the COI research have continued to make diary records across the five strands of *Te Wh_riki*, the early childhood curriculum: belonging, well-being, communication, exploration, and contribution. The intention was to reflect, both on children’s experiences of transition, and on teachers’ practices, holistically across the strands of *Te Wh_riki*. Details of the diary headings are presented as Appendix B. The information recorded includes useful examples of teachers fostering children’s sense of belonging, together with their well-being and exploration in the new space, and of teachers encouraging communication in Samoan. There are also examples, during transition, of contribution (children’s looking after others arriving).

Interviews with Children

Teachers involved in the COI research team have also made audio records of children talking about their transitions. A set of suggested questions was compiled for educators to ask the children (in the Samoan language). The questions at transition points, for example, are “*What are you looking forward to (doing) at school?*”, “*What do you like about school?*” or (before and after the child moves across to the over 2s area within the centre “*What do like best at....(the centre)?*” (see Appendix C).

These interviews were prepared prior to the first cycle of the action research, and trialled with some of the children during that cycle. However, it became apparent at that stage that the range of data collection tasks was probably too diverse and demanding of staff time. This led to the collective decision that teachers would concentrate on observations and their reflective diary records for the second spiral of the action research (i.e., the spiral which tracked the group of toddlers and of young children who made transitions during the first term of 2004).

After reflection and further planning, it was decided that this current cycle (September-December 2004) would concentrate on interviewing the children making transitions to school at that time, as well as incorporating their parents’ voices by inviting parental participation at focus group meetings in August and November 2004. The present report on the research from September 2004 to March 2005 provides some preliminary excerpts from the first set of analysed data from interviews with children who moved from the centre to school. It also includes observations and diary reflections focused on a further (“new”) group of toddlers moving up from the under-2s area.

Findings September 2004-March 2005

Language Continuity and Transition

Observations and Teacher Diaries

Samples in the action the research spirals September 2004-March 2005

From September 2004-March 2005, teachers observed 6 individual children as they made the transition from the infants' and toddlers' area to the over 2s area. Examples of the coded observations and teachers' related reflections are presented in this report. In addition, another teacher interviewed several children before and after they made the transition from the A'oga to the primary school located on the adjacent site.

Transition to the Over-2s Area

Innovative Practices

To set the data in context, a summary of the transition processes for the children at enrolment, and when they are aged over 2 years 6 months, is presented below (as presented in the November 2004 report).

Transition processes for infants and toddlers: The Primary Caregiver

A *Primary Caregiver* approach (influenced by attachment theory) was developed at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa. A primary/lead caregiver works with a group of children from their enrolment at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa. This approach has been established to build strong relationships between child, family, and teacher.

Children are enrolled with a lead care giver according to their age, birth-date, making sure that small ratios are kept at all times. This lead caregiver moves with the children through each area – *babies – infants- toddlers - young children*. In this way children, families, and staff are able to build up strong relationships, develop strengths and interests, and extend learning and language.

When children move from the building of the under-2_-year-old children to the building for older children the staff member moves with them.

This is the area where the research has been documented through observation diary recordings, individual portfolios, and parent feed back.

This transition is timed to coincide with primary school holidays, when not so many children attend, and the quieter atmosphere provides a calmer environment for transition.

Belonging, Learning, and Teaching during Transition

Observations in this cycle continue to show that understanding where to put their shoes when making a transition within the centre is important to children's sense of belonging in the new environment. The importance of removing shoes inside, and placing them in appropriate places, is consistent with cultural practices in Pasifika contexts.

Like their counterparts in the first action research cycle, this new group of young children in transition were also concerned about where to place their bags and belongings. They were helped by a new practice the teachers introduced after the first cycle of the research. The observations and reflections below provide examples of their experiences.

20/9/04 *Belonging* Child A___

A--- took the teacher's hand and said, "Look". She (the child) pointed her hand at her photo on her container and said, "A___(her own name)". Then she moved onto another child in the transition group's container and said ___(that child's name). She kept walking down pointing at her group's photos saying their names.

Teacher's reflection:

A___ was excited about her photo on her container. It helped her to know where her bag went when she came in the morning and when the teacher wanted to know where her bag was. It helped her also to know when the other children's bags were by their photos. Knowing she has a place to call her own.)

