



Research Report

Soso'o le fau ma le fau Connect the fibre with another fibre

Supporting successful transitions of Pacific tamaiti from early childhood education to school.

Leali'ie'e Tufulasi Taleni, Dr Saili Aukuso, Dr Sarah Te One, Glenda Albon, and Ruta McKenzie
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Fa'afetai | Acknowledgements

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We also could not have undertaken this journey without the drivers of the research: the school principals, management teams, and faia'oga (teachers) from the participating schools and early childhood services. This research would not have been possible without your commitment especially during the COVID-19 restrictions from 2021 – August 2022.

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(Leali'ie'e Tufulasi Taleni, Dr Saili Aukuso, Dr Sarah Te One, Dr Pam O'Connell, Glenda Albon, Alyssa McArthur, Keryn Davies and Ruta McKenzie)

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Upu tomua | Foreword

Warm Pacific greetings!

Ke mou o mo ia (Tongan), vakanuinui vinaka na soko (Fijian), Malo te tiu (Tokelauan), Kia manuia (Cook Island), Dirava se e namomu (Papua New Guinea), la manuia le fa'atamasoali'iga (Samoan) – these words from various Pacific languages speak with messages of blessings and optimism for the future of Pacific education.

***'Fofola le fala se'i ta talanoa'* (Samoan),
'Fofola e fala kae talanoa e kāinga' (Tongan)
'Spread the mat and prepare to talk'**



Spreading the mat is a metaphor for presenting the kaupapa for the advancement of Pacific education in Aotearoa New Zealand, discussed in a Talanoa with leaders and educators. It is a metaphor for coming together to collaborate with ideas, wisdom, experience, and perspectives for the educational success of Pacific students. In doing this Talanoa, the participants were contributing to the lalagaina (weaving) of a new mat, the fala of Soalaupulega (dialogue and collaboration of solutions).

It is an honour to be a part of this Pacific education malaga (journey), contributing widely to the weaving of this fala (mat). Pacific educational success is at the heart of all Pacific families and community aspirations. One of the main reasons for leaving their Pacific shores and fanua (lands) was in search of a better future for their āiga through education.

This report is woven by the voices from the moana loloto o mafaufauga (ocean of deep thinking) to capture the penina o tomai ma agava'a loloto (pearls of deep knowledge and wisdom). A Samoan saying – ole tuamafa lava sa fili i malae – refers to well-thought through ideas and perspectives, carefully voiced for the weaving of solutions. This report is a completed woven fala of effective pedagogical practices



and leadership experiences that are culturally responsive and inclusively developed for all Pacific learners.

In addition, it captures the voices of children, parents, and teachers about improving the educational engagement of Pacific students, to be shared with other communities of learners (teachers, school leaders, specialised educators, families, and community) to improve educational outcomes for Pacific learners.

la tausisi i le moa ole ala means, keep your eyes on the centre line. Metaphorically, the child is at the heart of this work. The Pacific Community leaders' words shone in this project when they said:

It is always our expectation and desire for our Pacific children to achieve and perform well academically without losing their identities, languages and cultures through the process of achieving.

It is the intention of this report on 'effective transitions from Early Childhood to Schools' to provide 'educators' with suggestions and recommendations for strategies and practices to honour these words:

Ole upega e fili ile ao ae talatala ile po
- The net that became entangled in the night will be disentangled in the morning.

Malo galue, malo tautua – in humility and respect, I offer this foreword with immense acknowledgement and pride of my research colleagues and educators.

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Senior Lecturer, University of Canterbury



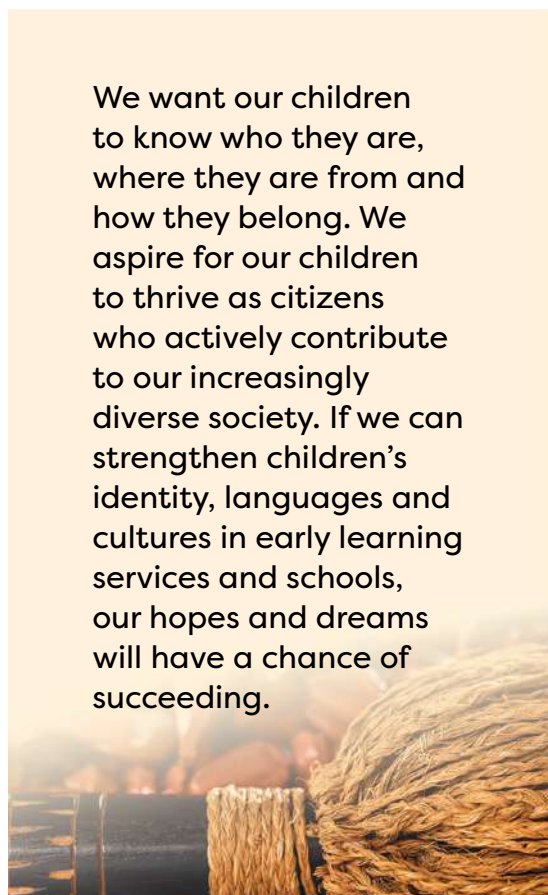
Aotelega | Executive Summary

In early 2018, CORE Education was invited by the Rātā Foundation to submit an action research proposal with a focus on transitions to school designed to effect systemic change in this important stage of a child's learning journey – to ensure life-long learning pathways for all tamariki. Two projects were undertaken – one in English-medium schools, with a focus on new entrant kaiako (Te One, McAllister, and Whiting, 2020), and in one in Māori-medium kōhanga reo and Kura Kaupapa with a focus on whānau (Gully and Hohepa, 2021).

This collaborative participatory action research project *Soso'o le fau ma le fau* focuses on our Pacific āiga and fānau. It utilises the Samoan mūāgagana (saying) 'Soso'o le fau ma le fau' (Connect the fibre with another fibre) – the process of connecting one fibre with another provided the cultural metaphor for this project. A Pacific child's confidence in their identities, languages and cultures¹ can be understood as a metaphorical fau and the transition from early learning services to school is the process of connecting the fibres from one environment to another – physically, culturally, linguistically, and spiritually. Strong connections are supported when the new environment affirms the Pacific child's identities, languages and cultures and those of their āiga leading to successful transitions and continuity in learning.

The aspirations of Pacific fānau are for our children to succeed in education. Statistically, however, Pacific children lag behind their peers and this is now shamefully accepted as a truism. This is wrong. This is unfair. And, this needn't be the pathway for Pacific learners. We know that children's first experiences at school can have a lasting impact on their learning and, for our Pacific communities, the stakes are higher than average if those impacts are negative.

We want our children to know who they are, where they are from and how they belong. We aspire for our children to thrive as citizens who actively contribute to our increasingly diverse society. If we can strengthen children's identity, languages and cultures in early learning services and schools, our hopes and dreams will have a chance of succeeding.



¹ Pacific peoples in Aotearoa often identify as having more than one identity, language and culture.



Working alongside faia’oga (teachers) from the participating schools and early learning services (ELS) we sought to understand:

- What do successful transitions look like, sound like, and feel like from the perspectives of Pacific āiga?
- From a Pacific world view, what is the fau and what does this look like for children transitioning from A’oga Amata (Pacific ELS) to English-medium schools?
- From a Pacific world view, what is the fau and what does this look like for Pacific children transitioning from English-medium ELS to English-medium schools?
- How can the fau be strengthened to ensure children’s transitions are successful?
- What can ELS and primary teachers do to ensure the fau is strong for all Pacific children and their āiga?

Our research has been underpinned by Pacific values, notably love (Talen, 2017). Love and teaching are often distanced by Western notions of professionalism. However, in our research, we consciously imbued our work as researchers and as teacher-

researchers with Pacific notions of love. The design and implementation of the project was deeply embedded in Pacific approaches where respectful, reciprocal relationships are crucial for learning and engagement.

The notion of va and teu le va is central to understanding the importance of relationships between people, places and things. This space is not empty but serves to connect thought and feeling (Reynolds,). The va is regarded as a sacred relational space and is protected, nurtured and cared for accordingly. Teu le va infused the relational elements of our research at all levels. Given our purpose – to amplify the marginalised and silent voices of Pacific tamaiti, āiga and fanau, and to strengthen kaiako pedagogy – we ensured the people, spaces and places we worked with were cared for respectfully and with love.

The Pacific approaches we used, typically value metaphors and models to provide an authentic means of connecting the familiar with the unfamiliar. Through all phases of our project we sourced metaphors and models from throughout the Pacific. These are explained below.



Soso'o le fau ma le fau

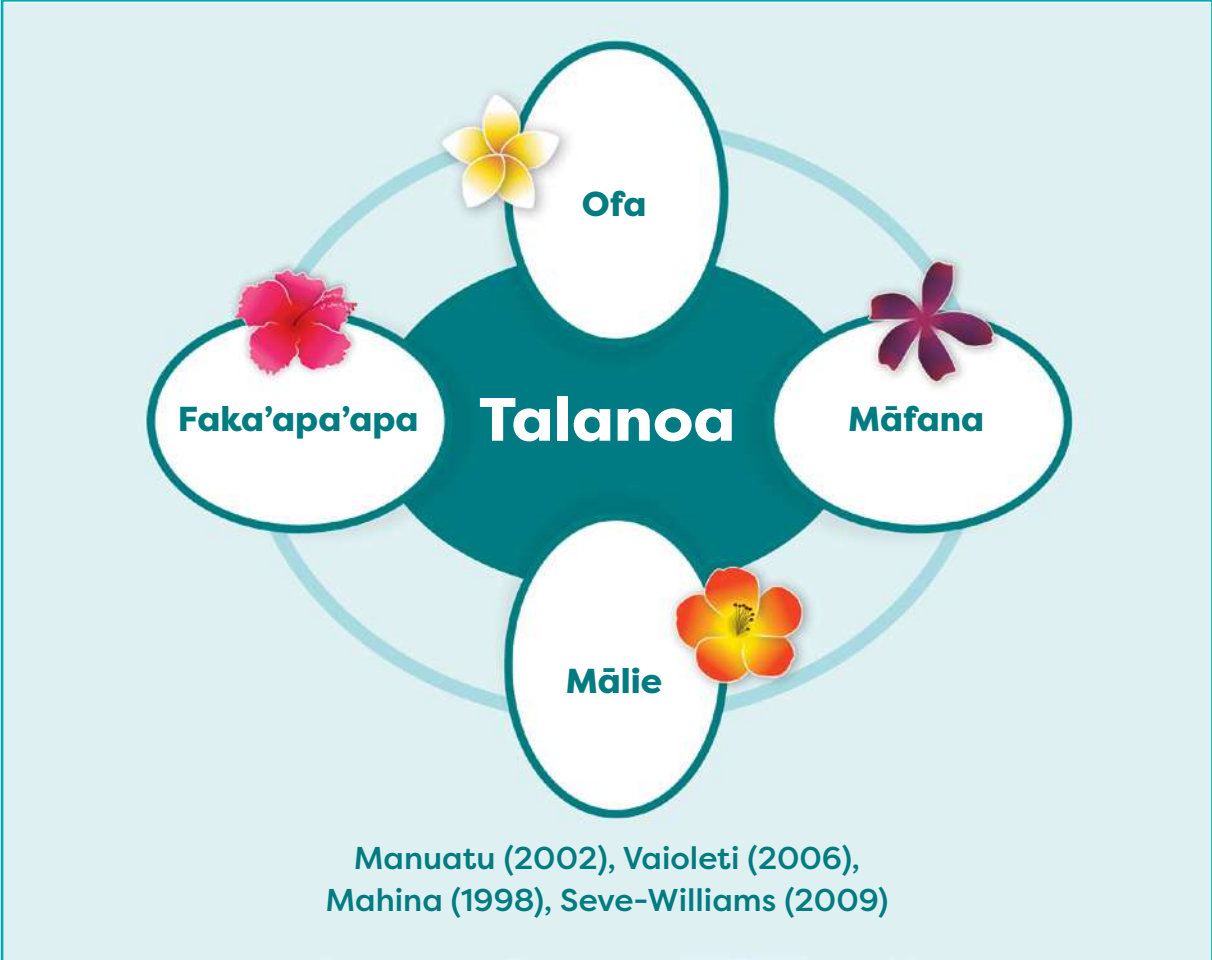
Our research design utilised the Samoan mūāgagana (saying) Soso'o le fau ma le fau (Connect the fibre with another fibre). This process of connecting one fibre with another provided the cultural metaphor for this project. Our research identified the following fibres of the fau which appeared and reappeared as themes and findings throughout our research:

- Environmental influences
- Spiritual influences
- Partnerships between kaiako, āiga, ELS and schools
- Pacific pedagogies
- Identity, language and cultural influences

Talanoa

Talanoa is a traditional word used across the Pacific to reflect a process of inclusive, participatory, and transparent dialogue. Talanoa provides opportunities to discuss authentic knowledge grounded in Pacific values of respect, reciprocity, love, humour and service. In the context of this research, spreading the mat so we can talk is also about inquiry – teachers inquiring into their transition practice to find out about what successful transitions for Pacific āiga and fānau look, feel and sound like.

Talanoa was employed at every level of engagement throughout our research. When working with āiga and fānau, with kaiako, with our Steering Group, and with experts from within CORE Education and externally, the talanoa process established our project as Pacific in its conception and its enactment.



Talanoa are founded on the following values:

Ofa | Love: Stories, talanoa with Pacific parents families and communities, Parents conversations and fono.

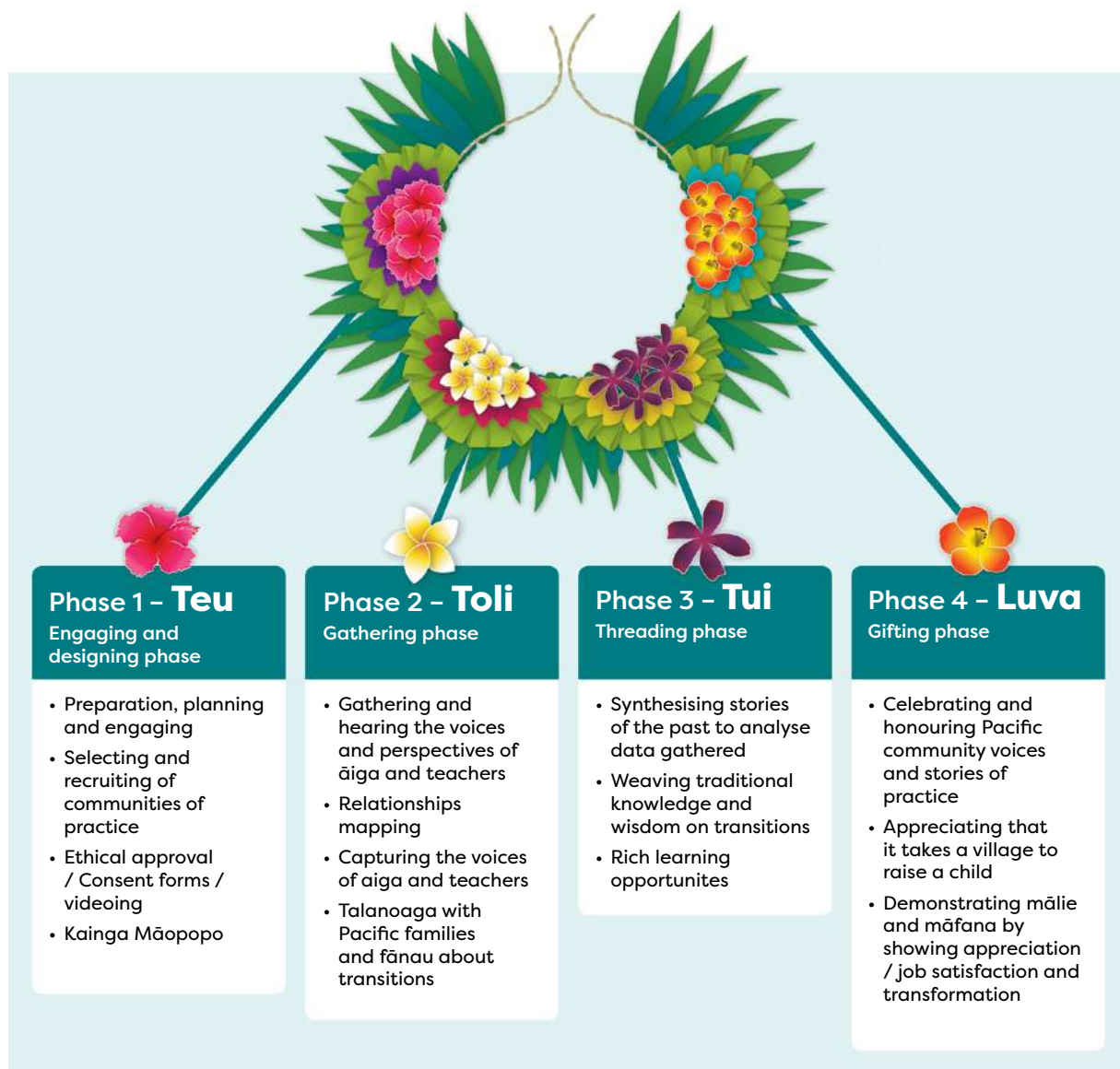
Māfana | Warmth: Warm and non threatening talanoa, builds rapport, trust for āiga and the Pacific community to engage.

