

Chapter 4

FINDINGS: Ethics and the *Aiga* Principle

Seu le manu ae taga'i i le galu

Always be aware of who you are and be prepared before you speak as you might insult those who are important. To acknowledge that one has responsibilities to one's family/community.

Overview

This chapter discusses the findings of the research, focusing on the key philosophical concepts of ethics and the *aiga* principle. It explains how these concepts are embedded, and central to the robustness of the research findings and the validity of interpretations of outcomes.

Ethics and the *Aiga* Concept

Throughout all phases of this research, “ethics” was defined with reference to the Pasifika guidelines. We referred, in particular, to the Pasifika Education Research Guidelines prepared by Melani Anae, Eve Coxon, Diane Mara, Tanya Wendt Samu, and Christine Finau (2001). In this project, the focus/advisory group, which includes teachers, parents, management, and the research associates who work alongside the teachers, had a key role. Focus group members commented on and contributed to the action research processes and the findings from the centre. Relationships within the *Aiga* community (families, teachers, children) became an integral part of the research process, as a consequence of application of Pasifika informed ethical principles. This is essentially culturally embedded ethical research practice.

The community that we have via the A'oga Fa'a Samoa has many parallels to the fundamental traditional Samoan institution of the *aiga*—or the extended family. The A'oga Fa'a Samoa, like the *aiga*, is a cultural and social institution that has key positions, each with important roles and responsibilities in relation to the others. The positions or groups that are a part of the A'oga Fa'a Samoa are: the teachers, the management committee; families and their children.

The findings of the research show how the centre practices and relationships reflect Samoan cultural values. The A'oga Fa'a Samoa places a strong emphasis on the *aiga* (extended family) in regard to relationships. As Tanya Wendt Samu has explained, the *aiga* concept is a reality in action at the centre, and is related to values:

The values that underlie our interactions (as families, teachers, and children) are not unlike those which inform our actions within our different *aiga*. Values include, for example, service and responsibility (*tautua*), love and commitment (*alofa*) and respect (*faaaloalo*). (Taouma, Wendt Samu, Podmore, Tapusoa, & Moananu, 2003, p. 5)

The *aiga* principle has been central to the philosophy that underpins the relationship agreement between the A'oga Fa'a Samoa COI team, including the research associate. As discussed later in Chapter 7 (on “community of learners” and “community of inquiry”), the focus/advisory group, convened for the purpose of developing the COI research proposal and processes, has guided the research reporting. The focus group represents the *aiga* philosophy of the centre, and has staff, parents, community, management, and the research associates all involved. The *faia'oga* (teachers) and parents have complementary roles that are closely interwoven (Taouma, Tapusoa, & Wendt Samu, 2005).

In this research project, the observations of young children making transitions show how both the children and teachers demonstrate the *aiga* principle in action. Among the children, this is apparent through their supporting others in the group and actively contributing to their well-being. We discuss these findings in Chapter 6.

Tanya Wendt Samu has analysed how the three key principles have informed the research approach. The *Pou Tu* model (adapted from Samu, 2005) demonstrates the central role of these principles. A traditional Samoan *fale tele* is constructed around three or more centre posts (*pou tu*). The centre posts are constructed and placed first – they are like the cornerstone, of a large European style building. The vaulted roof is built on top of and around the centre posts. Posts are constructed around the rim of the *fale*. However, the most unique feature of the structure of a *fale tele* is the posts around the rim are not a structural necessity for holding the vaulted roof up. It is the

centre posts—or the *pou tu*. Samu (2005) has argued that the potential success of Pasifika research and education projects lies in the extent to which Pasifika values have informed both the design, structure, and implementation of the project. The values for this project are illustrated in the following *Pou Tu* model:

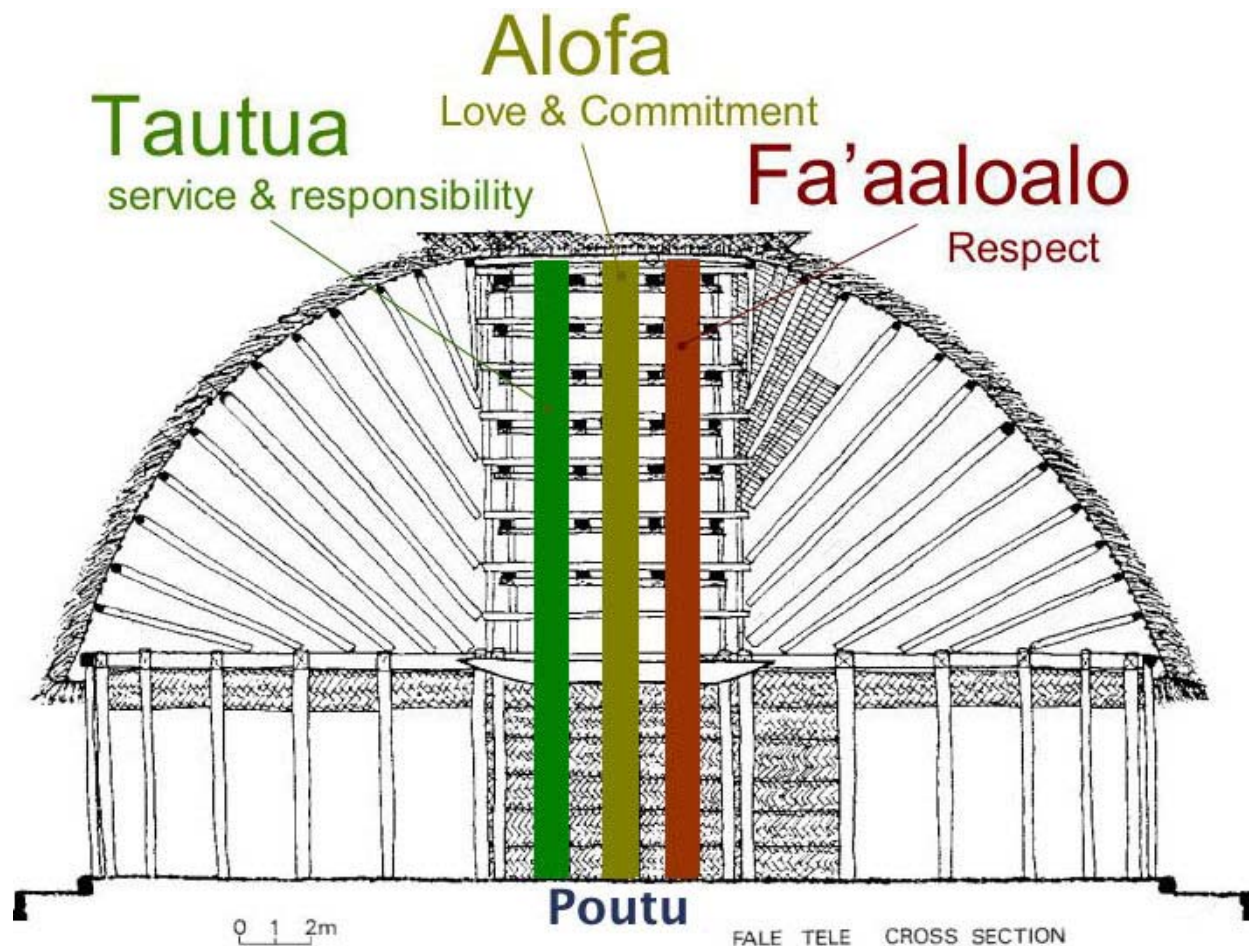


Figure 4.1 The *Pou Tu* model (adapted from Samu, 2005), showing the three values that informed our research at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa.

Three values or principles have informed our research project. Tanya Wendt Samu explains them in this way:

- *Alofa*: love and commitment. The relationships the members of our COI (i. e., the A’oga Fa’a Samoa) are familial relationships. Being involved with the COI research project is a specific, shared commitment – it is a make or break commitment for us all.

Children – it has been a journey of discovery for us as parents, teachers, and researchers. We have discovered or learned new knowledge of our children, the ways that they learn or have been learning. The research has provided us with different set of lenses in which to see our children.

- *Faaaloalo*: respect. Hierarchies are non-existent within the relationships that have been formed between those involved with this COI project. For example it is incidental that our lead research associate (Dr Val Podmore) happens to have a title, a professional title (Dr), from a world we collectively respect i.e., academia and education. But the primary source of our respect for her is the form and the manner in which she has contributed to our community, our A’oga Fa’a Samoa. She has shared her knowledge and expertise with us, provided guidance and leadership in terms of research.

Faaaloalo also applies to the respectful and ethical involvement of our children in this research project. Such a relationship is not alien of our day-to-day practice, or very much a part of our centre’s philosophy.

- *Tautua*: service. Service for us is about the contribution of time, resources and knowledge and expertise. Reciprocity is an essential feature of our notion of service. For example, the focus group, for many of the participants, particularly the parent members, has been an opportunity to serve the A’oga community (teachers and children) via advice, provision of feedback for milestone reports, assisting with the preparation of presentations , and so on. There is also the perspective that this research project is a way that our Centre the A’oga Fa’a Samoa, can serve other groups—other cultural groups e.g. Pasifika immersion centres, and professional groups.

These principles have informed the research process that we, A’oga Fa’a Samoa, were immersed within for the duration of the project. The “connections” that we have made (in terms of new knowledge, understandings and perspectives, and relationships with others) are as a consequence of principles that have informed our research practice. This has made this research ours. The western methodological framework

(including, for example, the action research and the action research tools) has become ours—we have clear, unwavering sense of ownership of this project as a consequence of these principles. This research is ethical because our values flavour it in deep, meaningful ways. The research is still valid, and legitimate and robust research—it is still action research, and still informed as well by socio-cultural theory.