During the first spirals of the action research, the teachers had observed that it was important for the young children in transition to know where their bags and belongings should be placed. Consequently, they developed the system (observed in the excerpt above) where the photograph of the each child marks the place where his/her bag or belongings are placed in the new environment. The teachers have observed that this new practice, of labeling using the child's photograph, is working well in terms of enhancing children's sense of belonging in the new space:

Great idea by the teacher to put photos there. The children love seeing their photos and this helps them to recognise their names. It also stimulates communication between children and staff.

There is also further evidence from these observations, that understanding where to sleep in the new environment remains important.

20/9/04 - *Belonging*: Child E___

After morning tea, E___ was wiping her nose with a tissue, the teacher told her to put the tissue in the rubbish. E___ turned around and looked for the rubbish tin that was usually under the tissue box. There was nothing there so she walked outside and started walking to the under-2s side. The teacher called her back and showed her where the other rubbish bin was.

After eating their lunch they (Teacher S's group) started walking to the under-2s side to sleep. The teacher told them that they were sleeping at the other side now.

E___ was excited about her bed. When they woke up, they all walked across to the under-2s side, after getting dressed.

The teacher-researcher, reflecting on the observations of the child, wrote that:

With the key teacher away, other teachers realise the children still needed reminding re where they will sleep.

Commenting on the coded observational excerpt above, she noted that:

The teacher reminded the children where they sleep, and helped them to know where things go. She also showed E___ where the other rubbish tins were. They still went back to the under-2s area sometimes, and she helped slowly to settle them in their new environment.

A related observation of another child in the transition group, recorded the next day, shows how the children needed reassurance about where to sleep when their primary caregiver/lead teacher was absent:

After lunch S___ went over to the under-2s side. She took off her pants and went to the bedroom, looked around for her bed. When she couldn't find it, she asked the teacher, "Where's my bed?"

The over-2s teacher, realising that S___ was missing, came down to look for her and took her back. She explained to her that she's now a big girl and will be sleeping where the other children sleep from now on. S___ nodded her head and said, "Bottle, bottle".

Teachers also noted that, during the first days after their transition across the over-2_s building, children showed an interest in the different furniture and equipment in the new space:

21/9/04 - Child S___

S___ got up and walked over to the next table and got one chair and put it next to hers. She brought three more chairs after that. When the teacher asked her who those chairs were for she said, "Mine and T___'s" (child who'd just joined her). T___ walked over and she said to her, "That's yours T___".

Teachers' reflections:

Chairs are new to them not having chairs in ~~the~~ under-2s area. A new experience for them to sit on chairs at A'oga.

Two spirals of the first research cycle showed that the innovative practice having the teacher (their A'oga Fa'a Samoa "primary caregiver") making the transition with the children, is effective. Furthermore, observations collected since September 2004, during the second cycle of the action research, show how another group of children moving to the over- 2_-year-old children's area communicated their concern to one another, and to adults present, when their primary caregiver was absent.

Transition with the Teacher: Learning in the New Space

The following observations were recorded when the primary caregiver of this group (Teacher S) was absent on sick leave for several days.

20/9/04: On the first day of Teacher S and her group's transition to the over-2s side, T__ was the first to arrive. She was happy to see the teacher who was already there. The teacher said, "Talofa T__". T__ replied "Talofa (Teacher M__)" Teacher M then asked her how she was and T__ said, "Manuia fa'afetai" (I'm well, thank you). She then went and sat down and ate her piece of bread. E__ came; the teacher greeted her and asked how she was. She replied, "Manuia fa'afetai" Then E__ saw child T__, she walked over and sat with her. When V__ came, they both stood up and said Talofa to him. V__ walked over to them. A__ came, they clapped their hands and ran to her. They brought her back to where they sat before they all shared T__'s bread. T__ saw S__ come in; she stood up saying to them, "Va'ai S__" (Look at S__). They all went to meet her then they came and sat down talking happily together.