Mālie | Humour: Highlight humour throughout talanoa/conversations to strengthen authenticity of the relationships.

Faka'apa'apa | Respect: Mutual respect is built and developed throughout the inquiry process. Collective decisions for 'Next steps' are significant for the outcomes.

Kakala

Where the fau provided us with an idea and a concept for understanding how ELS and schools might work together, and the talanoa guided our discussions, our research process used the kakala which is an indigenous framework of knowledge and wisdom unique to the Tongan process of producing a beautiful kakala or garland (Thaman, 1988; 2007). There are four main phases in forming a kakala: teu, toli, tui and luva.



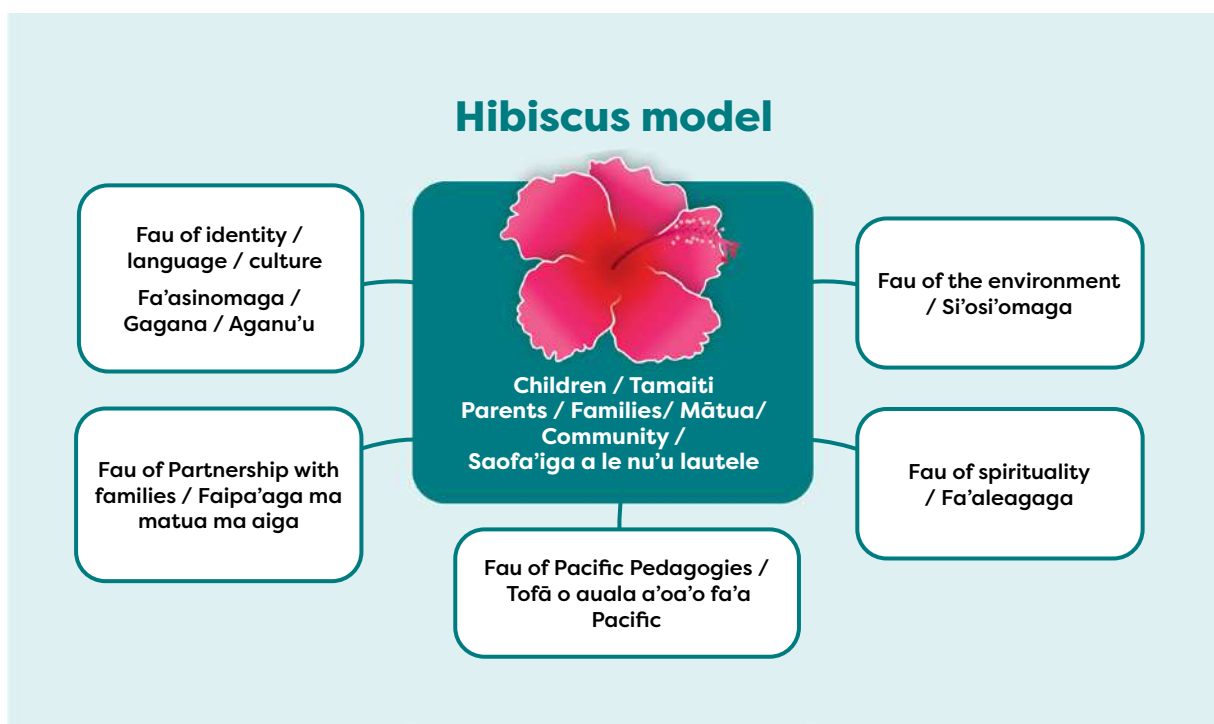
The kakala framework became increasingly relevant to our research. We developed our fono and talanoa around the phases and found that these phases complemented our community-led focus.

A strength of our particular project is how we utilised the kakala and elements of action research. We found synergies between the two approaches but the kakala was the predominant guiding process.

The hibiscus flower

Our theoretical influences were Pacific and reflected our approaches. Our theoretical framework is best represented by the hibiscus flower*. We used our theoretical lenses to make sense of the emerging findings and messages.

This model summarises our theoretical framework and is consistent with our use of Pacific metaphors. As our data emerged, we attributed the petals to the strands of the fau. These were considerations in the ELS and school action research projects. For ease, we worked to make sense of data using the fau, but we were always conscious of the need to bring this back to the whole – the hibiscus petals and flowers formed both the tui and luva phases of our research kakala.



As researchers, we knew the value of the fau but what we didn't know was what they might look like, sound like and feel like. Rather than be led by theorising, dialogue or talanoa mai and talanoa atu were important. Listening attentively to tamaiti, āiga and kaiako generated data that identified which strands of the fau were meaningful to the communities. For example, each partnership focused their research on emergent strands/fibres of the fau. As well as revealing the fau in our data, we added a layer of robustness by questioning their presence, their influence and any gaps. The hibiscus reminded us that data does not exist in isolation but is part of a wider story.

Our aims	Our questions (summarised)	Our approaches and methods	Our theoretical framework
<p>Capture, share and amplify Pacific perspectives.</p> <p>Support pedagogical changes to current practice for Pacific children and their āiga.</p> <p>Mobilise practices and strategies to influence systems level change.</p>	<p>What do successful transitions to school look like, sound like and feel like from a Pacific world view?</p> <p>What does the fau, look like in English-medium and Pacific-medium ELS and schools?</p> <p>How can the fau be strengthened to ensure children's transitions are successful?</p> <p>What can teachers do to ensure the fau is strong in all settings, for all Pacific children and their āiga?</p>	<p>Talanoa (conversational interviews with kaiako, āiga, tamaiti)</p> <p>Fono (meetings)</p> <p>Action research cycles (plan, do, reflect, review)</p> <p>Kakala (observations, digital images, artefacts)</p>	<p>The hibiscus model</p> <p>The fau:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pacific pedagogies • Partnerships • Spirituality • Identity, language and culture • Environment

Each of the four partnerships between ELS and schools decided on their research focus. The inquiries surfaced very powerful messages from the heart of the community and āiga. We were conscious of the fact that many voices are silenced when it comes to hearing Pacific experiences.



Guided by the overarching questions, ELS and schools worked in tandem with communities on action research projects which investigated an issue confronting them. Conversations were informed by the principles of talanoa (alofa, mālie, māfana, faka'apa'apa, fa'aaloalo), the use of home languages, and genuine engagement with the āiga.

Early Learning Services and School partnerships	Inquiry focus	Inquiry questions
Barnardos Hornby Pasifika Early Learning Centre and Te Māhuri Mānuka Hornby Primary School	Talanoa over the fence	How can we honour and reflect the cultures and values of families in their new learning environments as they transition
Lalaga Preschool and Te Kōmanawa Rowley School	Lalaga Talanoa: Weaving conversations	How can we strengthen the fau of identity, language, culture and spirituality during transitions?
Tafesilafa'i Early Learning Centre and Waltham School	Pulupululima faifaiepa: Working together to grow	What are the important elements of partnerships between home, ELS and school to support successful transitions?
Kidsfirst Kindergarten Hoon Hay and Te Kōmanawa Rowley School	Lalagaina o leo: Weaving voices	How can we create learning environments that reflect and strengthen tamaiti identity, language and culture during transition to school?

The metaphor of the fau further unites our research questions. Some questions centre on āiga experiences; some questions centre on children’s perceptions; and some direct attention to the roles and responsibilities of teachers in ELS and schools. All questions use the fau metaphor to illustrate the interrelated and interdependent fibres of the research.

A driver for our research outcomes was to identify the fau to support transitions to school, and to strengthen these in multiple settings. This research identified the following fibres of the fau. These appeared and reappeared as themes and findings throughout our research.



Strands of the fau	Examples
 <p>Tofā manino fa’a Pasefika Pacific pedagogies</p>	<p><i>‘I can be adaptable to the new environment and be who I am. My identity is still strong.’</i></p>
 <p>Faigapa’aga ma matua ma āiga Partnership with āiga</p>	<p><i>‘The teachers in the school and preschool now work together.’</i></p>
 <p>Si’osi’omaga Environments</p>	<p><i>‘Is this classroom mine or ours?’</i></p>
 <p>Fa’aleagaga Spirituality</p>	<p><i>‘I loved the big hug from Whaea Lisa.’</i></p>
 <p>Fa’asinomaga/Gagana/ Aganu’u Identity, language and culture</p>	<p><i>‘I am going to my Samoan school.’</i></p>

Each inquiry generated its own insights and these have been distilled down into four findings briefly summarised below:

- O tatou uma | All of us
- Auala a’oa’o ma fa’atinoga fa’a Pasefika | Pacific pedagogies in practice
- Lagonaina o leo | Hearing the silent voices
- Galulue fa’atasi ina ia manuia | Working together to grow

O tatou uma | All of us

‘O tatou uma’ means ‘all of us’. Fragmented approaches to transitions have not served Pacific communities at all well. The disconnect between cultures and pedagogical traditions resulted in the well documented story of under achievement and disengagement. This finding emphasised the strength of a united approach, embedded in Pacific methodologies, and informed by a rich tradition of metaphor. Strengthening partnerships between ELS and schools and āiga gave rise to more collaborative ways of engagement – o tatou uma. Prior to the research, many Pacific āiga were reluctant to engage in schools and just dropped their child off. Now, Pacific āiga and tamaiti see themselves as belonging in their school environments and kaiako see their role is to establish a space where knowledge is respectfully shared.

Auala a’oa’o ma fa’atinoga fa’a-Pasefika | Pacific pedagogies in practice

Pedagogy is a term used to cover teaching and learning and is usually associated with teacher practices. These practices are unconsciously culturally embedded to represent mainstream education. This was a concern because of the ongoing evidence that Pacific children are not well served by the education system. Initially, some members of the research team were unaware that Pacific pedagogies existed. Embracing

culturally responsive practice is a pedagogical theory that emphasises the use of Pacific metaphors as tools and resources. This can also mean tamaiti can act as kaiako; they have the expertise. Learners can be teachers and teachers can be learners.



Lagonaina leo | Hearing the silent voices – see me, hear me, know me

Unlocking the culture of silence is a long-standing issue for Pacific āiga. Past experiences reveal that kaiako assumed that if Pacific āiga (and tamaiti) did not respond, they did not understand. In fact, the value at work here is respect; respect for the words of the kaiako, taking time to listen and process. The other process in place is the notion of teu le va. Silence does not equate to not understanding. Silence is actually a form of response and the cultural practice of talanoa, creating a safe space, eventually results in rich dialogue. The culture of silence has been misunderstood and has resulted in damaging assumptions being made about children and āiga.



O tākanga ‘etau fohé ‘o tau tupu, tupu ai pē | Working together to grow

Working together to grow focuses on the effect of o tatou uma. In this research an important finding was the ways in which āiga, kaiako in ELS and schools collaborated together on transitions. For example, āiga are now more willing to participate in group transition to school visits. They help tamaiti with the classroom activities during their group visits to the school classroom. In other words, they have broken the cultural silence. This confidence affects other āiga, and we found a snowball effect – more āiga are involved and more āiga want to be involved. Āiga are now validated as belonging to this space and having a role.

The school community has directly benefited from increased āiga engagement. Through the spread of talanoa, and the increasingly fragrant flowers in the kakala, not only were our fau strengthened, they were made visible beyond the confines of the research. Being accessible makes it possible for the fau to grow.

Understanding parents’ aspirations, valuing the individual cultures of tamaiti, and making them visible in the curriculum, and the wider school culture, enables tamaiti and their āiga to participate openly.

We are confident our process allowed the voices of āiga, teacher-researchers, and tamaiti to emerge. We learnt what a successful transition looks like, sounds like and feels like from āiga. We created a shared understanding of the fau and, at

the same time, we strengthened their visibility in ELS and schools. We also created pathways for kaiako to explore how these fau support Pacific tamaiti so that their journey into schools is enjoyable and builds a platform for successful future learning – learning that is culturally relevant and responsive. For us, these findings are made possible by the process of spreading the mat and preparing to talk. The combination of talanoa with kakala and the fau has not only created a guide for our future, but also offers localised solutions.

The combination of fau and findings establishes a strong sense of cohesion when it comes to redressing the issues of systemic failure and the disengagement of Pacific learners. We have all heard distressing anecdotes about learners wanting to hide their identity as Pacific.

For the findings of this research to effect transformational change, we need to first and foremost acknowledge that Pacific values both add strength and strengthen us as researchers, as kaiako and as āiga engaged in education.

Throughout this research we saw, again and again, how love, respect, service, warmth and humour imbued our work on every level. We never stopped wondering at the powerful influences these values had on us. Our kakala model is designed to be shared; the process, talanoa, is to be used; and the fau are to be put into practice in multiple settings. These gifts are unique to the Pacific and apply not only to research but to everyday life as well. Our point is that these can and do facilitate transitions to school for Pacific tamaiti. They facilitate partnerships with āiga, and they strengthen Pacific pedagogies for kaiako.



Fautuaga | Recommendations

The following recommendations were drawn from our talanoa discussions about each of the inquiries. We also referred back to the fau and to the findings. Some of these recommendations can be actioned relatively easily, but others require changes at a systemic level, such as investment in professional learning and development (PLD) opportunities for kaiako, and (even better) during their initial teacher training.

O le upega e fili i le ao ae talatala ile po

The net that became entangled in the night will be disentangled in the morning

The net metaphor conceptualises the notion of the community coming together to collaborate and dialogue ways to disentangle issues that impact on Pacific students' learning. The following recommendations are given to disentangle the complex issues that create barriers to learning for Pacific students and barriers to involvement in their children's education for āiga.



We recommend that leaders and policy makers with a direct interest or role in our education system:

- **Promote talanoa as an effective, inclusive and culturally respectful way** to encourage conversations in a safe, shared space. This means kaiako need to understand the values of talanoa and recognise that this is not just for new entrant kaiako, but across the whole school community, Kāhui Ako and beyond.
- **Ensure all kaiako have fully funded PLD** to deeply understand the experiences of Pacific tamaiti, āiga and what their stories tell us about them.
- **Engage with members of the Pacific community** to support talanoa about education with āiga.
- **Invest in co-designing resources and systems** to support fānau to navigate their transition journey and to see themselves reflected in the new environments.
- **Create leadership opportunities for kaiako and senior tamaiti** to contribute to supporting new entrant tamaiti to foster leadership and tuakana-teina learning.
- **Employ Pacific language support personnel** in schools and ELS to strengthen cultural knowledge and practice, and support the use of Pacific languages in all ELS and schools.
- **Fund kaiako to participate in established networks**, like Kāhui Ako and Church communities, to share expertise about successful transitions to school for Pacific learners.
- **Listen to others, including children, those with diverse learning needs, and cultural expertise**, to inform thinking and improve practices including cultural values like spirituality, service, and reciprocity.
- **Start conversations about transitions** between āiga, ELS and new entrant kaiako early.
- **Create opportunities for kaiako from both schools and ELS to visit** one another as part of the transition process for Pacific children. This needs to include home visits with āiga.
- **Establish recognisable pathways to school for Pacific children** that take into account their identities, languages and cultures. These pathways imply systems-level change and must include school leaders, ELS leaders and Pacific community leaders.

