

## Original Paper

# Fagogo—A Literary Cultural Perspective

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### Abstract

*This article discusses Fagogo (story telling at night) in the Samoan context and authors assessment and evaluation of the tool, its significance, appropriateness and applicability to classroom teaching and student interaction. In relation to 'Fagogo a few publications had widely researched this tool from a Samoan perspective. Few Samoan academics highlighted Fagogo in their writings and research, but I have drawn from the available literature and my own experience as a Samoan raised within the context of Fagogo in the Samoan culture.*

*Freire (1970, 1987) and Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) have provided the lens through which people and students of indigenous cultures are inspired to have strength and faith in their own language and culture to equip them in combatting obstacles and barriers they face in education and survival. Both authors remind people to take pride in one's identity and be empowered through one's knowledge and understanding of one's own language and culture. Freire's (1978) work in Chile and Brazil became extremely influential in the lives of the landless people. Samoans have drawn from his ideas to better understand the importance of not devaluing one's heritage, language, and the culture but to seek the removal of the source of disempowerment knowledge and strength.*

### Keywords

*language, heritage, identity, perspective, empowerment, pedagogy, knowledge*

### 1. Introduction

The gogosina or manusina, a bird of the mountain survives on fishing. Early in the morning the gogosina soars high in the skies as it makes its way to the sea to fish for food. The manusina is unique in scouting for fish over the deep sea, hence the Samoan proverb “*E manusina le soā*” it is one on its own. The bird acts as a guide to the fishermen because it instinctively knows the change in tides and where a huge catch may be found. In the evening when the gogosina moves towards the mountains it is an indication to the fishermen that the catch is scarce, and they should return home. The gogosina always returns to the mountains with a fish for its young and thus the prophetic idiom “*Ua fō'i i le*

*tuasivi le faiva o manusina*” the fisherman returns home. Moreover, it does not return empty handed and fulfils another Samoan saying “*Ua molimea manusina*”.

With hope for greater possibilities ahead the search is never ending and the *gogosina* demonstrates behaviour that have sustained and assisted the survival of societies historically and culturally. The *Fāgogo* ensures the continuation of behaviours and practices that aid survival in a particular place.

The significance of educating young children in Samoa using Samoan language and culture has been a critical and pivotal issue to the Samoan people. The deep value of Samon language and culture as a basis for learning of Western knowledge has not been understood well. In the desire to keep pace with a world full of technology and economic advancement, most of Samoan people focus their education on the formal, pedagogical constructs, imported and used by Missionaries who arrived in 1830 (Samoa Ministry of Education, 2006). For many years, the introduced Western formal education system overwhelmed the Samoan people thus denying the value of Samoan ways to acquire knowledge, to think and to learn. Consequently, the ideas and beliefs of Samoan people about the Samoan language and culture as the basis of the learning process, has become nearly insignificant. Furthermore, Samoan people, particularly the younger generation, take the Samoan language and culture for granted. This ignorance further undermines the contribution of Samoan language and culture as the foundation and means for learning and for living a life enriched by meaning cast by its cultural lineage, heritage, and history.

The Samoan language and culture is explored here from a Samoan perspective, by unpacking *Fāgogo* for insights and understanding of Samoan deep culture as an essential base for learning. In addition, it pinpoints the pedagogical elements in *Fāgogo*. These elements then can inform the teaching of Samoan children in their traditional language and culture and uses them as the foundation for learning other foreign languages and knowledge.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Stories/Storytelling a Pedagogical Tool

Every culture has its own set of stories that are repeated and evolved. These stories have been told and modified to fulfil changing purposes for a variety of audiences. The content and effect of the cultural set of stories go beyond the initial entertainment they offer. Beyond the immediate pleasure that uplifts, excites, and provokes emotion and thought at the moment of telling, there is also a constant contribution to intellectual, emotional and moral development that is the afterthought conveyed and instilled in the purpose of story or storytelling.