T__ asked the teacher, "Leai Teacher S?" (Is Teacher S not here yet?). The teacher replied "E lei sau Teacher S__" (Teacher S is not here). T__ then told her group saying "Leai Teacher S". Later on T asked Teacher M again, saying "Teacher M, sau Teacher S?" (Is Teacher S here?). Teacher M replied, "Leai, ua ma'i Teacher S". (No, Teacher S is sick). Then she went and repeated it to the other children in her group, "Leai Teacher S, Leai Teacher S" (No Teacher S).

That day S__ and A__ went to the under-2s for a little while. Most of the day these children (the small group in transition) were seen playing together.

The teacher/researchers' diary records included these reflections about the children's sense of *belonging*, (and *well-being*, *exploration*, *communication*, and *contribution*) and what the teacher did to foster this:

Belonging: The children were excited to see each other and being in the new environment. Teacher M (encouraged a sense of belonging in the new space) – she greeted the children, welcoming them and making them feel comfortable in the new environment knowing that Teacher S (their primary caregiver/key teacher wouldn't be there.

Well-being: The children showed a growing capacity to identify their emotions and to be independent, knowing that familiar adults are around. The teacher responded to the children's attempts to communicate their feelings in a respectful way.

Exploration: (Thinking/ideas) Even though the children were happy to see each other, T__ still noticed that Teacher S (their primary caregiver/key teacher) was not there, and asked the teacher about her. The teacher explained to T__ why teacher S was not there.

Given that these young children were concerned to know where their primary caregiver/key teacher was during and after their transition with her, talking about her and her whereabouts became a topic of strong interest that seemed to stimulate conversations in the Samoan language. As well as being important to their belonging and sense of well-being, then, the quest to find out more about their primary caregiver/key teacher also appeared to challenge these children to communicate in Samoan among themselves and with other teachers who were nearby. The teachers encouraged the children to use short sentences in Samoan.

The teacher/researcher made these reflective comments:

Communication: (Samoan language development) All the children were familiar with the greetings in the morning “talofa, manuia fa’afetai.” The teacher helped them to respond. What she said helped T__ to make short sentences to communicate with the teacher.

For months after their primary caregiver/key teacher returned from sick leave, the children continued to show the same strong bond with her. Their primary caregiver/key teacher recorded:

9/11/04 – E__, T__ and Teacher S:

It was lotu time. I sat down on the mat - E__ came sat on my lap. T__ saw us and came over calling my name. She tried to push E__ off. E said to her, “My (Teacher S)”. T__, nearly crying, said “No my (Teacher S)”, holding onto my hand. I told E__ to sit on one side while T__ sat on the other.

The teacher-researcher reflected in her diary, with reference to the strand of Belonging that both T__ and E__ wanted to sit on their primary caregiver’s lap. One child says to the other “My S__”:

This shows how close she was to Teacher S, not wanting to share her. Teacher S helped them to understand that they can both sit with her. By doing this, she was letting them know that she loved both of them.

This primary caregiver/lead teacher actually left the centre in January 2005, and departed overseas. The teacher-researcher noted that, before she left, the children had just spent 3 weeks without her (during the Christmas holiday period when the centre was closed). “It probably helped, their being away for 3 weeks.” Then, prior to leaving, she sat down with the children and explained that she was leaving, and the

children seemed to accept this. Two weeks after she had left, no-one from “her” group of children had mentioned her. At this point, the teacher-researcher asked the children in Samoan “Where is (Teacher S)?” She noted that: “The children knew. One child (T__) said “Alu i Australia” (“In Australia”). The other two said “Va’alele” (“In an aeroplane”). Sensitive communication by their teacher had apparently helped them to adapt to her departure.

Learning Together as a Group

As well as their attachment to the primary caregiver/key teacher, this small group of transition children who were moving up through the centre together, also showed strong bonding as a group and looked after one another, consistent with the aiga philosophy. In the observations above, one of the children (T__) communicated to the other children the information about their teacher’s absence. The teacher-researcher reflected later that day:

Contribution: (looking after others arriving/aiga philosophy) Even though Teacher S wasn’t there, when the children found out they accepted that and looked after each other all day, playing together.

She also noted that, even by March 2005, one child (T__ as above) was still taking a lead role in looking after the others in the group. By later March, T__ herself had left the centre to go overseas with her parents. By then, the other children were well used to being in the new space, and they were closely bonded as a group.