Mafua'aga autū ina ia manuia fanau | Our why: we want our children to succeed

Totō hau tōkiga nei, aua tupulaga e fāi mai.
Plant a seed today, for the future generations

O au o matua fānau: Our children are our
precious gifts



'I have already told you about my aspirations and dreams – so what have you done to them? (Amosa Fa'afō'i cited in Taleni, 2017,)

The aspirations of Pacific families are for our children to succeed in education. Statistically, however, Pacific children lag behind their peers. This contributes to an ongoing, unacceptable narrative of Pacific underachievement (Taleni, 2017). This needn't be the way Pacific learners are perceived. To shift this perception is the big 'why' motive for our research project, Soso'o le fau ma le fau. We know that children's first experiences of school can have a lasting impact on their learning and, for our Pacific communities, the stakes are higher than average if those impacts are negative. This is also a motivating factor for our research. Finally, we want our children to know who they are, where they are from and how they belong. We aspire for our children to thrive as citizens who actively contribute to our increasingly diverse society.



If we can strengthen children’s identity, languages and cultures in early learning services (ELS) and schools, our hopes and dreams will have a chance of succeeding.

Our gafa

This report adds to the body of knowledge focused on transitions to school. In 2018, CORE Education was invited by the Rātā Foundation to submit an action research proposal with a focus on transitions to school designed to effect systemic change in this important stage of a child’s learning journey – to ensure life-long learning pathways for all tamariki. Two projects were undertaken – one in English-medium schools, with a focus on new entrant kaiako, and in one Māori-medium kōhanga reo and Kura Kaupapa with a focus on whānau (Te One et al., 2020; Gully and Hohepa, 2021).



This project, Soso’o le fau ma le fau (Connect the fibre with another fibre), was developed as the Pacific strand with the Rātā Foundation. Pacific children’s experiences of transition to school, and importantly their āiga and wider community, were invisible. The concept for this research project was developed further in talanoa held with Dr Saili Aukuso (University of Canterbury), and Fuetanoa Kose Seinafa and Lima Magele (Ministry of Education, Otautahi Office). Synergies between Ministry initiatives and the project were established. It was agreed the project was an important complementary initiative for Pacific learners and their āiga in the community. This was also an opportunity to continue to strengthen effective, consistent relationships (teu le va) between the Ministry and external providers in contributing to improving outcomes for Pacific learners, their families and communities.

Building on the experiences of the previous projects, Soso’o le fau ma le fau was ambitious: it would work with teacher-researchers from both schools and ELS; with children; and with families. The opportunities afforded by this research would make the transition to school experiences of the Pacific āiga visible.

The potential to effect change for the better, based on research evidence, was an underlying outcome across all three projects. They all acknowledged the importance of the child’s experiences as a window into what transitions looked like, felt like and sounded like. These experiences were understood as being deeply embedded in whānau/fānau aspirations which in turn, translated into how whānau/fānau participated in their children’s education. Whānau/fānau experiences are therefore equally important to the child’s experiences during transitions to school. Add to this, professional, research-based insights into kaiako teaching practices across two

sectors, and the evidence is compelling. Transitions to school are a process that includes the child, other children, whānau/fānau, kaiako and communities.

Finally, our point of difference with this suite of projects is an intention to address systemic inequities. First, by acknowledging these exist, and second, by using our findings to inform recommendations we hope will mobilise kaiako at all levels and in both sectors, to effect transformational changes.

O mo'omo'oga ma mana'oga ausia | Our aspirations and desired outcomes

First and foremost, our aspirations are underpinned by a desire that as Pacific peoples, our cultural and spiritual values are recognised as foundational to our identities and those of our children. Pacific peoples view children as treasures and beacons of hope for the future. All members of the āiga are responsible for their care (Ministry of Education, 2017). These hopes, aspirations and dreams include educational success and so the notion of collective responsibility in the āiga extends to include kaiako. The purpose of the research was to support the engagement of Pacific learners, their āiga and communities in the education system by ensuring every Pacific learner experiences a transition from ELS to school that supports their identities, languages and cultures.

Through this engagement and research processes the project aimed to:

Capture, share and amplify the perspectives and stories of what makes a transition from ELS to school successful from Pacific peoples' perspectives (especially the voices of those who are often silent, less engaged, or not engaged at all).



Support ELS and primary teachers to deeply understand these perspectives and stories and design and implement pedagogical changes to their practice for Pacific children and their āiga.



Capture and mobilise exemplars of practice, strategies and learnings to influence systems level changes for Pacific children, and their āiga, who transition from ELS to school.





Fesili tupito | Our questions

The questions we sought to answer were:

- What do successful transitions look like, sound like, and feel like from the perspectives of Pacific āiga?
- From a Pacific world view, what is the fau and what does this look like for children transitioning from A’oga Amata (Pacific ELS) to English-medium schools?
- From a Pacific world view, what is the fau and what does this look like for Pacific children transitioning from English-medium ELS to English-medium schools?
- How can the fau be strengthened to ensure children’s transitions are successful?
- What can ELS and primary teachers do to ensure the fau is strong for all Pacific children and their āiga?

We devised these questions based on research findings about Pacific children’s and families’ experiences as they transition to school. As well as adding to the substantial research base about transitions to school, we wanted to expand on a growing movement of Pacific scholarship by exemplifying Pacific methodologies. In particular, our emphasis on Pacific metaphors as methodology and method contribute to this body of research. We focus on the lived experiences of tamaiti, āiga and fānau and in this report, we use the fau as our vehicle for amplifying their voices.

The other important feature of this research is the deliberate partnerships built between ELS and schools. We wanted to illuminate āiga and fānau educational aspirations across both sectors. To create the strength and unity required to support Pacific children (and their āiga) to succeed, this project brought Pacific researchers, leaders, āiga and community together to capture perspectives and stories that inform, influence and shape the learning and practice of teachers from ELS and schools.

As this report will show, embedding Pacific cultural and spiritual values strengthens pathways to educational success.

Kulupu Fa'atonu | Steering group

As with the other transition to school projects, a Steering Group was established. The role of this group was to both advise and inform. As well as listening to short presentations about the projects delivered at fono, ideas and prototype resources were shared for feedback. The Steering Group added a degree of rigour to the research and also allowed for an overview of the Pacific Transitions Project.

The group members were representatives from the Pacific community, the Ministry of Education, Pacific āiga and community; representatives of Pacific teachers in schools and ELS; and CORE Education, University of Canterbury and Rātā Foundation personnel (See Appendix 1).

The Steering Group met five times over the course of the Project. These fono were thoroughly enjoyed by all and reinforced the role of talanoa as our conversational approach. This allowed for all the Group members to participate freely in our discussions. Speaking from the heart was an important value the talanoa established in our fono. For some group members, this was very new but they began to understand the benefits of this process. Our talanoa also reminded everyone about the value of community-led, Pacific research. We introduced concepts of talanoa mai (talk with me) and talanoa atu (talk with you). The talanoa protocols created space (teu le va) for important conversations that were respectful and reciprocal and most importantly, foregrounded relationships.



Ko e tu'unga 'etau 'iló | What we know

Many Pasifika teenagers have left school with no qualifications and, as a result they have continued to contribute to the on-going patterns of Pasifika student underachievement and unemployment, which has consequently led to more and more Pasifika families living in poverty in this country. The on-going unanswered question is: Are Pasifika students failing the system or is the New Zealand Education system failing Pasifika students? When are 'we', as a 'community of learners' going to get this right? (Talení, 2017).

The longstanding, negative effects of failure in an education system which privileges certain sections of society over others has significant implications for Aotearoa New Zealand's future (Henare et al., 2011; Macfarlane et al. 2007; Peters, 2014). Social cohesion is undermined when certain groups are unable to contribute meaningfully, or their contributions seem to disappear, in faceless bureaucratic systems. Educationally, Pacific are continually relegated to the 'long-tail' of underachievement and arrive at schools with labels such as 'disengaged', 'priority learners' and 'kids at risk'.

There are two key messages we want to communicate:

1. That 'Pasifika students have, for too long, been trapped in an environment of underachievement, and little has changed since the 1960s and '70s' (Talení, 2017).
2. That a positive transition from

ELS to school influences children's perceptions of themselves as learners and, at the same time, supports parental engagement as partners in educational endeavours.

While there is a great deal of international research on transitions to school in general (Margetts and King, 2013; Perry et al. 2014), there is very limited research on transition to school involving children and āiga (families) from Pacific and mainstream ELS to school. Transitioning into a new education environment is a time of change and adaptation for not only children, but also for āiga (family) (May, 2011; Wright, 2011).

A successful transition to school takes time and is directly affected, either positively or negatively, by the actions of the teacher (Hartley, et al., 2012; Peters, 2010). As well as learning to adapt to the new environment of a school, children from Pacific ELS also have to manage differences in language and cultural experiences. Research (Podmore, Sauvao and Mapa, 2001) has revealed the following issues and dilemmas facing children transitioning from an A'oga Amata to a mainstream school:

- Children voiced that cultural activities were important to them in early childhood. However, continuity of cultural activity for children is not assured when they begin school.
- Children preferred to have a familiar person stay with them at school. However, 45% of teachers preferred not to have parents stay in their classroom when children first start school.

During the transition phase, it is important to have teachers in both sectors who understand the child's language and culture in order to maintain shared understandings and pedagogical approaches across the settings (McNaughton, 1988; Davis and McKenzie, 2014).

'O tu ma 'agaifanua a le tamaititi e le mafai ona ulufale i le potu a'oga sei vagana ua ulufale i le loto o le faia'oga'

The culture of the child cannot enter the classroom until it has first entered the consciousness of the teacher (Bernstein, 1970)

The ELS sector in Aotearoa New Zealand provides a diverse range of services for children from birth to six years old including a growing number of Pacific immersion ELS settings – A'oga Amata. The majority of these settings are closely aligned with a community, āiga and church, and some are privately owned. The philosophical rationale of A'oga Amata is to retain culture, language, and identity.

Initiatives like the *Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030* (Ministry of Education, 2020) and *Tapasā: cultural competencies framework for teachers of Pacific learners* (Ministry of Education, 2018) indicate a willingness on the part of the education sector to engage with Pacific and redress the statistical imbalance. That said, the issue under investigation here is that schools do not have a clear Pacific immersion pathway. Unlike Māori-medium kōhanga reo, children attending an A'oga Amata move directly into mainstream or bilingual schools around the age of five. In many cases, the school may not be the same one that the child's early childhood peers attend. Once Pacific children enter school their opportunity

to connect with their language and participate in cultural celebrations become limited to experiences outside school. Within school, their identities as Pacific people can become fragile. The shift from immersion Pacific to immersion English language poses barriers to the child's identity as a learner who belongs. This both undermines their contributions, and those of their āiga, and at the same time has the disturbing effect of silencing their thoughts, ideas, voice and anxieties.

This project creates a synergy between these two significant bodies of research (Pasifika education and transitions to school), both of which aspire to transform learner experiences at a community level by empowering tamaiti, āiga and kaiako to use their skills and knowledge as tools for change. Both bodies of research reveal positive impacts on successful parent engagement and student achievement when cultural ways of being, doing and knowing are embedded in pedagogy.





Ko 'etau fekumi ki ha kaveinga | Our research story

When the language dies, a culture dies, when culture dies, our stories die, when our stories die, our connections die, when our connections die, our identities die, when our identities die, we will truly be lost people

(Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2018).

Ko 'etau fakafotu 'e fēfē | Our approach

The design and implementation of the project was deeply embedded in Pacific approaches where respectful, reciprocal relationships are crucial for learning and engagement. These approaches typically use and value metaphors and models, which provide an authentic means of connecting the familiar with the unfamiliar (Te Whāriki, 2017). At the same time, we also recognised that, in Western terms, this project sits within a qualitative paradigm and utilised principles of participatory action research which

are collaborative, interpretive and iterative (Dalli et al., 2017; Te One, 2017). In our research, teachers acted as researchers (Alexakos, 2015) and navigated successfully between the two approaches, always guided by our Pacific leadership. We found the combination of these approaches was conducive to our Pacific methodology. As with all CORE Education research, this research was approved by our Human Ethics Committee.

Teu le va

The notion of va and teu le va is central to understanding the importance of relationships between people, places and things. This space is not empty but serves to connect thought and feeling (Reynolds, 2022). The va is regarded as a sacred relational space and is protected, nurtured and cared for accordingly. Teu le va infused the relational elements of our research at all levels. Given our purpose – to amplify the marginalised and silent voices of Pacific tamaiti, āiga and fanau, and to strengthen kaiako pedagogy – we ensured the people, spaces and places we worked with were cared for respectfully and with love.

Through all the phases of our project we sourced metaphors and models from throughout the Pacific. These are explained in the sections that follow.

Soso'o le fau ma le fau

This research design utilised the Samoan mūāgagana (saying) 'Soso'o le fau ma le fau' (Connect the fibre with another fibre). This process of

connecting one fibre with another provided the cultural metaphor for this project. A Pacific child's confidence in their identities, languages and cultures² can be understood as a metaphorical fau and the transition from ECE to school is the process of connecting the fibres from one environment to another – physically, culturally, linguistically, and spiritually. Strong connections are supported when the new environment affirms the Pacific child's identities, languages and cultures and those of their āiga leading to successful transitions and continuity in learning.

This research identified the following fibres of the fau. These appeared and reappeared as themes and findings throughout our research:

- Environmental influences
- Spiritual influences
- Partnerships between kaiako, āiga, ELS and schools
- Pacific pedagogies
- Identity, language and cultural influences

Suffice it to say, these fibres influenced all aspects of our research process from design, implementation, analysis and findings.



² Pacific peoples in Aotearoa often identify as having more than one identity, language and culture.