In the interpretation of stories as a resource for language teaching in the classroom, Wajnryb (2003) referred to stories as serving two main purposes; one is to provide a means of teaching and learning in general; and two, they provide a means of teaching language specifically. Stories in a daytime classroom, offered by teachers, provided the data for Wajnrybs’ study. The author stated that while he found stories useful to classroom language learning in particular, stories shouldn’t be confined to the

classroom. The cultural and linguistic nature of stories provided additional important insights for students to gain. Taking on both oral and written literacy in another language required acculturation to the genre and intent of its story language. This acculturation helps the learners become consciously aware of the rich socio-cultural, pragmatic, and discursive knowledge held within the stories, especially in those of adult native speakers working in their first or home language (ibid. p. 17). The author indicated that stories and storytelling, beyond classroom experience, can and do contribute largely to academic and procedural knowledge. The effect of story, its *magic* “is to offer an infinite well of vicarious experience with the capacity to transport the hearer/reader beyond all boundaries of time, space, language, ethnicity, class or gender” (Wajnryb, 2003, p. 4). Stories/storytelling are universal to humanity because they entertain and instruct the language through use of structures and embedded meaning. Wajnryb warned that while exposure to stories contributed to holistic learning, not all stories serve universal educational purposes. Stories specific to a particular cultural setting, suitable for those values and beliefs, may not serve another culture as well. Wajnryb’s believed stories and narrative action in the classroom provide additional benefits beyond the initial effect of listening to a story.

According to Pellowski (1996) “storytelling is the entire context of a moment when oral narration of stories or prose, is performed or led by one person before a live audience” (ibid. p. 18). The author stated that all kinds of stories and storytelling occur throughout the world’s human community and gives a single, absolute, all-inclusive, definite definition which is very difficult. Every cultural tradition the author reviewed, however, defined story and storytelling that serviced its own language and highlighted its cultural values and beliefs.

In addition, the differentiation of types of storytelling which are specific to a purpose. One type is “Bardic” storytelling, where the ‘bard’ as the storyteller creates or performs poetic oral narratives that chronicle events or praises the actions of illustrious forbearers and leaders of tribal, cultural, or national groups. The author found throughout the Pacific, there have been and, in a few cases, still are, performers of a bardic nature. The Polynesians are found to have an especially rich history of such epic styles. As Katherine Luomala (cited in Pellowski, 1996) stated, they “had a name for every narrative and poetic form, and each had its proper time and place” (ibid, p. 38). In Pellowski’s discussion, names, places, and times of narratives are often unique to each culture, however there are some stories which share concepts like the founding of the culture or the life source. The *Fāgogo* of Samoans was found to be unique in its time, place and narration styles. Culturally, the unique structure of *Fāgogo* is based on *talanoa* (*dialogue*) that creates the inter-relationship for exploring the pedagogical ideas of the Samoan language and culture for Samoan children. However, storytelling, though seemingly held in high regard for its maintenance of cultural traditions and content, is diminishing in common practice and the reasons for that are many.

Stories as a component of oral traditions play a significant part in the culture and lives of indigenous societies. “In most indigenous societies throughout the world, oral traditions are pervasive with metaphors, proverbs and highly developed wordplay that display themselves through verbal

repertoires” (Grenbole & Whaley, 2006 p. 119). The implication is that stories serve as the vehicle of history and traditions that connect the spoken and the spiritual world. Taonui (2006 in Howe p. 22) also drew attention to the significance of mythologies of oral cultures, that reflect deep-seated philosophical, religious, cultural, and social beliefs about the nature of reality and the unknown, being and non-being and the relationship between all things; hence, regarded as the most sacred of all traditions.

### 3. Result

#### 3.1 Language and Cultural knowledge

Aiono Fanaafi (2005) urged Samoans in her book “*La Ta Gagana*” (our language) that *fāgono* is one of the foundations of our language because of its underlying meanings, chants and emotions, reflecting clarity of vision (p. 163).