Summary

These observations and reflections provide further evidence that the innovative transition process, of having the primary caregiver/key teacher move with a small group of children from under-2_-year-old children’s area to the building for older children, fosters children’s well-being, communication, contribution (in terms of aiga philosophy), and sense of belonging in the new space.

Transition to School

Innovative Approaches to Transition to School

There is a close connection between the A’oga and the school, located on the same block of land. A staff member from the centre accompanies the children to the school classroom to observe their transition experiences. Details of the transition-to-school process are summarised below.

Transition Process for Children into the Bi-Lingual Samoan classroom of Richmond Road Primary School

The A’oga Fa’a Samoa is situated on the site of the primary school and is regarded as a part of the “*school family*” - a part of the community of learners attached to the school.

The A’oga joins with the school in all the school assemblies each Friday, performing on a regular basis with the bi-lingual Samoan classroom. The A’oga also joins in powhiri and other whole school community events that regularly occur during the school year.

The oldest group of 4-year-old children begin a *transition process* with their teacher, who takes them once a week to the bi-lingual classroom in the primary school. This enables the children to become confident in their knowledge of the school area, classroom, teachers and of course to meet up with their brothers, sisters and friends who have previously been apart of the A’oga Fa’a Samoa.

These 4-year-old children also have a time each week to go to the school library to read and take out books, which is part of the transition knowledge and also is encouraging literacy for them.

These innovative practices are enhancing understanding and interpretation of the actions of children who make the transition.

Communication and Language Continuity

Interviews with Children

Interviews with the children were carried out to document and discuss their use of the Samoan language before, during, and after their transition to school. Brief examples of some preliminary excerpts and reflections are presented in this report. More

detailed data on children's language on and after transition will be presented in the September 2005 milestone report.

The teacher carrying out the interviews noted in February 2005 that:

There are 5 children, 2 of the 3 that have already started school have maintained their fa'a Samoa from the a'oga Fa'a Samoa up to the bilingual unit...

Excerpts from the interviews suggest that these children were looking forward to going to school, and that they enjoyed communicating in Samoan with the A'oga teacher-researcher when she interviewed them. Prior to moving to school, one child talked about school in this way:

Teacher-researcher: *Talofa H___*

Child: *Talofa ___*

Teacher-researcher: *O a mai oe?* (How are you?)

Child: *Manuia faafetai lava* (I'm fine thanks)

Teacher-researcher: *O a mea e fiafia oe e fai pe a alu i le Aoga?* What do you want to do at school?

Child: *E taalo ma ___ ma ___ ma fia taalo maths* (I play with ___ and ___ and I like maths)

The child continued to make similar comments after transition: friends and playing on the computer were important. This child's length of utterances in Samoan appeared to decline when he was interviewed at the time of transition (that is, during the weeks he made the transition), but then appeared to increase in a later interview recorded in 2005 (several months after he moved to school).

Reflections on Children's Language and on Becoming a Teacher-Researcher

The teacher-researcher who interviewed the children reflected firstly on the experiences and language use of the children whom she interviewed, and secondly on her own role and experience as a beginning teacher-researcher. Her reflections on the children's language and transition included:

The children have settled well, they've made new friends because of the ongoing transition that we do every Wednesday from the A'oga Fa'a Samoa to the primary school and also attending different activities (at school) during the week (before moving up to school).

This teacher also wrote reflectively about the importance for the children of:

Knowing their surroundings and being comfortable in their environment and also their (school) teacher.

She recorded these points about being a “novice teacher-researcher”:

When it was my turn I thought to myself ‘Oh my gosh! What am I going to do?’ All I knew was that I had to do observation on the children that were going to school. Then our (lead research associate___) sat down with me and explained what needed to be done for this part of the research, there were two options (for the interviews) one was audio and the other was video. I tried the video but some of the children were shy and others wanted to look at themselves after, then I tried the audio (This was more appropriate).

A further comment from her new experience as a “practitioner-researcher” was:

Doing this research has been a challenge for me and I now know how difficult it can be sometimes, trying to find the time to the interviews and also finding the time to sit down and do a reflection on oneself.

This teacher-researcher reflected again on the experience and commented further to the research associate:

I found doing it in a quiet space good. It was good to catch up with how they were (after moving to school). It was good they moved to school in groups of two - two in September and two in November.