Talanoa

Fofola e fala kae talanoa e kāinga
**Invite family members to come together on
the mat and talanoa (Tongan)**

Fofola le fala se'i ta talanoa
Spread the mat so we can talk (Samoan)

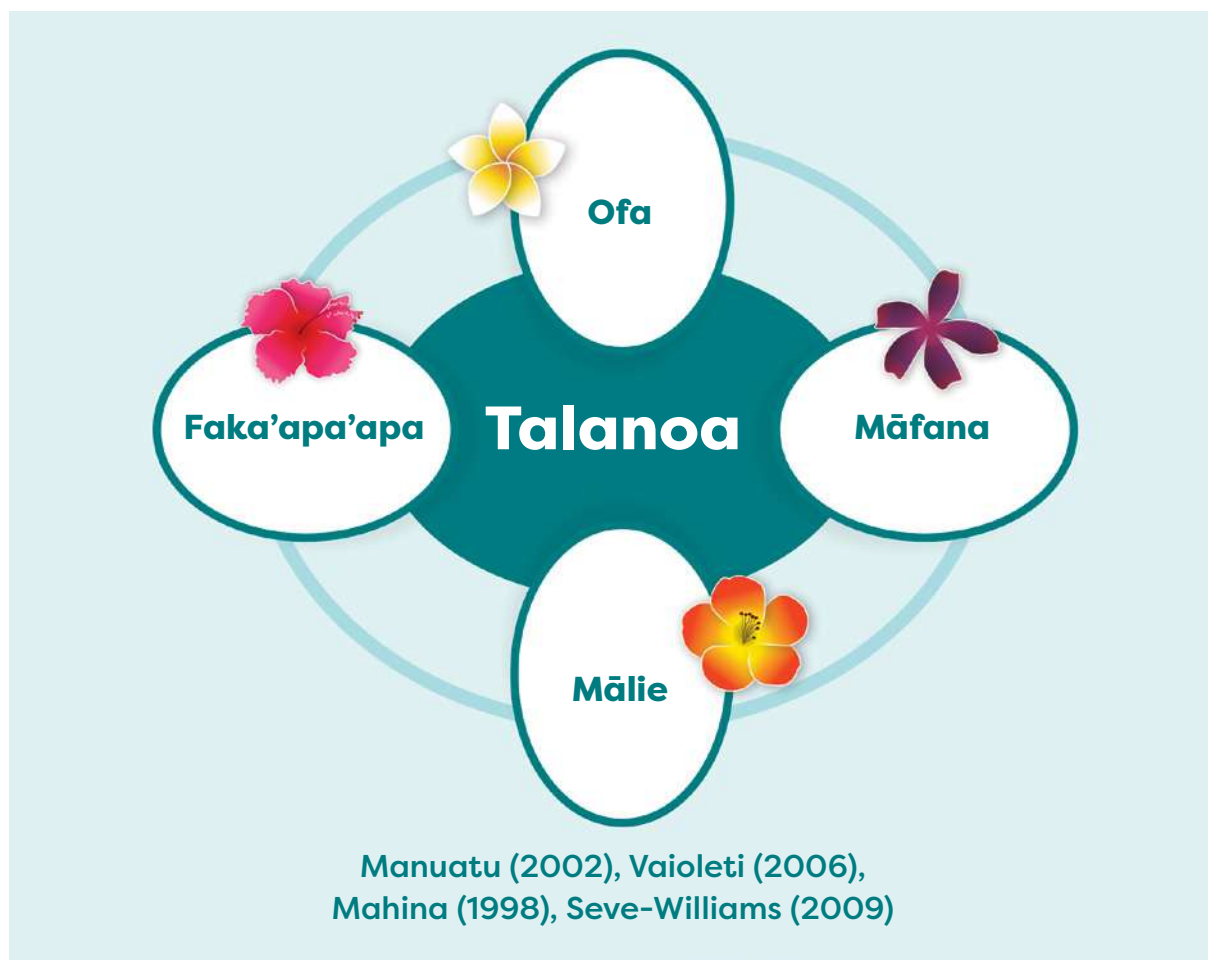


Potentiality is a cultural aspect of Talanoa. It allows people to engage in social conversation which may lead to critical discussions or knowledge creation that allows rich contextual and inter-related information to surface as co-constructed stories (Vaiioleti, 2006, p. 24).

Talanoa is a traditional word used across the Pacific to reflect a process of inclusive, participatory, and transparent dialogue. Talanoa provides opportunities to discuss authentic knowledge grounded in Pacific values of respect, reciprocity, love, humour and service. In the context of this research, spreading the mat so we can talk is also about inquiry – teachers inquiring into their transition practice to find out about what successful transitions for Pacific āiga and fānau look, feel and sound like?

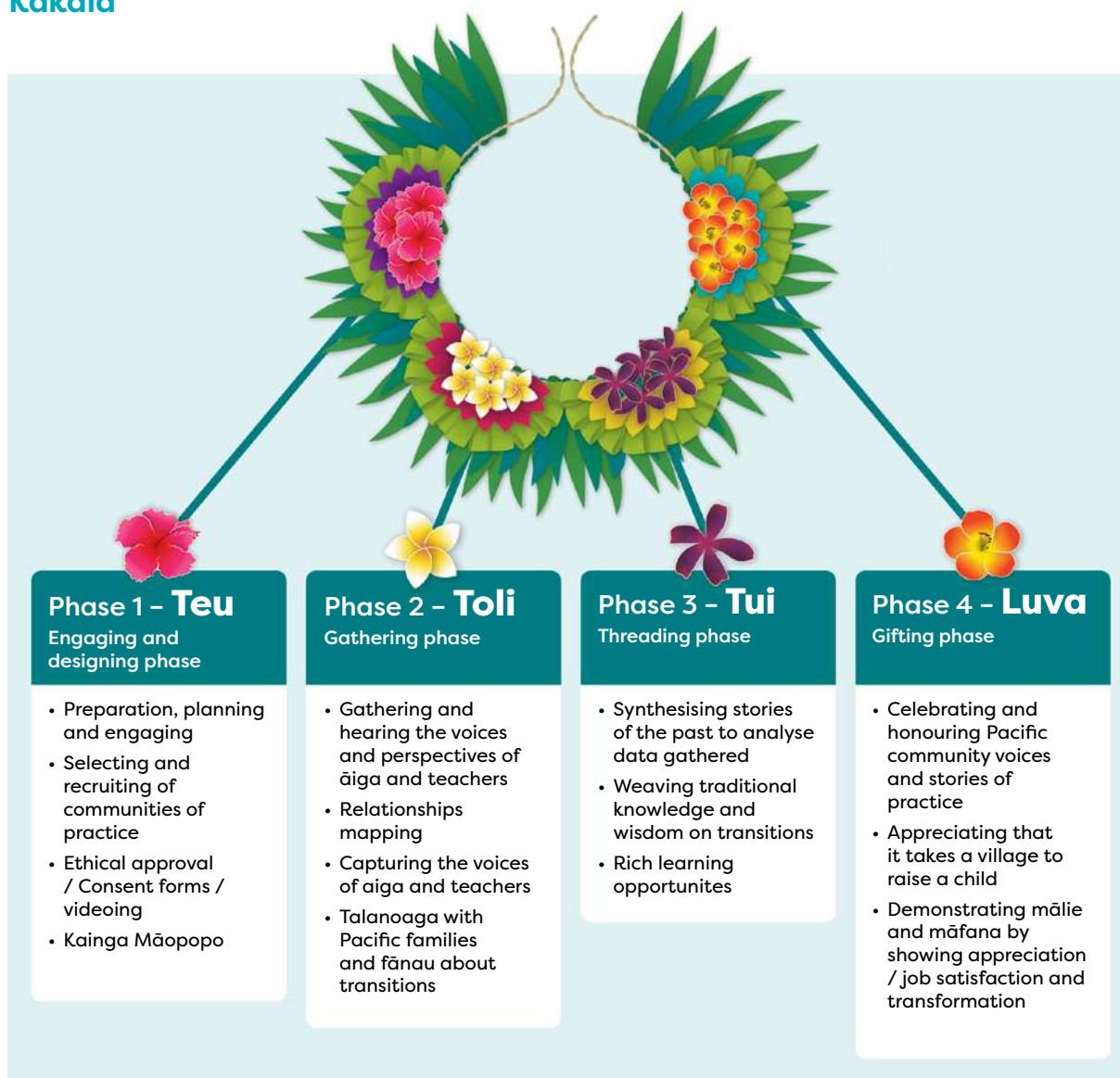
In our research, talanoa was employed at every level of engagement throughout our research. From working with āiga and fānau, with kaiako, with our Steering Group, and with experts from within CORE Education and externally, the talanoa process established our project as Pacific in its conception and its enactment.

As a palagi researcher this multi-layered and collaborative process has brought the concept of Talanoa to life for me (Glenda, CORE Researcher).



We supported our non-Pacific team members to participate in this process and we saw this as an opportunity to broaden cultural competencies and capabilities. Talanoa is infused with spirituality and emotion of vibrant, real discussions about matters of common concern. The outcomes of talanoa are not static and continue to respond to context which enhances their relevance and robustness. Talanoa participants are immersed in co-constructed definitions of an issue and then as active co-creators and co-designers of solutions. These were evident in the stories and observations we heard and saw as part of the ELS and school inquiries.

Kakala



Where the fau provided us with an idea and a concept for understanding how ELS and schools might work together, and the talanoa guided our discussions, our research process used the *kakala* which is an indigenous framework of knowledge and wisdom unique to the Tongan process of producing a beautiful *kakala* or garland (Thaman, 1988; 2007). There are four main phases in forming a *kakala*: teu, toli, tui and luva.

The *kakala* framework became increasingly relevant to our research. We developed our fono and talanoa around the phases and found that these phases complemented our community-led focus.

A strength of our particular project is how we utilised the *kakala* and elements of action research. We found synergies between the two approaches but the *kakala* was the predominant guiding process.

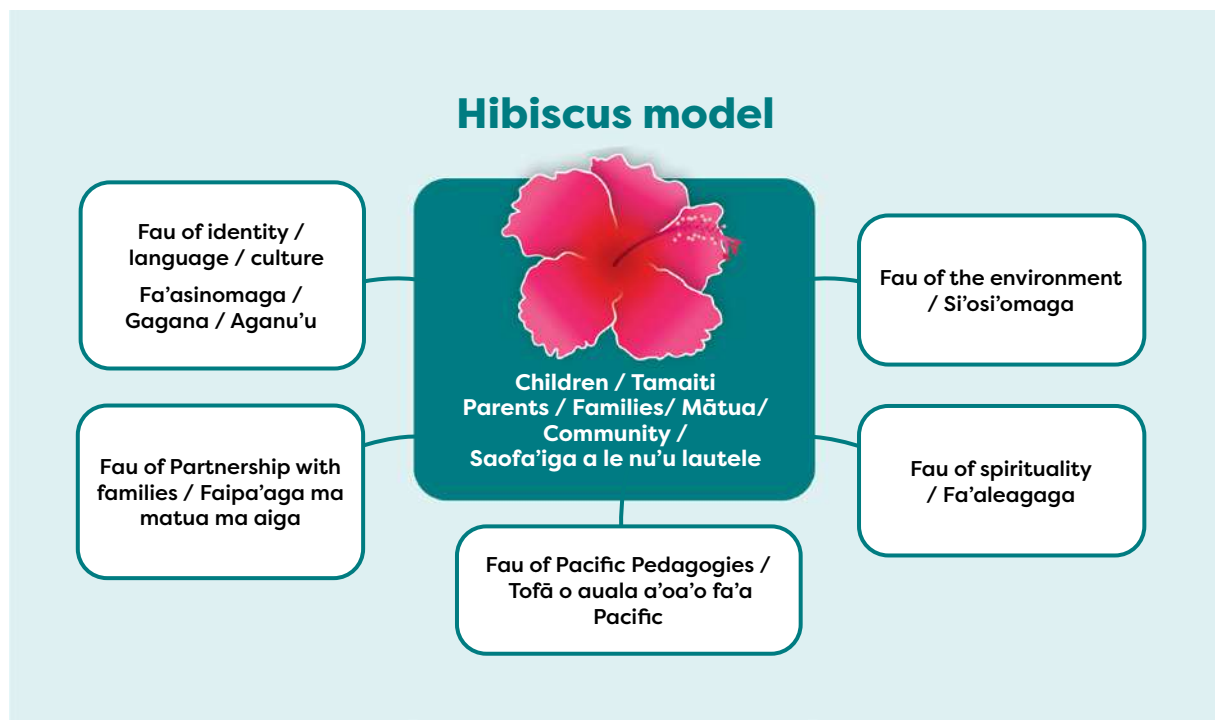
As with all research projects at CORE Education, this was approved by our Ethics Committee.

Pitofilo e afua ai | Theoretical influences

A theoretical approach refers to the ways in which the research is conceived and enacted. While theory is significant to each phase of a research project, it is most prominent in data analysis when we use our theoretical lenses to make sense of the emerging findings and messages. Our theoretical influences were Pacific and reflected our approaches. Key processes and stages in our research made our theoretical influences visible.

Our theoretical framework is best represented by the hibiscus flower*. This model summarises our theoretical framework and is consistent with our use of Pacific metaphors. As our data emerged, we attributed the petals to the strands of the fau. These were considerations in the ELS and school action research projects. For ease, we worked to make sense of data using the fau, but we were always conscious of the need to bring this back to the whole – the hibiscus petals and flowers formed both the tui and luva phases of our research kakala.

As researchers, we knew the value of the fau but what we didn't know was what they might look like, sound like and feel like. Rather than be led by theorising, talanoa mai and talanoa atu were important. Listening attentively to tamaiti, āiga and kaiako generated data that identified the strands of the fau that are meaningful to the communities. For example, each partnership focused their research on emergent strands/fibres of the fau. As well as revealing the fau in our data, we added a layer of robustness by questioning their presence, their influence and any gaps. The hibiscus reminded us that data does not exist in isolation but is part of a wider story.





Our aims	Our questions (summarised)	Our approaches and methods	Our theoretical framework
<p>Capture, share and amplify Pacific perspectives.</p> <p>Support pedagogical changes to current practice for Pacific children and their āiga.</p> <p>Mobilise practices and strategies to influence systems level change.</p>	<p>What do successful transitions to school look like, sound like and feel like from a Pacific world view?</p> <p>What does the fau, look like in English-medium and Pacific-medium ELS and schools?</p> <p>How can the fau be strengthened to ensure children's transitions are successful?</p> <p>What can teachers do to ensure the fau is strong in all settings, for all Pacific children and their āiga?</p>	<p>Talanoa (conversational interviews with kaiako, āiga, tamaiti)</p> <p>Fono (meetings)</p> <p>Action research cycles (plan, do, reflect, review)</p> <p>Kakala (observations, digital images, artefacts)</p>	<p>The hibiscus model</p> <p>The fau:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pacific pedagogies • Partnerships • Spirituality • Identity, language and culture • Environment



O metotia | Our methods

'O le tele o sulu e maua ai figota.'

'Through collaboration we can overcome the most difficult challenges and ensure success for our communities' aspirations.' (Minister for Pacific Peoples: Aupito William Sio)

Fengāue'aki 'o hoko e fau mo e fau | Working with and alongside one another

We worked with Pacific āiga, leaders and community members as the carers of all Pacific children, along with ELS and primary teachers. Four teacher-researchers from three primary schools and eight teacher-researchers from four ELS participated in this research (12 in total). CORE Education, courtesy of the Rātā Foundation, were able to fund three active researchers: two research leads and a research coordinator. They led the research projects in the ELS, schools and

communities. Supporting them were two advisors: Matai Leali'ie'e Tufulasi Taleni, a respected community leader and researcher, and Dr Sarah Te One, CORE's Senior Researcher.

The CORE research team met regularly to plan for, reflect, review and evaluate before and after fono and site visits. The successes and the challenges identified at the fono, and during ongoing site visits, contributed to the modifications made to the hibiscus model. The research team used Pacific proverbs and frameworks to guide discussions to ensure that we were adhering to the vision of this research project: Soso'o le fau ma le fau.