Aiono elucidated that *Fāgogo* is unique to Samoans because it carries fundamental values of the Samoan language and culture and *fa’avae* that hold the Samoan culture and its people together. It signifies the utmost importance of seeking knowledge pertaining to the foundations of Samoan language and culture. This is highly essential, and people should not undermine their home language and culture because of the powerful dominance of western knowledge and foreign ideas they have been exposed to for generations. Moreover, Aiono gave voice to the Samoan culture and her role in the Samoan Indigenous University that she established.

“Written stories are only a very improvised form of spoken ones; nowhere in the written text can you discern the tone of voice, loudness, excitement, gesture, facial expression or tempo, all those things that make a story alive” (Harrison, 2007 p. 145). The comment by Harrison once again elevated the nature of oral story telling in comparison to written stories in oral communities. The author alluded to the beauty and freedom of oral art in the delivery of the Samoan *fāgogo*. Since *fāgogo* is an oral ritual, the written *fāgogo* eludes the *agaga*, meaning the spirit of the oral *fāgogo*. The spirit only draws out the magnificence of *fāgogo* in the Samoan context and is a vital element in telling *fāgogo*. All the elements of *fāgogo*, from the tellers to the context and content, interconnect in a way that is one of its kind.

Tupua (2003) in his paper, “In search of Meaning, Nuances and Metaphor in Social Policy” gave an explicit explanation of the culture of oral traditions in the Samoan context. The ritual of *Fāgogo* has the power to impart spiritual, emotional, physical, mental, and cultural nurturance. These traditions are slowly disappearing. “The demise of the *Fāgogo* is a tragic blow to our culture” (p. 59). Tupua speculated on the demise of *Fāgogo* as the end of cultural *fa’afailelega* (nurturance) of the younger generation in its cultural values, language, beliefs, and identity. The *Fāgogo* with its stories of wars and victories, and the pride, love, strength, and courage these provided, served to enlighten the minds, hearts, and souls of any Samoan. This identified Samoans and the value of the language and the culture in building these qualities. Tupua explained “frame of mind” as reference to regrets in the disappearance of *Fāgogo* from common and current Samoan culture. It exposed a gap in the Samoan language and culture of the *Fāgogo*, that is worth analyzing for pedagogical ideas in teaching Samoan

children about themselves.

In recording *Fāgogo*, one or more songs sung by the narrators was the focus of Moyles (1981) research on collecting and analyzing Samoan stories in English and Samoan. Without the *Fāgogo* or stories, the text of the songs are incomprehensible and thus *Fāgogo* is the contextual foreground in which songs are understood, appreciated, and analyzed. Moyle's suggested *Fāgogo* as the foundation of all other Samoan oral rituals including song because the *Fāgogo* explained the story which the songs extended or enhanced. Moreover, *Fāgogo* often highlighted the contrast and conflict between culturally accepted and unaccepted behaviour. It also featured *Fāgogo* in attracting children with humor, wit, and comedy. Moyle's work is significant in analyzing the structure of *Fāgogo*, but more research is needed to further clarify how *Fāgogo* is a source of childhood pedagogy for Samoan cultural knowledge.

### 3.2 The Learning Tradition

"Aga" is a component of the Samoan concept *aganu'u*. *Aga* refers to all the behaviour and movements of each member of the group, while *nu'u* refers to the group. *Aganu'u, o tu ma amioga a tagata o nu'u ta'itasi sa masani mai ai anamua e tutusa uma ai nu'u o Samoa* (Mailo, 1992) translated as customs and traditions of each village from the past that are common to all villages in Samoa.

*Fāgogo* is one such tradition that is common to all villages in Samoa, hence it is very much a part of the *Aganu'u*. *Fāgogo* is *aga* that commonly serves both the entertainment and educational needs of Samoan children. It uses the model of an elder storyteller who employs the Samoan language in a powerful yet persuasive way to help the young obtain knowledge for survival in time and place. *Fāgogo* employs both the strong Samoan oral literature and the well-practiced storytelling ability of the older family member, usually a grandmother or a great-aunt. *Fāgogo* flows from the oral literature reservoir and wellspring characterized by genealogies, oral traditions, songs, and stories. It is a Samoan art form, exploring the relationship of people to people and people to life and place and providing knowledge and hard-won wisdom.