Teachers at the A'oga Fa'a Samoa had prior experience of the Exemplars project (learning stories)

Where there was lots of reflection from the child's side. But in this new (COI) research we've got to do more reflection on ourselves, on the teacher.

Parents' Voices

A wider group of parents is now actively involved in the focus group meetings. In addition, the facilitator of the focus group prepared a set of short questions for parents of children who made the transition to primary school (on the adjacent site) during the most recent cycle of the action research. There were three open-ended questions, designed to hear about parents' perspectives about transition to school. (see Appendix D). In addition to the data presented here, there are focus group notes, currently being transcribed, that will extend and support the preliminary information presented below.

Important factors for Transition

Factors that the parents of parents of 6 transitioning children identified as important to make transition smoother included some policies and practices already in place, like location and visits:

"Having A'oga connected to a primary school bilingual unit"

"Having our children as 4-year-olds go up to bilingual unit once a week"

"Participating in school assembly with the primary school".

"Weekly visits from the A'oga to the unit once he turned 4 made it a very familiar place. I also think the assembly performances are great for helping them feel part of the school at an early age."

"Starting at the A'oga was a positive step, and helped her transition to school. Having her friends from the A'oga attend the same school was also a huge help."

Familiarity of the older children in the school was a related factor:

"I think the transition was made smoother due to the fact that (the child) knew many of the older children as most of them have been through the A'oga, he already had an older brother in the unit..."

The teacher was also important:

"Having a warm, caring, friendly teacher like ___ who was previously with A'oga is a great help and relief for me as a parent."

“I suppose the familiarity of the school and teachers”.

Parent commitment was a further factor:

“Having a group of parents who are committed and passionate about providing resources for bilingual unit (for e.g., trips)

“Knowing the parents already, made it comfortable for us to send ___ to the primary school. We felt the parents in general were very supportive and were enthusiastic in ensuring the primary school excelled.”

Communication (across parents, children, teachers, and the community) was clearly a key factor. There were also some concerns about communication of information and expectations:

“I would have liked to have known what children were going up with mine, and how many children. And what did they do there (at school)? What would the teacher like/expect the children to be able to do when starting school e.g., writing their own name.”

Impact of Transition on Samoan Language

From the parents’ perspective, language continuity was important. Several talked about the continuity of language across home, early childhood centre, and school. There were some very supportive comments, and some concerns were voiced:

We continue fa’asamoa at home, however we are concerned that some of the Samoan language may be lost in the bilingual unit (depending on future staffing there). It’s still too early at this stage to note the impact on our child who (has just) started.

I felt the transition impacted negatively on (our child’s) language as the English component (60:40) is too high for children coming from an immersion environment. (Our child) speaks much less Samoan at home now, and it is quite hard to encourage him to speak more. Language continuity is helped by being in an environment where they can continually hear and practice speaking it, as well as expressing thoughts and ideas.¹

¹ Since these data were collected in October and November 2004, a new teacher/team leader has been appointed to the primary school, to work with the older children. The current teachers in the new entrant class all have (or have had) children attending the A’oga: “They are very keen to initiate 80%:20% Samoan: English, and so teachers are using Samoan every day with the children in the school classroom” This is the class

How is the Samoan/English structured at the school?

(The transition is) just a continuation of (our child's) Samoan language. The support from the teachers was great. (Our child) has made steady improvement, and we are generally happy with her development!

Through the use of the questionnaire, and the recording of parents' perceptions at the focus group meetings, this cycle of the research has yielded more in-depth information on parents' views, experiences, and aspirations regarding transition to school and their children's Samoan language continuity.

that the children move on to from the A'oga. (Centre manager A'oga Fa'a Samoa, verified by the school principal at the focus group meeting 17 March 2005.

Summary Synthesis of Trends and Themes

Summary Update: Key Themes

The following summary presents key themes and findings from the action research to date. Sections presented in bold italics are new information or findings from this most recent cycle of the action research.

- For children moving from the infants' and toddlers' area to the over-2s area of the centre, knowing where shoes and bags belong, clothes are hung, and about sleeping places and patterns is important.