I am so proud to see [Amosa Fa'afu'i's] legacy acknowledged and seeing other Pacific leaders carrying this on and bringing it to reality. (Principal, Te Māhuri Mānuka Hornby Primary School)

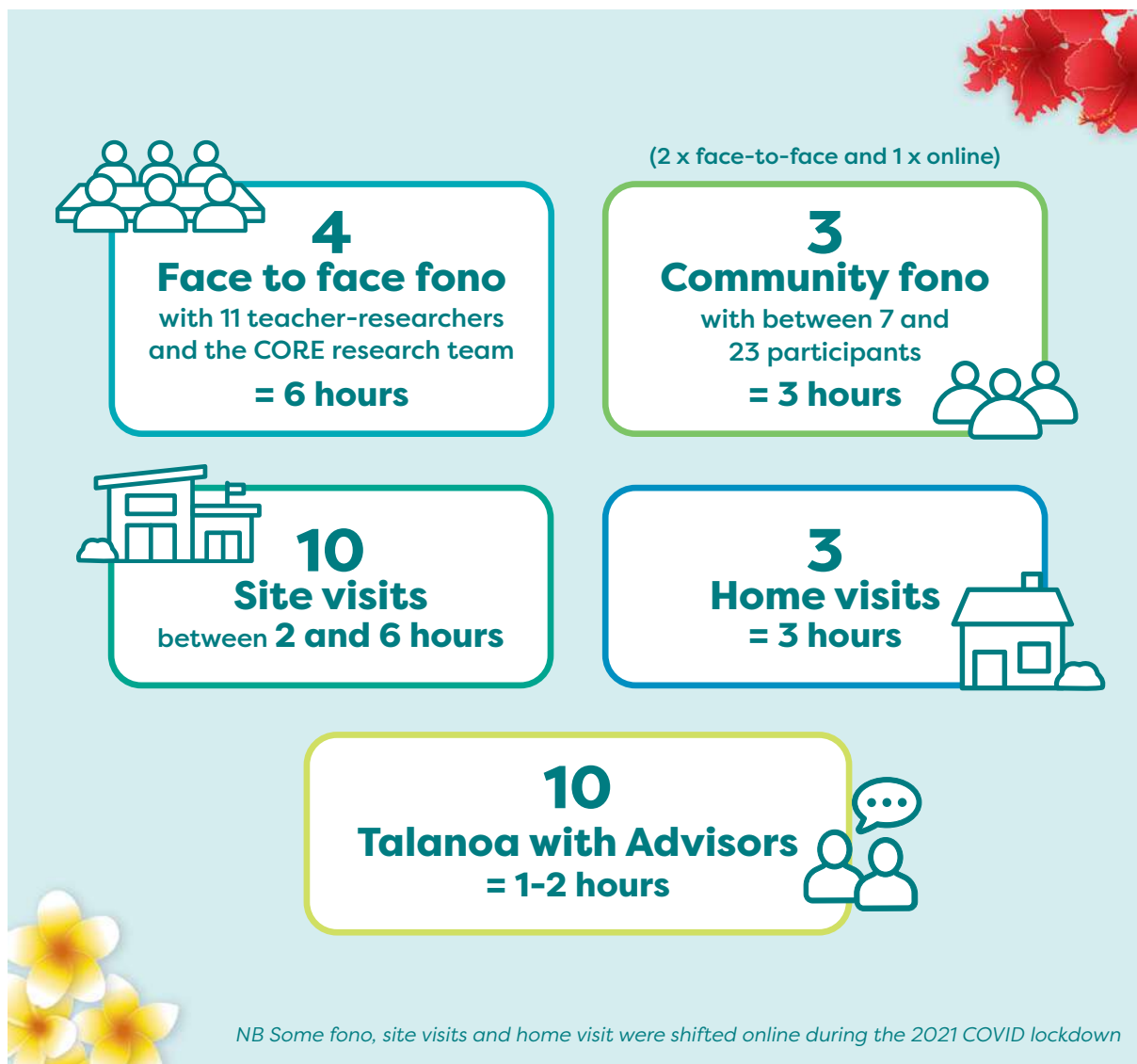
The design of the project involved talanoa and fono with āiga, tamaiti, community leaders, school leaders and early childhood teachers. Face-to-face fono, virtual talanoa and regular site visits for teacher-researchers and Pacific āiga/fānau and community were held between June 2021 and November 2022. During lockdown (2021) we continued to connect with teacher-researchers online through emails, webinars, and phone calls.

A mix of participants attended the āiga fono; grandparents, parents, young families, school and ELS leaders, teachers and children. The focus of these fono was to share the purpose of the project and to build relationships between and amongst the research team, āiga from the ELS alongside



the teachers from the schools and ELS involved in this research project. It was highlighted that the voices from āiga and children are paramount to the success of this project. Family members and some teachers shared their personal stories and experiences of transitions and their aspirations for their children for their transition journey and beyond.





Kamata leva | Getting started

Research is equal amounts of practical formalities and conceptual, metaphorical thinking. Often the first stages are practical – selecting participants and setting up systems. For us, we needed to identify potential sites, and then invite them to be part of the research. We were mindful of our questions when selecting the sites because we wanted to find out about the children and āiga transitions experiences from both Pacific-medium and English-medium ELS. We used our community networks and existing relationships to make decisions about

which services we thought would be interested (the diagram below shows the different partnerships between the ELS and schools).

We were also conscious of the workloads and too, of how the word ‘research’ might influence teachers’ decisions. We invested time in this stage, knowing that if we addressed concerns from the start, our likelihood of successfully retaining all ELS and schools would increase.

This was also a time for our CORE research team to talanoa. Once we had identified potential sites, and after numerous phone calls and

emails, we visited in pairs to explain the project face-to-face. As we presented our project and invited teachers to join, we noticed how, over time, we developed more confidence to discuss our research aims. In many situations, it was not merely a visit to an ELS or a school; we also needed to work with community and church leaders. We had expected this and knew that a one-off visit would never yield the relationships we needed for this project to be successful.

Site visits became an integral part of our research. During the site visits the co-lead researchers and the project coordinator / researcher developed site-specific inquiries with teacher-researchers and senior management of the schools and ELS services.

An incredibly important aspect of our research design was to gather āiga

voice. We knew from the research and from our professional networks, that connecting meaningfully with āiga was well established as a way to ensure successful transitions. The research gap we intended to address was in this area. Silent in the research, or almost so, were parental perspectives and experiences.

Critical to gathering these voices were āiga visits. Building on pre-existing relationships that either the ELS or schools had with āiga, the CORE research team were able to deepen relationships with āiga in their homes. Visiting āiga homes allowed the team to gather āiga perspectives about their aspirations and experiences of transitions for their children. During visits and fono, āiga and fānau shared their aspirations for their tamaiti and perspectives about the fau.



Fāngota ha teita | Collecting the data

***E le sua se lolo ise
popo e tasi***
**One coconut is not enough
to make coconut oil**

Once ethical approval was granted, we began an intense period of data generation. Our approaches were both culturally meaningful and culturally affirming:

- digital photos, videos, voice recordings
- children's drawings
- parents stories (written and oral conversations)
- teacher and fānau reflections
- learning stories.

Using multiple data sources from across all sites allowed for triangulation and adhering to the collective values of the Pacific methodologies, established trustworthiness and robustness. This collective strength demonstrated the true essence of the saying, *E aofia fa'atasi le nu'u i le tapu'eina ma le fa'afaileleina ole ola a'oa'oina ole tamaitiiti* – It takes a whole village to raise a child.

The teacher-researchers and project researchers found these āiga visits very useful. The home contexts appeared to enable āiga to confidently share ideas about what they want to see for their children when moving from home to early childhood services and then to primary schools. The visits were authentic engagements, legitimising



the strength of the cultural knowledge of each āiga and the value they place on education. For example, one āiga shared a lot more information about the child with the teacher-researcher and the CORE researcher in the home-based setting. Being able to speak in their first language created an atmosphere where rich stories and examples were shared. Our sense was that this degree of intimacy would be less likely to have happened in the busier and more public environment of an ELS.

A measure of success for us was the honest, open discussion facilitated by the use of Pacific methodologies. For example, a parent clarified that the terms *fono* and *talanoa* convey different messages to āiga. The term 'fono' can be interpreted as being more formal, a time where information is given out, whereas 'talanoa' is informal and is an approach that empowers people to speak. Consequently, the teacher-researchers recognised the importance of using the term 'talanoa' when promoting events in their schools or services to encourage āiga and fānau engagement.

Ko e teitá 'oku 'uhinga ki he ha | Making sense of data

Data were analysed iteratively using the questions as our guides. As our understanding of the fau developed, they were useful starting points for analysis too. Each inquiry undertook a guided analysis process which then fed into a wider discussion about the emerging themes and findings. Tweaks and adjustments were made in response to the evidence.

An issue for this research was that every data set offered rich insights about questions and so a great deal of time was spent on deciding which data would best illustrate the points we wanted to make.

Numerous talanoa were held; working documents were created and shared; and readings and books about analysis and Pacific pedagogy were referred to during this process (Cunningham, 2022; Movano & Schyvens, 2021; Tagoilelagi-Leota, 2017; Rimani, Glasgow & Averill, 2022).



Ki he'etau fekumí | Our inquiries

The talanoa approach underpinned the ways in which data was gathered for these stories. The importance of the ways in which teu le va within the relationships has been valued and respected led to many contributors engaged in these conversations expressing their appreciation of the comfort and ease as they shared their perspectives with teacher researchers. Storytelling is a significant part of Pacific cultural ways of knowing, being and doing and we have endeavoured to reflect this in the ways that we show our own learning interwoven with the wisdom from the voices of Pacific children, āiga and their communities.

Early Learning Services and School partnerships	Inquiry focus	Inquiry questions
Barnardos Hornby Pasifika Early Learning Centre and Te Māhuri Mānuka Hornby Primary School	Talanoa over the fence	How can we honour and reflect the cultures and values of families in their new learning environments as they transition?
Lalaga Preschool and Te Kōmanawa Rowley School	Lalaga Talanoa: Weaving conversations	How can we strengthen the fau of identity, language, culture and spirituality during transitions?
Tafesilafa'i Early Learning Centre and Waltham School	Pulupululima faifaiepa : Working together to grow	What are the important elements of partnerships between home, ELS and school to support successful transitions?
Kidsfirst Kindergarten Hoon Hay and Te Kōmanawa Rowley School	Lalagaina o leo: Weaving voices	How can we create learning environments that reflect and strengthen tamaiti identity, language and culture during transition to school?

These inquiries were not decided lightly and numerous talanoa and fono took place during that first year. Finding a good, manageable inquiry focus takes time, negotiation and, at the heart of these processes, trusting, respectful relationships.

Our inquiries surfaced very powerful messages from the heart of the community and āiga. We were conscious of the fact that many voices are silenced when it comes to hearing Pacific experiences. Although we are presenting two synopses of the inquiries here, the themes or fau from the others interweave to tell a compelling story.

- Home visits enabled the researchers to attend to āiga voice. In these situations, the conversations moved from functional to deeper dialogue – this was authentic talanoa with depth and breadth. The principles of talanoa (alofa, mālie, māfana, faka’apa’apa, fa’aaloalo), and the use of home languages supported genuine engagement with the āiga.
- Building deep partnerships with āiga is supporting a child who has neurodiverse learning needs through his transitioning journey to another school. We have placed importance on closely observing him as he communicates in other ways, and in listening to the parent. This shifted the power dynamic from kaiako to āiga – and allowed us to recognise the power of fau – fibres that strengthen connections between people, places and things.

We had our fono to discuss [Child’s name] Transition Plan this morning at his school visit with his parents, occupational therapist, language therapist, early intervention educator and school faiaoga. It was a wonderful and warm talanoaga. Having everyone from both services there really ensures the child’s parents and āiga that he will have a successful transition. Our Samoan way of being was also felt and valued during the talanoa. It really ‘takes a village to raise a child’. (Palepa, teacher-researcher)

- Through ongoing talanoa, we amplified the previously silent voices of āiga. Kaiako in two ELS listened closely to the parents’ aspirations which led to deeper cultural layers of the partnership fau. Cultural traditions, practices and languages emerged in the interactions

and actions of kaiako and āiga community members.

In order to keep our culture, traditions and language alive I want my child to be able to do this at home, preschool and school. When [Child’s name] comes home from Preschool she tells me how she loves to sing her Samoan songs. She knows she is Samoan and goes to a Samoan preschool. I hope there’s a way she can continue this throughout her school years. I can tell she is proud to be Samoan. (Parent)





Talanoa over the fence

In the beginning there were two schools that sat next to each other. One was known as 'The Big School' and the other, 'Preschool'. Between them was a simple grey fence. The children from preschool loved chatting to their friends over the fence that separated the two schools. The preschool tamariki were curious about what their old friends were doing at the big school. The newly transitioned students miss the atmosphere of their play space. The teachers began to talanoa across the fence and a beautiful relationship formed. (Tracy, teacher-researcher, Barnardos Hornby Pasifika Early Learning Centre; Abby and Julie, teacher-researchers, Te Māhuri Mānuka Hornby Primary School)

Te Māhuri Mānuka Hornby Primary School has a diverse community located in southwest Christchurch. The ethnic groups include Māori, Pacific, Filipino and many others. Families

enrolled at Barnardos Hornby Pasifika Early Learning Centre also reflect their diverse local community. This ELS has a roll of 45 and is managed by Barnardos.

In the past kaiako, tamaiti and their āiga engaged in transition to school visits on a semi-regular basis. However once kaiako were engaged in this project they began to question how well they support Pacific tamaiti and their āiga to establish a sense of belonging that is inclusive of their identities, languages and cultures through their transition process. Stronger partnership between kaiako from both settings, and tamaiti and their āiga began to emerge.

The identity, language and culture strand of the fau metaphor drew our attention to the need to ensure that tamaiti remain strong in their knowledge of who they are as they establish their sense of belonging in the school.

Our daughter knows her place and knows who she is. We love to see her taking the lead. Our daughter will always be happy to share and contribute her thoughts and ideas towards conversations. We hope she continues to grow this passion during her time at kura. (Parent, Barnardos Hornby Pasifika Early Learning Centre)

To address this challenge kaiako implemented a range of strategies. They:

- Engaged in talanoa with Pacific āiga and their community about their aspirations for their tamaiti.
- Established stronger relationships between settings through warmth, humour, love and respect.
- Engaged in frequent talanoa between tamaiti and kaiako over the fence.



- Ensured that Pacific tamaiti are able to use their own languages, and cultural knowledge in both settings; for example, pese, tatalo, storytelling, tuakana-teina relationships, access to Pacific resources, books, artworks and so on.
- Engaged in regular reciprocal visits, including āiga, between the school and the ELS.
- Introduced a resource activity where tamaiti regularly share information about themselves and their āiga during their school visits.

‘Hi Whaea Abby’, ‘Look at this Whaea Abby’, ‘Will you come to visit?’ (Tamaiti from Barnardos Hornby Pasifika Early Learning Centre)

As a result of understanding and using the Pacific talanoa approach, kaiako, tamaiti and āiga in both research sites have built strong relationships and are developing highly impactful transition to school practices. The teacher-researchers know the tamaiti well, and have noted that a higher number of parents are participating and engaging in school visits. Tamaiti developed a deeper connection with the teacher-researchers at school and are confident to go to their school as they know it is their place too. Āiga commented that the teacher-researchers from both settings now work together and not separately.



Lalaga Talanoa | Weaving conversations

The little things matter. (Tonu, Teacher-researcher, Lalaga Preschool)

Lalaga Preschool provides education and care for up to 35 tamaiti from diverse cultural backgrounds. Its philosophy is to nurture tamaiti to grow in the love of Christ and Samoan cultural values. Tamaiti from Lalaga Preschool transition to a range of mainstream and faith-based primary schools throughout Ōtautahi Christchurch.

Te Kōmanawa Rowley Primary School is in southwest Ōtautahi Christchurch. With a roll of 151 and made up of many cultures, Te Kōmanawa Rowley Primary School offers a Gagana Samoan programme for tamaiti to regularly access throughout their school years.

How our story began

Core values of tautua (service and responsibility), alofa (aroha, love and commitment) and fa'aaloalo (respect, dignity and relationships) underpin Lalaga Preschool's philosophy and



are embedded into our practice. We wanted to know how

- our core values were supported
- to ensure each tamaiti remained strong in their identities, languages and cultures as they transition to school.

Several of our kaiako at Lalaga Preschool have Pacific heritage and they were very aware of the ongoing challenges, barriers and gaps in Pacific focussed educational learning experiences for tamaiti when they moved from A'oga Amata to school.