### 3.3 Strengthening Identity

Culturally, people gain knowledge through various experiences and rituals that are unique to their own cultures. Two cultures rarely have the same words or expressions to define the unique rituals and cultural experiences that serve life in their place. Moreover, the rituals and traditions offer greater benefits and advantages to those who initiated and practiced them than anyone from a different place or time could fully appreciate.

Just as the *gogosina* must act in a particular way to feed its young, so too should unique rituals and traditions be protected to ensure the survival of generations of human inhabitants.

Manu'atu (2000) defined pedagogy as the science of teaching and learning, drawn from Freire's philosophy (Freire, 1970). In this definition, science refers to knowledge. The knowledge of teaching and learning produces ways of how we make sense of the world we live in every day. Pedagogy gives human beings the opportunities to form relationships amongst themselves, be it in the family, the school, the community or even in a foreign place. As renowned Freire expressed, "Pedagogy is

concerned with relationships between the words and the world” (Manu’atu, 2000, p. 90). Understanding the conducts and traditions of how one learns in one’s culture provides an explanation of how people form the crucial bonds and connections among the concept, the words and the world.

When people no longer feel free to think their own thinking and cannot name the world in their own words, they are easily assimilated into new dominant cultures with new knowledge that is totally foreign and meaningless to them (Freire, 1970, 1987). Freire’s experiences greatly influenced the lives of landless people in Chile, Sao Tome, Brazil, Principe and Guinea-Bissau. In his work, Freire aimed to convince peasants and landless people to think and change their current situation by learning more about themselves, their identity and knowledge to empower their struggle in the Western world. Freire posited that the ‘anthropological concept of language and culture is central and indispensable to the education of the people in their coming to know the world’ (Manu’atu, 2000, p. 89). Teaching and learning, Freire attested, is crucial in one’s own home language and culture enabling one to understand the significance and value of oneself.

When people fully understand and appreciate their historical and traditional ways of learning, only then can they be grounded firmly in their heritage and culture. In that sense, neither foreign ideas nor change can be easily accepted or understood (Freire, 1987). Freire stated that one’s own cultural strengths constructed through one’s own cultural pedagogies, is the foundation of the thinking and conceptualization that supports a critical view of the world. This is linked to the theory that the strength and values in one’s identity come from knowing and understanding one’s own *Fāgogo*, one’s own cultural stories expressed in one’s own mother tongue. Freire realized that those with whom he worked led difficult lives and that freeing themselves relied on recreating or re-expressing their own significant stories that defined their identity.

Samoan people learn about their identity in ways that are specific to themselves, such as *Fāgogo*. Even though Samoan language and culture dominated everyday life under colonization, the powerful influences of Western ideas proved too strong as people sought a different standard and way of living consistent with the material wealth of the colonizers. The attention and value given to the Samoan pedagogical culture of learning decreased to near non-existence and that situation continued to greatly impact people’s thinking.

Over the years, however, the cultural environments have changed, for both the colonialists and the Samoans. Interestingly, both sets of people now search for knowledge and wisdom of the Samoan culture that was previously ignored. The recognition that culture is an attribute of a person in a particular place and time, is more prevalent and more credible as a contributor to successes psychologically, economically, and ecologically.

Contributive pedagogies theoretically rely on relationships created and produced in valuable learning contexts which are not fixed but are created and recreated as students and teachers engage in the process of coming to know (Freire, 1993). Relationships are important as a source of *Fāgogo*. As a Samoan cultural pedagogy, *Fāgogo* in the Samoan context, explores how it can produce relationships

and worthwhile learning contexts to support the learning process. Moreover, contributive pedagogies are created from language and cultural practices that are commonly used and familiar, which value and use the behaviors that are common and understood within a community of learners.