*Evidence to date: Teachers' observations of two separate groups of young children during transition, and related teacher diary records. **Teachers' observations of a third group of children who made the transition in September-December 2004, and related teacher diary records.***

Teachers report that a new initiative, of labelling the place where a child's bag belongs using the child's own photograph, is working well for the children in transition and their teacher (Action research cycle 2 – September 2004-March 2005).

- Having the A'oga Fa'a Samoa "primary/lead caregiver" move with "her" group of children during their transitions contributes to the children's sense of belonging and their security.

*Preliminary evidence: Observations of groups of children during transition, related teacher diary records. **Observations of a third group of children, including their communications and experiences when their primary caregiver/key teacher was absent through sickness. This means that there is now evidence showing the impact of both the presence, and the absence, of the primary caregiver.***

- Innovative transition practices (e.g., "spending time in the new entrants' bi-lingual class in the primary school"), and language immersion practices, may support children's competence and confidence to express themselves in Samoan, and their identity.

*Preliminary evidence: Critical incidents analyses (category 1), observations of groups of children during transition, related teacher diary records, (preliminary) child interview. **Interviews with children before and after their transition to school, September 2004-March 2005.***

- Teachers' observations and reflections support innovative practices and language continuity.

*Preliminary evidence: Critical incidents analyses (category 4), teachers' observations of groups of children during transition, and related teacher diary records. **Teachers' observations and reflections during the second action research cycle.***

- **The process of being involved in the action research and related mentoring has led to staff development, and to increased reflection and action to enhance children's thinking (Fleer, 1995).**

*Staff meetings, including a meeting with the whole staff and the researcher during the second cycle. **Teachers' observations and reflections before and after this meeting.** (In addition, staff are now moving into further related professional development through participation in the Ministry of Education's Exemplar project, March-December 2005).*

- **Parents of children in transition, and more representatives from the school, are becoming part of the focus group/the community of learners.**

Focus group meetings in the second cycle.

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Appendix A

Focus Group Interview Questions

<p>Early Childhood Centres of Innovation (COI) Action Research at the A’oga Fa’asamoa</p>
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QUESTIONS/TOPICS FOR FOCUS GROUPS

1. How do we assist Samoan language communication in the centre?
Probe: Links to Te Wh_riki (Ministry of Education, 1996)

2. What strategies or practices do we use to facilitate children’s transition:
- From the infants’ and toddlers’ area to the over-2s area?
 - From the over 2s area to the primary school?

Probes: focus on “critical incidents” (Airini & Brooker, 1999)

3. What are our main expectations/aspirations for children at the centre? (*centre participants*)

4. What are our main expectations/aspirations for children moving from this centre to the school? (*school participants*).

Appendix B

Teachers' Diary Headings

<p>Early Childhood Centres of Innovation (COI) Action Research at the A'oga Fa'asamoa</p>
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TEACHER'S DIARY HEADINGS

What Children Did to show

Belonging

a sense of belonging in the new space
(settling)

What Teachers Did to foster

Belonging

a sense of belonging in the new space

Wellbeing

Independence
(mealtimes)

Wellbeing

independence

Exploration

(physical – e.g. playground)

Exploration

(thinking/ideas)

Communication

Samoan language development

Communication

Samoan language development

Contribution

(looking after others arriving/aiga philosophy)

Contribution

Appendix C

Child Interview Questions

Early Childhood Centres of Innovation Action Research at the A'oga Fa'asamoa

Video/Audio Records of Children talking about Transitions

Steps in the process:

- Ask each child a question
- Videotape/audio tape the question and the child's responses
- Audio discussions 10-15 minutes in length
- Write down the child's name and the date, and then
- Pass each tape (with date of recording) to (lead research associate) to arrange transcription in Samoan (and translate from Samoan to English so we have records in both languages)

Questions to ask (in the Samoan language)

Transition to school

Interview points and questions

For 4-year-old children (before they go to school)

What are you looking forward to (doing) at school?

For children in the first weeks at school:

What do you like best about school?

For children after 3 months at school:

What do you like best about school?

Transition to the over-2 area

Before moving across:

What do like best at A'oga?

Two weeks after moving across:

What do like best at A'oga?

About 3 months after moving across:

What do like best at A'oga?