During this journey we visited family homes. We were able to listen and hear parents' voices in their own environment using their mother tongue in our conversations:

A significant finding from talanoa with āiga is that importance of home visits by kaiako to deepen the relationship and trust with āiga, and clarify misunderstandings or assumptions about the role of kaiako. (Tonu and Milika teacher-researchers and Saili, researcher, Reflections)



I'm going to my Samoan School' (Case study child.)

We recognised that the fau of spirituality and identity, language and culture are vital components in the transition process. Focussing on these fau gave tamaiti confidence in themselves as successful learners. We could also see how connecting the fau empowered āiga to engage in the process.

We also valued talking with the principal, teachers and new entrant teachers. This was important to achieving shared understandings about the fau and brought identity, language and culture and foregrounded the learning journey for tamaiti.

During this journey, Jules (New Entrant kaiako, teacher-researcher, Te Kōmanawa Rowley Primary School), came to visit Lalaga Preschool. This was the first time we had done this. We established a relationship and shared information about each others' environments and learning experiences. Jules saw how the fau of spirituality was experienced in Lalaga Preschool. This enabled her to develop ways to provide experiences for our Pacific tamaiti to continue, ensuring the fau of spirituality is strengthened as they continued on their school learning journey.

Jules adapted her programme to reflect the many cultural aspects she observed at Lalaga Preschool. She introduced pese, siva, tatalo, language, stories and cultural artefacts into their classroom. This ensured that our case study child heard her own language and saw artefacts from her culture in the school environment.

To ensure the fau is strong for all Pacific tamaiti and their āiga when they transition, our inquiry found that for a successful transition to school, it was important to:

- Provide opportunities to have home visits with tamaiti and their āiga to discuss their aspirations for their tamaiti.
- Build strong partnerships between kaiako and leaders in ELS and school settings. This includes regular visits to build relationships with tamaiti and their āiga.
- Use talanoa to share āiga’ aspirations and shared understandings about education with school leaders like the principal and kaiako.
- Provide professional development and learning for kaiako to strengthen their cultural competence and capabilities.

During this year-long inquiry, we all went on a learning journey which led to a deep appreciation of how the fau can connect us to tamaiti, āiga and kaiako across settings. We also found that with support, we could shift our teaching practices to honour cultural values, especially spirituality.



Pulupululima faifaiepa | Working together to grow

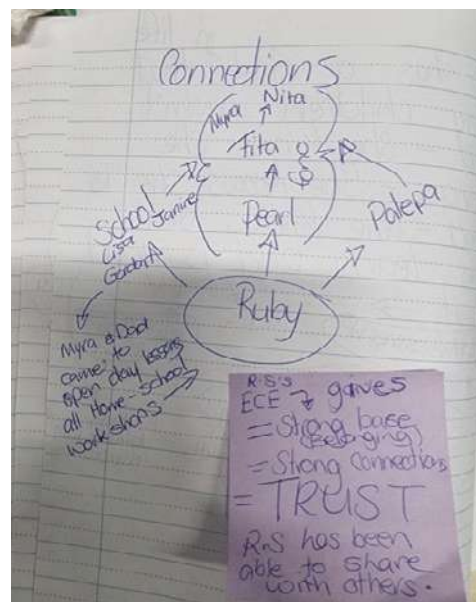
The strength of the fau shows unity of being tightly bound. (Palepa, Teacher researcher, Tafesilafa'i Early Learning Centre).

Tafesilafa'i Early Learning Centre is an A'oga Amata (Samoan language nest) owned by the Catholic Church. Spirituality is a significant part of our Catholic faith as is our Samoan culture. There are 29 tamaiti enrolled and they come from across Ōtautahi | Christchurch. Waltham Primary School is a mainstream school located in south east Ōtautahi | Christchurch and it has a roll of 276. Children, teachers and parents are all part of the learning community. We value knowing the identities, languages and cultures of all our tamaiti and their āiga.

Our inquiry followed two tamaiti – a girl and boy. We tracked their pathways to school, and working closely with āiga and kaiako and the Pacific community from both settings, we strengthened the fau of partnerships.

The girl is very confident about her identity, language and culture. Her story revealed the significance of partnerships between āiga, and kaiako in the ELS and school. The boy is a neurodiverse, non-verbal child. His story epitomises the saying 'it takes a village to raise a child', and demonstrates how collaboration

between āiga, kaiako in the ELS and at school, and support services worked together to build effective partnerships.



Talanoa with āiga revealed what mattered to them, and their aspirations influenced the direction of the inquiries. For example, we all agreed that children are happy in their environment when their cultural values, especially their languages, are present in practice. These conversations with parents allowed us to follow both case study children on their transition journeys and answer our research questions.

The significance of partnerships between āiga and kaiako at both the ELS and school.

Culture is very important. It's very good showing the values at preschool [...]. My child has learnt so much at Tafesila fa'i, she has learnt Samoan and speaks it very well now. And prayers as well because Church is very important in my family. (Parent, Tafesilafa'i Early Learning Centre)



This child is Samoan and has a strong sense of her identity, language and culture at home and at Tafesilafa'i Early Learning Centre. Kaiako at both the ELS and school had an existing relationship with the child and her āiga, as her older sister attends Waltham Primary School.

The ELS tradition was to take children on school visits. Kaiako had listened to the mother's aspirations for her

daughter which were for her to remain strong in her identity, language and culture. They knew this was an important element to making her transition to school successful, and they shared this with the New Entrant kaiako at School – Whaea Lisa.

When [Child's name] comes home from Preschool she tells me how she loves to sing her Samoan songs. She knows she is Samoan and goes to a Samoan preschool. I hope there's a way she can continue this throughout her school years. I can tell she is proud to be Samoan. (Parent)



Lisa (teacher-researcher, Waltham Primary School) and Palepa (teacher-researcher Tafesilafa'i ELS) worked closely with āiga to support the case study child's transition to school. They made sure that the physical environment depicted cultural artefacts that were familiar to the children. Lisa acknowledged the child's spiritual connection with her faith by ensuring she continued to engage with Samoan tatalo, pese, music and stories. As part of the inquiry, Lisa found resources to support her pedagogy and strengthen the fau of partnership and Pacific pedagogy.



I give a bit of talanoa time after songs for the children to talk about where they have heard the song/s and who they know who sings them. The talanoa often includes stories about when this child saw friends from our class at Church. I have shared this slideshow with all of the teachers in our year 0-2 hub and they are used every morning. (Lisa, Teacher-researcher, Waltham Primary School).

The child's transition experience was successful and those involved were conscious that the partnerships they had built as a result of the inquiry process contributed to this. A characteristic of this working relationship was that all were equal, as her mother observed:

It was apparent that [Child's name] was more than ready to go to 'big school' mostly in part from the social, connecting and adapting skills learnt during her time at preschool, nurtured by Palepa and her team of awesome teachers.



[Child's name] received a wonderful warm welcome from Whaea Lisa. Whaea Lisa partnered with Palepa and truly made her first visits seem effortless, so much so that she wanted to stay longer than the allocated time.

We are very thankful for the wonderful service provided by these amazing teachers and agree that it is beneficial for all children transitioning from preschool to primary school. (Parent)

By working together actively, it was clear that the partnership ensured [child's name] had a strong sense of belonging and confidence. Her familiarity with the school and the

classroom facilitated her successful transition to school:

I saw how powerful [Child's name] connection with Samaon music is during mat time when I played Le 'Aute and she said 'I know this song, I'm Samoan'. Then two other children said 'I'm Samoan too'
(Lisa, Teacher-researcher, Waltham Primary School)

The importance of extending partnerships.

[Child's name] is a neurodiverse learner and is Samoan. While he is non-verbal, this child communicates in other ways. His mother was very keen to explore the ways that the ELS could support her child as he transitioned to school. She advocates for his Pacific neurodiverse voice and wants his voice to be heard amongst the talanoa sessions so he and other Pasifika autistic children don't get lost



or forgotten in the ongoing discussions of the future learning and wellbeing of our Pasifika children.

I want him to feel included as Pacific and his special needs. He loves song and dance. He wants to see people who look like him. It takes a village environment. That's what I want my son to go into and to thrive. (Parent)

Palepa (Teacher-researcher, Tafesilafa'i Early Learning Centre) and the parent worked closely with the child and his early learning intervention team. This consisted of an occupational therapist, a nutritionist and other specialists. They partnered together to support the child's interest in music which plays a significant part in his learning both at home and at Tafesilafa'i ELS.

The teacher-researchers observed how [Child's name] responded to singing and so, through music, they created opportunities for him to be heard. Over time, they could see how his self esteem and confidence grew especially when those around him recognised and acknowledged the ways he expressed himself.

The strength of partnerships unified the pedagogical strategies of the kaiako and support services. This in turn generated more information sharing with the child's āiga during home visits. As his mother commented that:

You know the saying, 'It takes a village to raise a child'? It's very true especially for a child with extra needs. [Child's name] village consists of his āiga, his preschool āiga, his early learning intervention team, his occupational therapist, his nutritionist etc ... (Parent)

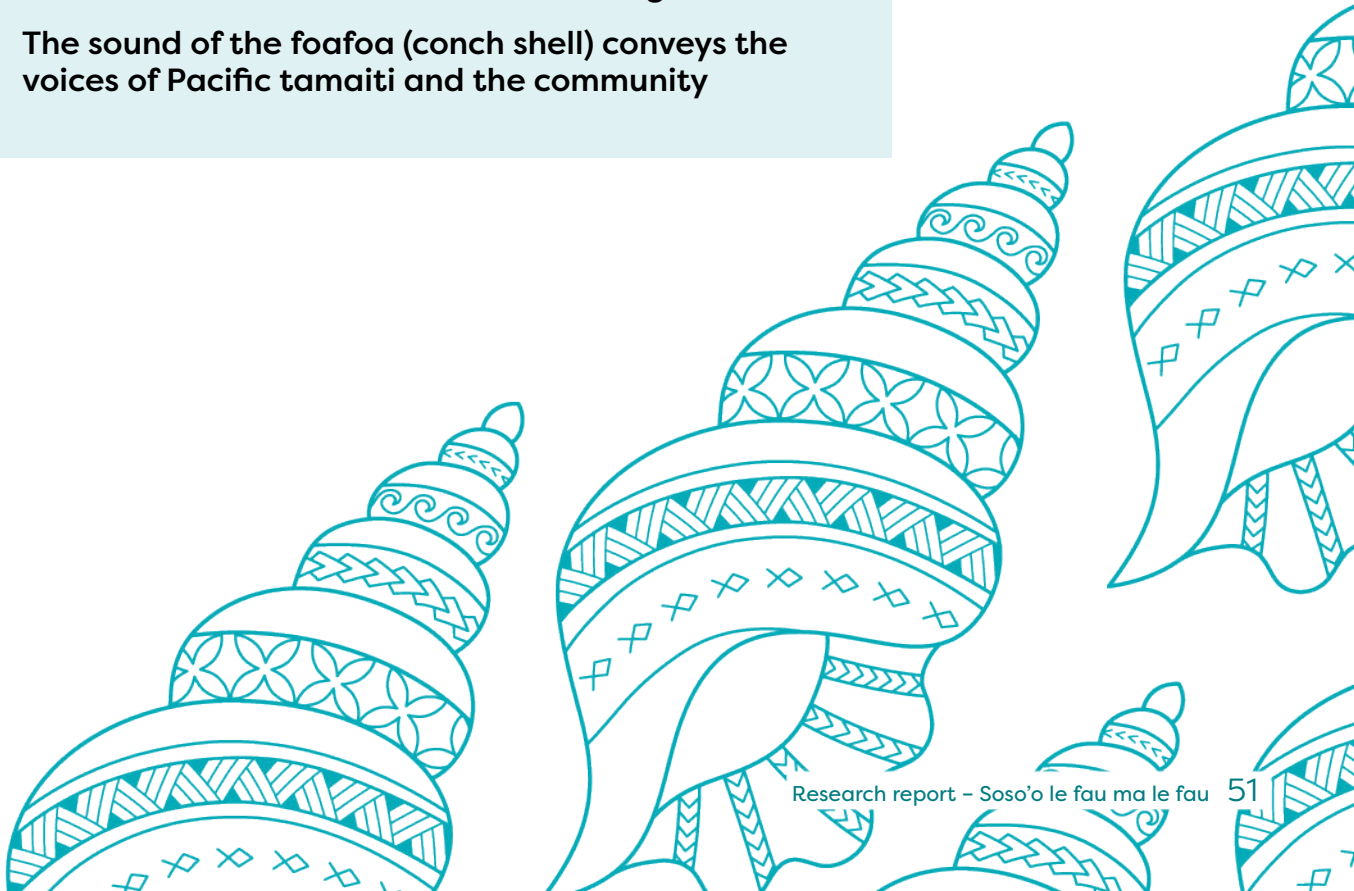
[Child's name] transition journey highlights the significance of partnerships as one of many strands of the fau. This helped others to understand how he shared his sense of belonging to society and the world around him. Despite being 'theoretically' non-verbal, he communicates. The issue was that the adults around him had to learn his language. As his mother reflected:

We have worked together harmoniously with the Early Intervention Learning team – to implement his learning plan with a cultural, holistic and pastoral approach. This is something I'm passionate about and would love to see this way of learning transitioned and incorporated into Pasifika autistics' primary and secondary schooling as it's proven by [Child's name], that he really does thrive in his 'village'. (Parent)

The teacher-researchers identified two major recommendations to support Pacific learners with disabilities to transition into school

- 1. Pacific children's songs and music opened up opportunities for talanoa with the children and their āiga and fānau. This was an authentic way to enhance identity, language and culture as a fau to support transitions.
- 2. Create opportunities for everyone involved in the process of transitions for children with special needs to engage in culturally responsive conversations. This will ensure all voices will be heard.

Ua fa'asoa e le foafoa leo o fānau ma āiga Pasefika
The sound of the foafoa (conch shell) conveys the voices of Pacific tamaiti and the community





Lalagaina o leo | Weaving voices

**Don't teach me my culture.
Use my culture to teach me. (Bentham Ohia)**

Kidsfirst Kindergarten Hoon Hay is situated on the same site as Te Kōmanawa Rowley School. With 27 tamaiti on the roll, our diverse community has a strong Pasifika presence at kindergarten, supported through language and culture woven into our programme every day. Te Kōmanawa Rowley Primary School is in southwest Ōtautahi Christchurch. With a roll of 151 and made up of many cultures. Te Kōmanawa Rowley Primary School offers a Gagana Samoan programme for tamaiti to regularly access throughout their school years.

The key message for our inquiry story has been how we have listened to our

tamaiti voices in order to understand their perspectives of transitioning to school. We know that tamaiti in Kidsfirst Kindergarten Hoon Hay have a strong sense of their Pacific identities, languages and cultures in this setting throughout their daily experiences and the talanoa they share.

- 'Do you have a flower in your hair?'
- 'Can we play the siva video today?'
- 'I want to sing Va'ai i le pepe?'
- 'That is like my beach.'

We wanted to know if they remained connected with these as they transitioned and settled into the classroom at Te Kōmanawa Rowley

School. When the new entrant teacher-researcher increased support for Pacific tamaiti, she became aware of what tamaiti were saying. On one occasion she was engaging in mahi that reflected the Samoan Language when one child spoke up to say, 'But I am Tongan.' This was a significant point in her thinking as she had not included other Pacific cultures. She realised that for this tamaiti to feel connected she needed to include more Tongan experiences. She invited the tamaiti to share her culture. She was very proud to lead the class in singing pese and sharing her language with others.

We have built a strong relationship with the new entrant teacher-researcher and have established regular reciprocal visits where school tamaiti also visit the kindergarten. A positive outcome from these visits is that the school classroom is more reflective of Pacific cultures in visual ways, and we are now familiar with each other's pese and lotu and tamaiti are proud to join these and often lead them.



Soso'o le fau ma le fau | Our themes

Traditionally it takes time to process and prepare the fau for building, so it is for transitions to school. We now start our conversations with āiga earlier to smooth out the knots to have a stronger fau. (Amelia, teacher researcher)






Our research questions centralise the importance of the fau. We developed a shared understanding of what these meant and, at the same time, recognised these as critical to transforming transitions for ELS and for schools. We wanted to make the fau visible, tangible artefacts and, in this section, we present the results of numerous talanoa where we discussed how the fau were understood and enacted across the mini inquiries. The metaphor of a fau can be used at an

organisational level but also at an individual level. We were reminded of the importance of the fau for a child living with a disability.

You know the saying, 'it takes a village to raise a child'? It's very true especially for a child with extra needs. This child's village consists of his āiga, his preschool āiga, his early learning intervention team, his occupational therapist, his nutritionist etcetera, etcetera. We are one of many strands of the fau which help support [child's name] to embrace his culture and identity and his sense of belonging in society and their world around him. (Parent, Tafesilafa'i Early Learning Centre)





Strands of the fau	Examples
 <p>Tofā manino fa’a Pasefika Pacific pedagogies</p>	<p><i>‘I can be adaptable to the new environment and be who I am. My identity is still strong.’</i></p>
 <p>Faigapa’aga ma matua ma āiga Partnership with āiga</p>	<p><i>‘The teachers in the school and preschool now work together.’</i></p>
 <p>Si’osi’omaga Environments</p>	<p><i>‘Is this classroom mine or ours?’</i></p>
 <p>Fa’aleagaga Spirituality</p>	<p><i>‘I loved the big hug from Whaea Lisa.’</i></p>
 <p>Fa’asinomaga/Gagana/ Aganu’u Identity, language and culture</p>	<p><i>‘I am going to my Samoan school.’</i></p>



Tofā manino fa'a Pasefika | Pacific pedagogies

I can be adaptable to the new environment and be who I am. My identity is still strong.

(Parent, Lalaga Preschool)

An insight of this project was identifying Pacific kaiako practices already in place. For example, starting the day with lotu, modelling talanoa with and alongside children in ELS and classrooms, using fono, and being willing to move beyond the confines of the walls of buildings to engage in community and Church-based activities. An important aspect to this was to bring the values of the Pacific communities into the education settings and make these seen and heard. Pacific values are our foundation. Each generation builds the foundation for the next to stand on. It is important that this generation understands that it does not stand here alone – there are many who have come before us to pave the way.

During the Samoan language week and celebration of 60 years of Samoan independence, kaiako in one service

honoured Pacific pedagogies in the ways they planned and implemented their Fiafia celebration. Partnerships with āiga were upheld through talanoa, and together with kaiako, they were involved in all aspects of this event in the following ways:

- Āiga provided Pacific food and were involved in the preparation of kai and umu.
- Kai was shared with parents and visitors and they were given a plate of kai to take home.
- Āiga engaged in talanoa with parents, other kaiako and visitors.
- The fiafia celebration performance honoured Samoan language culture and identity:
 - tamaiti performed pese for the visitors
 - parents supported children to sing
 - kaiako supported tamaiti to perform with pride and confidence
 - the celebration cake was cut by some tamaiti and a parent.



- Board of Trustee members, the lead researchers, and representatives from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Pacific Peoples were invited and this strengthened Pacific community partnerships.
- Formalities like raising the Samaan flag, lotu, and Minister's message and blessing were highlighted as tangible examples of working together.

This event allowed tamaiti to observe, experience, share and celebrate their identities, languages and cultures as part of the wider community. The teacher-researchers were able to implement Pacific pedagogies in an authentic way. When tamaiti experience these practices in their ELS and schools and wider Pacific communities Pacific pedagogies can become a way of being.





Faigapa'aga ma matua ma āiga | Partnerships with āiga

The teachers in the school and preschool now work together.

Relationships are the basis of partnerships. Partnerships are working relationships between people: tamaiti, kaiako, āiga, fānau, researchers and community members and leaders. For our research context, the partnerships operated on several levels:

- partnerships between CORE and Rātā
- partnerships between CORE and the communities (ELS, schools, āiga, Churches)
- partnerships between researchers and kaiako
- partnerships between kaiako in ELS and schools, tamaiti, āiga and fānau.

Our inquiry findings overwhelmingly demonstrate the value of partnerships between āiga, the ELS and schools, and how āiga and fānau are actually the cultural glue, creating coherence and cohesion.

I now see Tracy as a work colleague, instead [of as] a teacher in another setting.

(Abby, teacher researcher, Te Māhuri Mānuka Hornby Primary School)

We found that when the teacher-researchers and the CORE researchers engaged in talanoa with āiga, their cultural aspirations, knowledge and beliefs shaped our thinking and created windows of understanding into each others' world views. Talanoa with āiga strengthened the fau of partnership between Pacific and Palagi teacher-researchers, and we saw how the fau of Pacific pedagogies was also strengthened in practice.

I have shared this slideshow of our songs with all of the teachers in our year 0-2 hub and they are used every morning.

Reciprocal benefits have meant that āiga felt empowered by the knowledge kaiako shared with them through their talanoa.



ULearn22 presentation: Sharing our stories online.

More parents are really keen to join us in the transition visits and help with activities.

Parents have become more confident to engage in their tamaiti's educational journey and in some cases Pacific kaiako use their mother tongue to clarify perspectives.

Engagement with the wider Pacific communities strengthened this

strand of the fau as they have also offered to support the teacher-researchers with their expertise in Pacific languages and resources. The opportunity for teacher-researchers and a parent to come together and share their findings with other kaiako through networks and the ULearn22 Conference demonstrates other ways to strengthen the partnership fibres of the fau.





Si'osi'omaga | Environments

Can tamaiti see themselves in our classroom?

(Teacher-researchers' reflections)

This strand takes the external environment into account. Identity, language and culture, and spirituality are internal and values driven. The environment in this case acknowledges the actual physical spaces where we meet, work and play. There is, arguably, a spiritual element to the environment which we saw emerge throughout our data. We wanted to draw attention to the interplay between how a space looks, sounds and feels. Both subtle and big changes in the environments impact the experiences of those present physically and spiritually.

Kaiako and āiga engaged in talanoa which led to a shared understanding of individual tamaiti, about their strengths and interests which connect them to their cultures. We found that when tamaiti see, hear and feel familiar things in the classroom environment they know they belong there:

I was inspired by what I saw at Kidsfirst Kindergarten Hoon Hay – it was how they had so many Pacific resources everywhere in their environment. When I went back to the School, I really started to wonder, 'Can tamaiti see themselves in our classroom?' I started to add Pacific designs, artefacts and natural resources in the Pukeko room. There are now books which feature Pacific āiga and tamaiti, and lots of words from the Pacific languages.

(Jules, teacher-researcher, Te Kōmanawa Rowley School.)

Additionally this kaiako recognised how the learning experiences and activities tamaiti engage in at ELS can be integrated quite easily into the school environment. The power of the messages in a physical space are often underestimated but in this case, recognising 'si'osi'omaga' as a fau meant we critically analysed impact and, as a result, strengthened visibility of Pacific values between learning environments.





Fa'aleagaga | Spirituality

I loved the big hug from Whaea Lisa. (Child's name)

The fundamental place of spirituality in Pacific cultures demands special attention.

This strand of the fau is not to be confused with religious beliefs, although these are very influential. Connecting physically, and with your heart to people, places and things, now and in the past is a critical element of spirituality. In our discussions, we identified spirituality as a value imbued within, across and between settings. Spirituality was also acknowledged in our talanoa and fono, and too, in the ways we approached analysis and writing reports.

The teacher-researchers strengthened their understanding and knowledge of spirituality and honoured this fau through everyday experiences in their learning environments. They implemented practices such as:

- beginning the day with a blessing
- using lotu or karakia at kai times
- singing pese and waiata.

These pedagogical practices fostered tamaiti wellbeing and belonging. The ways that kaiako engage with tamaiti by showing love, inclusion, and respect through their actions enhances these Pacific values.

When kaiako honour aspirations from āiga alongside the principles, philosophy and values of the school or ELS, the fau of spirituality is enriched.

A teacher-researcher in one setting commented:

We have seen how powerful the connections between tamaiti are when they share their Pacific cultural knowledge. We can see spirituality as the respect, love and gratitude that tamaiti are showing towards each other through their kindness, helping, caring for others, welcoming and hosting visitors. During our visit to school we saw the joy shine through on the tamaiti faces as they were able to join in the blessing because it was one they already knew.

Through the fau of Fa'aleagaga | Spirituality the teacher-researchers gained a deep understanding of how to strengthen this to support successful transitions for Pacific tamaiti.





Fa'asinomaga, gagana, aganu'u | Identity, language, and culture

I am going to my Samoan school. (Child's name)

'Identity, language and culture' – these three words are at risk of being overused in educational contexts but they signify a key strand of the fau that is recognisable as connecting the ELS to schools and in turn, to āiga, fānau and beyond. They are inextricably linked and even though we can, arbitrarily, separate them, there is a large body of research indicating that without language, culture is diluted and without culture, identity is at risk. This strand provided scope for connecting to the past and present experiences of āiga in Aotearoa NZ and in villages that remain home. Knowing who you are and where you come from is part of understanding how you belong.

When the teacher-researchers used talanoa, they found that they connected deeply and authentically with fānau and āiga. Talanoa established environments where āiga felt comfortable to share their cultural

knowledge and aspirations for their tamaiti. Several teacher-researchers noted that when talanoa gatherings took place outside of the school or ELS setting, āiga were more relaxed and shared their thoughts, concerns and aspirations in greater depth than they had previously. In turn the knowledge they now have about the tamaiti has enabled the teacher-researchers to support tamaiti in ways that uphold their mana and ensure they are confident and competent in their identity, language and culture across the settings (Ministry of Education, 2017).

There are two key messages from āiga:

1. Successful transitions are about tamaiti being confident about their identity, language and culture.
2. Collaboration between ELS and school settings is vital.





One āiga wanted their tamaiti to be in a school where their Gagana Samoa and cultural values are present. The teacher-researcher from Te Kōmanawa Rowley School visited Lalaga Samoan Preschool to build a relationship with the tamaiti and to ensure that she would have a sense of belonging and connectedness with the school. The tamaiti visited the school with her parents and was able to recognise aspects of her own identity, language and culture there. When it was time to leave the Lalaga Preschool she proudly announced ‘I’m going to my Samoan Rowley School.’

The teacher-researchers now clearly understand that the knowledge they have of each child’s identity, language and culture is critical to a successful transition. When this knowledge is used in talanoa with the tamaiti and their āiga, this leads to authentic and culturally responsive learning experiences for the tamaiti.

A driver for our research outcomes was not only to identify the fau to support transitions to school, but to strengthen these in multiple settings. The challenge was always to find common ground, especially as tamaiti can transition from ELS where Pacific languages are spoken all the time, to schools where there is very little overt acknowledgement of Pacific cultures. Using talanoa, our fau established themselves as enduring means for analysis and now themes. These fibres interweave with our overall findings, presented in the next section.



Our findings: Auala a'oa'o e fa'atino i le alofa | The pedagogy of love

As part of developing a proposal for this project we came up with a list of indicators (Appendix 2) for successful transitions to school. At that stage, these were drawn from research which pointed to some well-known factors. A successful transition to school is evident when the child and family are:

- Familiar with their new environment
- Understand how things work at school (policies, processes, protocols)
- Included as members of the learning community
- Able to see their language, culture and identity reflected in the school culture
- Able to form meaningful relationships with kaiako, other children and families.



Using talanoa and collaborative analyses, these indicators helped us to assess the difference the project made for tamaiti, āiga and kaiako. This enabled us to see shifts in attitudes, thinking, behaviours and practices in ELS and school settings.

Our findings have enabled us to begin the process of creating resources to support kaiako for further professional learning.

Each inquiry generated its own insights and these have been distilled down into four findings:

- O tatou uma | All of us
- Auala a'oa'o ma fa'atinoga fa'a Pasefika | Pacific pedagogies in practice
- Lagonaina o leo | Hearing the silent voices
- Galulue fa'atasi ina ia manuia | Working together to grow

The breadth and depth of these inquiries can only be hinted at here, and in the sections below, we briefly present our overarching findings.





O tatou uma | All of us

'O tatou uma' means 'all of us'. In this research, all of us included the teacher-researchers, āiga, tamaiti, community members and the CORE research team. We all had to understand what o tatou uma meant in terms of this project. We would not achieve our intended outcomes unless we were all together.

Fragmented approaches to transitions have not served Pacific communities at all well. The disconnect between cultures and pedagogical traditions resulted in the well documented story of under achievement and disengagements. This finding emphasised the strength of a united approach, embedded in Pacific methodologies, and informed by a rich tradition of metaphor.

An important outcome for several kaiako has been how the impact of the talanoa process has enabled them to acknowledge different beliefs and worldviews and achieve deeper understanding of ways to engage with Pacific peoples in culturally respectful ways. By working collaboratively with tamaiti, āiga, each other, lead researchers and the wider Pacific communities, kaiako recognised actions and shifted their thinking:

I need to think about other Pacific nations too. (Kaiako)

Consequently, they supported Pacific tamaiti transitions to school by implementing some impactful, strategies influenced by cultural approaches founded on respect, spirituality, service, humour and above all, love.

Whaea Lisa partnering with Palepa truly made her first visits seem effortless, so much so that [Child's name] wanted to stay longer than the allocated times.
(Parent)

Similarly, the fau were apparent in this finding. For example, some kaiako recognised a greater understanding of the fau, others reflected that the little things, like considering the roles and responsibilities of kaiako and the contributions of parents, made significant differences for tamaiti and their āiga.

Strengthening partnerships between ELS and schools and āiga gave rise to more collaborative ways of engagement – o tatou uma. Prior to the research, many Pacific āiga were reluctant to engage in schools and just dropped their child off. Now, Pacific āiga and tamaiti see themselves as belonging in their school environments and kaiako see their role is to establish a space where knowledge is respectfully shared.



Auala a'oa'o ma fa'atinoga fa'a Pasefika | Pacific pedagogies in practice

I played Le Aute and [Child's name] said I know this song, I'm Samoan. (Lisa, teacher-researcher, Waltham Primary)

Pedagogy is a term used to cover teaching and learning and is usually associated with teacher practices. These are, unconsciously, culturally embedded to represent mainstream education. This was a concern because of the ongoing evidence that Pacific children were not well served by the education system. The system was not responsive to Pacific children and neither was it responsive to Pacific cultural values.

Initially some members of the research team were unaware that Pacific pedagogies existed. Throughout the research, we became increasingly conscious of how we, as kaiako, interacted with tamaiti, āiga and one another to bring these to life in our everyday practices.

I give a bit of talanoa time after songs for the children to talk about where they have heard the songs and who they know who sings them. The talanoa often includes stories about when Ruby saw friends from our class at church. (Lisa, teacher-researcher, Waltham Primary School)

Embracing culturally responsive practice is a pedagogical theory that emphasises the use of Pacific metaphors as tools and resources. This can also mean tamaiti can act as kaiako; they have the expertise.

Learners can be teachers and teachers can be learners. As we mentioned earlier, an anchor for Pacific pedagogies are underpinned by the values.

It all comes from the heart, it's another layer of the love and what's behind the love. (Glenda, CORE Palagi researcher reflection)

The implications of implementing Pacific pedagogies are that palagi kaiako in particular, challenge their assumptions and examine their biases when it comes to educational expectations for Pacific children. On a practical level, we identified some strategies:

- Embed pese, tatalo, cultural music, dance, storytelling, books, imagery, writing and language into curriculum experiences within and outside the classroom.
- Include Pacific artefacts and items in learning environments where they are accessible and interactive.
- Recognise the significance of the way tamaiti and their āiga are welcomed, greeted and farewelled in learning environments.
- Through talanoa with āiga, tamaiti and the wider Pacific communities find ways to deeply understand each other.
- Engage in opportunities where love, respect, service, inclusion, spirituality, leadership, belonging, reciprocal relationships and family are recognised, valued and honoured.

Lagonaina o leo | Hearing the silent voices – see me, hear me, know me

Unlocking the culture of silence is a long-standing issue for Pacific āiga. Past experiences reveal that kaiako assumed that if Pacific āiga (and tamaiti) did not respond, they did not understand. In fact, the value at work here is respect; respect for the words of the kaiako, taking time to listen and process. The other process in place is the notion of teu le va. Silence does not equate to not understanding. Silence is actually a form of response and the cultural practice of talanoa, creating a safe space, eventually results in rich dialogue. The culture of silence has been misunderstood and has resulted in damaging assumptions being made about children and āiga.

All voices need to be heard in order to understand and find answers to our research questions and individual inquiries. Our strongest messages have come from the often silent and unheard voices. Where kaiako and researchers have listened to and acted upon these messages in warm, respectful and loving ways, a deeper sense of belonging, trust and authentic partnerships have been achieved.

Teacher-researchers responded to the many voices from across the Pacific

communities in Christchurch. In one instance, amplifying this voice acted to make a child with disabilities visible:

As [Child's name] is non-verbal (he communicates in other ways) I am his advocate for his Pasifika neurodiverse voice and want his voice to be heard amongst the talanoa sessions so he and other Pasifika autistic children and their Pasifika neurodiverse kin don't get lost or forgotten in the ongoing discussions of the future learning and well-being of our Pasifika children.

The biggest advice I can give to parents and educators is to keep the communication lines open and flowing so everyone is on board and on the same page of how best to support the child, especially a child with extra needs. (Parent)

Once again, our Pacific methodologies provided solutions to what was perceived in English-medium education, as a problem. Listening from the heart, respecting the space, the place, and the person – young and old, and allowing time for responses was fundamental to our approach.



‘O tākanga ‘etau fohé ‘o tau tupu, tupu ai pe | Working together to grow

Working together to grow focuses on the effect of o tatou uma – all of us. In this research an important finding was the ways in which āiga, kaiako in ELS and schools collaborated together on transitions. For example, āiga are now more willing to participate in group transition to school visits. They help out tamaiti in the classroom activities during their group visits in the school classroom. In other words, they have broken the cultural silence. This confidence affects other āiga, and we found a snowball effect – more āiga are involved and more āiga want to be involved. Āiga are now validated as belonging to this space and having a role.

As a direct result of increased āiga engagement, the school community has benefited. Through the spread of talanoa, and the increasingly fragrant flowers in the kakala, not only were our fau strengthened, they were made visible beyond the confines of the research. Being accessible makes it possible for the fau to grow.

As well as nurturing kaiako, āiga, and community growth, we saw significant shifts in practice to respect and honour the voices of Pacific tamaiti. Hearing these made us aware of the fact that our Pacific tamaiti developed

sophisticated strategies to find a sense of belonging in multiple spaces – at home, school, church, sports centres and in community cultural events. These strategies enable them to feel a sense of pride in their culture and a sense of connectedness to all Pacific nations.

Understanding parents’ aspirations, valuing the individual cultures of tamaiti, and making them visible in the curriculum, and the wider school culture, enables tamaiti and their āiga to participate openly. This degree of engagement is exciting and infectious for kaiako and āiga alike.

I can now see that the teachers in the school and preschool are working together. Whereas before they were quite separate. It feels so different now. (Parent)

Working together to grow has revealed expertise in unexpected places. We can only involve our communities if we know our communities and we can only know our communities if we listen. Through talanoa, with a focus on transitions, we found new resources to support language learning and potential resources to support Pacific learners.



Fa'ai'uga | Concluding comments

Our data illustrates how the questions were answered. The combination of fau and findings establish a strong sense of cohesion when it comes to redressing the issues of systemic failure and disengagement of Pacific learners. We have all heard distressing anecdotes about learners wanting to hide their identity as Pacific.

We set out to address a long list of questions. We are confident our process allowed the voices of āiga, teacher-researchers and tamaiti to emerge. We learnt what a successful transition looks like, sounds like and feels like from āiga; we created a shared understanding of the fau and we also strengthened their visibility in ELS and schools. We created pathways for kaiako to explore how these fau support Pacific tamaiti so that their journey into schools is enjoyable and builds a platform for successful future learning – learning that is culturally relevant and responsive.

For us, these findings were made possible by the process of spreading the mat. The combination of talanoa with kakala and the fau has not only created a guide for our future, but also offers localised solutions to a national problem. Below, we argue that local solutions can be mobilised to effect sustainable, transformative shifts in expectations and outcomes.



Fa'aolaola lona fa'aāogaina | Sustainable, transformational change

We began this research with some very clear challenges. Our questions were ambitious and required the kaiako and āiga involved to be honest and courageous.

For the findings of this research to effect transformational change, we need to first and foremost acknowledge that Pacific values both add strength and strengthen us as researchers, as kaiako and as āiga engaged in education. Throughout this research we saw, again and again, how love, respect, service, warmth and humour imbued our work on every level. We never stopped wondering at the powerful influences these values had on us.

Our methodologies were utilised from the start. In our first fono, each participant was gifted a kakala. This included the researchers, the kaiako, and the āiga. We began with a challenge that started with appreciating the beauty and fragrances of the flower but knowing that as our research journey progressed, we would be adding new flowers and scents. The kakala also included children's voices and opinions and these contributed to the tui phase, analysing our fau and findings.

Our project also offers tangible resources which can be used by kaiako in other settings. The funding has allowed us to create:



- **An infographic** with prompt questions for kaiako to challenge thinking and practice around supporting Pacific tamaiti and āiga in their transitions to school.

- **Talanoa mai cards** with key messages to enable kaiako to recognise and implement practices that support and strengthen the fau.



- **A series of four videos** where teacher-researchers share their inquiry stories and the impacts on the transitions to school for Pacific tamaiti and their āiga.

These outputs which are informed by our findings, are not designed as static artefacts to sit on shelves or walls, gathering dust. We want the videos, posters and cards to be used widely in ELS, schools, and churches.

Right from the start, we wanted to activate change in two communities in Ōtautahi | Christchurch. These communities are where Pacific children transition from:

- A'oga Amata (Pacific ELS) where the curriculum is founded on Pacific language/s and culture to 'mainstream' English-medium schools.
- Mainstream English-medium ELS to English-medium schools. We also reached those āiga who have children with special needs and āiga who may not usually engage with their child's ELS or school community.

Our kakala model is designed to be shared; the process, talanoa, is to be used; and the fau are to be put into practice in multiple settings. These gifts are unique to the Pacific and apply not just for research but for everyday life. Our point is that these can and do facilitate transitions to school for Pacific tamaiti. They facilitate partnerships with āiga, and they strengthen Pacific pedagogies for kaiako. They also provide a pathway to schools which reflect Pacific values and embody parental aspirations for Pacific tamaiti.



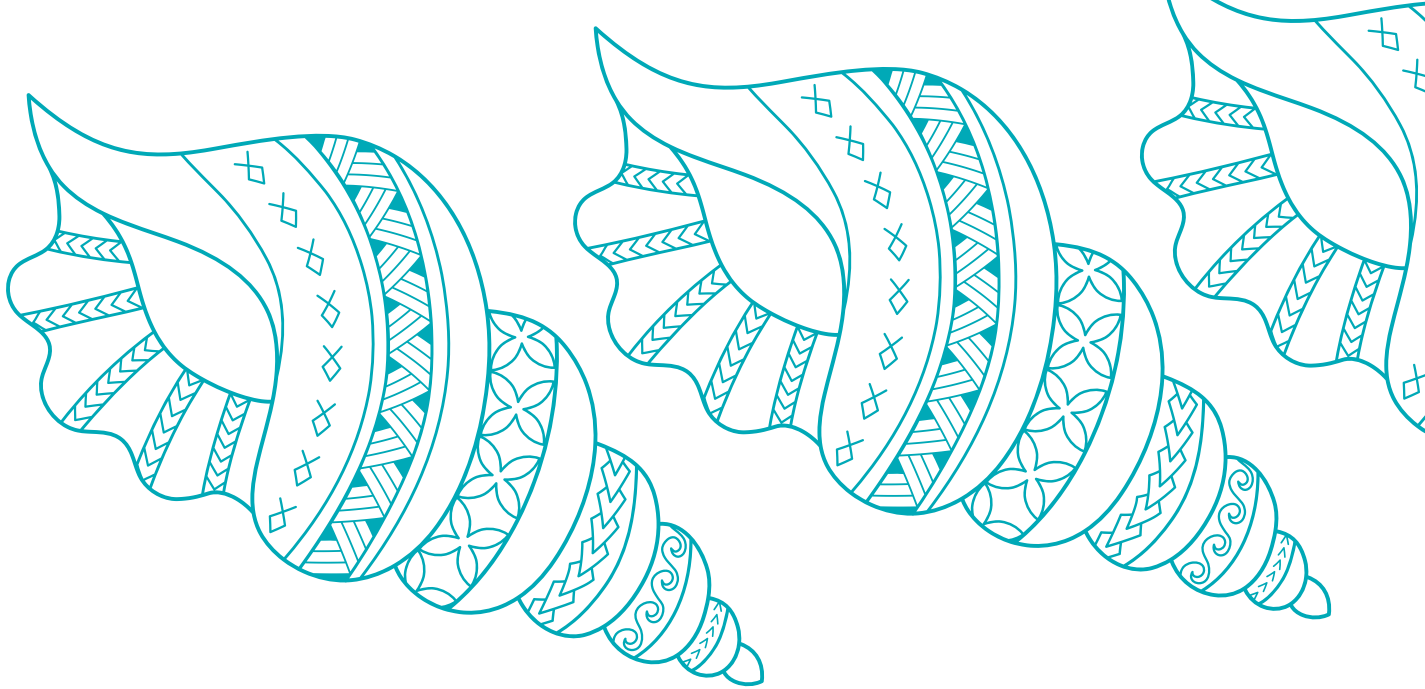
Fautuaga | Recommendations

The following recommendations were drawn from our talanoa discussions about each of the inquiries. We also referred back to the fau and to the findings. Some of these recommendations can be actioned relatively easily, but others require changes at a systemic level, such as serious investment in professional learning and development (PLD) opportunities for kaiako and during initial teacher training.

In order to scale the results that we describe in our project, the design required begins with locally based, locally led Pacific communities with a clear focus on deep, robust systemic change. Co-designed research projects which start with an intention to 'deep scale' are known for their impact on cultural roots (Riddell & Moore, 2015).

We recommend that leaders, researchers, and policy makers with a direct interest or role in our education system:

- **Promote talanoa as an effective, inclusive and culturally respectful way** to encourage conversations in a safe, shared space. This means kaiako need to understand the values of talanoa and recognise that this is not just for new entrant kaiako, but across the whole school community, Kāhui Ako and beyond.
- **Ensure all kaiako have funded PLD** to deeply understand the experiences of Pacific tamaiti, āiga and what their stories tell us about them.
- **Engage with members of the Pacific community** to support talanoa about education with āiga.
- **Invest in co-designing resources and systems** to support fānau to navigate their transition journey and to see themselves reflected in the new environments.
- **Create leadership opportunities for kaiako and senior tamaiti** to contribute to supporting new entrant tamaiti to foster leadership and tuakana-teina learning.



- **Employ Pacific language support personnel in schools and early learning services** to strengthen cultural knowledge and practice, and support the use of Pacific languages in all ELS and schools.
- **Fund kaiako to participate in established networks**, like Kāhui Ako and church communities to share expertise about successful transitions to school for Pacific learners.
- **Listen to others, including children, those with diverse learning needs, and cultural expertise** to inform thinking and improve practices including cultural values like spirituality, service, reciprocity.
- **Start conversations about transitions** between āiga, ELS and new entrant kaiako early.
- **Create opportunities for kaiako from both schools and ELS to visit** one another as part of the transition process for Pacific children. This needs to include home visits with āiga.
- **Establish recognisable pathways to school for Pacific children** that take into account their identities, languages and cultures. These pathways imply systems-level change and must include school leaders, ELS leaders and Pacific community leaders.



Igoa ma upu eseese | Glossary

Aroha mai	love received
Āiga	family
Faia’oga	teacher/teachers
Faka’apa’apa	respect
Fānau	children / extended family
Fau	strand / name of a tree / hibiscus
Fono	meeting
Kaiako	teacher
Kakala	Tongan necklace
Kaupapa	principles and ideas which act as a base or foundation for action
Kāhui Ako	Communities of learning
Kura	school
Lotu	prayer
Māfana	warmth
Mālie	humour
Ofa	love
O tatou uma	all of us
Palagi	white people
Siva	dance
Talanoa	talk / share stories
Talanoa atu	talk / share stories with others
Talanoa mai	talk / share stories with me
Talanoaga	talk / share stories
Tamaiti/tamaititi	children / child
Tautua	service
Tuakana/Teina	older person and a younger person
Tumu Whakarae	Chief Executive

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Vaega Fa'apipi'i | Appendices

Appendix 1: Steering Group members

Rātā Foundation: Kate Sclater (2020-), Courtney Sheat (2020-2021), Vimbayi Chitaka (2021 -2023).

Ministry of Education: Amituana'i Fuetanoa K. Senafo (2021), Lima Magele (2021), Jo George Scott (2021), Pauline Luafutu-Simpson (2022-2023).

University of Canterbury: Joanne Tогiaso (2021-2023).

Pacific Peoples' Representative:

Havana Vil-Misa: Pasifika ECE Network Christchurch (2021-2023).

Rātu Lolohea: Primary School Representative (2022-2023).

Fiaola Ah Kuoi-Lemalie: Parent Representative (2022-2023).

CORE-Education: Hana O'Regan (2021), Keryn Davis (2021-2022), Dr. Pam O'Connell (2022- 2023), Dr. Sarah Te One (2022-2023), Dalene Mactier (2022-2023), Alyssa McArthur, (2021-2022), Tina Healey (2022-2023).





Appendix 2: Indicators

For children:

- They make friends, and willingly join in and participate in everyday activities of school life.
- They are happy to be at school and attend willingly.
- They share and make connections to their family, identity, language and culture through activities and interactions with others.
- They demonstrate their pride and confidence in their identities, languages and cultures to others.
- They confidently demonstrate their capabilities and knowledge to school peers and teachers.
- They show leadership, teach and care for others in ways that are valued in their communities.



For kaiako:

- Transition practices honour the cultural uniqueness that Pacific children and families bring with them and nurture their sense of belonging.
- Children’s friendships and engagement in a group are fostered to enhance their security and confidence at settling during transition times.
- They understand the connections between *Te Whāriki*, *Tapasā*, and *The New Zealand Curriculum*
- The environment is culturally responsive and affirms the identities, languages and cultures of āiga and child.
- Teachers across ELS and school regularly communicate and work together to support successful transitions for Pacific āiga and children.
- Demonstrate leadership in designing learning and teaching that is responsive to Pacific ethnic-specific identities, languages and cultures across education settings.
- They enjoy a positive relationship with Pacific āiga and view them as important and valued partners in this relationship.
- Are familiar with cultural practices, norms and values and understand how these play out in the lives of the child and their āiga.





For āiga:

- Aspirations are shared and they collaborate with teachers to design a plan to support a successful transition for their child.
- Their important cultural stories and cultural practices are shared.
- There is understanding of where to access information around transition to school and they feel confident about seeking support if needed.
- They attend school events and contribute in ways that are culturally responsive and respectful to them.
- They enjoy a positive relationship with the ELS and school and see themselves as important and valued as partners in this relationship.



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