### 3.4 Inspiring Writers

There are numerous success stories of the Pacific people, but it is necessary to relate a few significant stories in relation to cultural knowledge and skill and the modern world. Today, many Samoan storytellers explore familiar themes and use a similar mechanism of telling *Fāgogo* to tell their stories through the written word (Mallon, 2002). The developments in Samoan written literature have been well documented in an essay by Fairbairn-Dunlop (1994). In a detailed account, Fairbairn-Dunlop suggested that the ‘search for Samoan writers has been to capture on paper the elusive essence of the *Fāgogo* art they remembered from their youth’ (ibid. p. 164). This is probably true for most Samoan writers, particularly those who were raised in Samoa, but the present generation included writers who have had little access or exposure to

*fāgogo*. Fairbairn-Dunlop is an active supporter of *Fāgogo* in the modern world and its impact on success stories. When today’s writers search for ideas and mechanisms valid in the Samoan context, then *Fāgogo* is a significant contributor to living and understanding the modern world as in the past.

In an interview by Sharrard (2003), Albert Wendt acknowledged his grandmother’s skills in telling *Fāgogo* as a significant source of inspiration for his prolific work in writing. Wendt is one of the first in the Pacific to acknowledge the significance of informal cultural learning in his work. The bulk of his work is presented in the English language and Wendt is sighted as an inspiration for many other Pacific writers, as he incorporated many elements of Samoan oral tradition into his work. In Mallons’ book “Samoan Art & Artist” (2002) Wendt wrote, “I have always had an interest in telling stories because I came from a family very rich in oral storytelling and tradition. My grandmother was a great storyteller and was an authority on *fa’a Samoa*, history, genealogy and so on. She handed a lot of this to us in the form of stories” (ibid. p. 167). Wendt’s work is the being of “*Samoaness*” that Fairbairn-Dunlop wrote “he was a Samoan, and writing about topics, emotions and feelings Samoans could identify with, using imagery that had instant appeal” (ibid. p. 165). From the rich background of *Fagogo*, Wendt provided a huge and successful view into Samoan knowledge and its perceptions and thoughts about the world. However, there were critics whose misinterpretations of his work probably sprung from little or no knowledge of *fa’a Samoa* and an apathy towards that knowledge and its understanding.

Sia Figiel, known to be the first Samoan female novelist, was inspired by the style and content of Wendt’s writings. Sia like Wendt grew up frequently exposed to *Fāgogo* and *solo* (poems) and has admitted their great contributions and value to the way she writes today (Figiel, 1996). She referred to the imagery and music of *Fāgogo* and *solo* as “the greatest influence in her work” (ibid. p. 122). Figiel, in addition to authoring books, is also a live storyteller and performer. In the year 2000, Figiel released some of her poetry on compact disc with Kiribati poet Teresia Teaiwa. Entitled “*Terenesia*”, the CD provided performances of Figiel’s work and allowed new audiences to experience the spoken

performance of it (Mallon, 2002). The work by Figiel is an example of how the art of *Fāgogo* lives on in the new generation, though in a modified form. Like Wendt, Sia provided her experiences of *Fāgogo* in a more widely accessible form to a broader audience and has offered her “voice through writing” to the younger generation of Samoans in an English-speaking world.

There are other talented Samoan writers whose works were also influenced by the *Fāgogo* and storytelling traditions of their youth. Author and poet Ruperake Petaia’s evaluation of the impact of modernization in Samoan society has been widely studied in classrooms throughout the Pacific, as they are more relevant and comprehensible to the Pacific Island situation. Momoe Malietoa von Reiche, a poet and artist, also recalled the *Fāgogo* of her childhood, “it was so much more fascinating because your mind would work overtime creating fantastic images and places” (Mallon, 2002 p. 164). The images Momoe talked about were replicated in her artistic work throughout her career. As a young child listening to *Fāgogo*, the beauty it described created fantastic images in the mind that later in life were explored and exposed to the rest of the world through poems and illustration.

There is great admiration from other Pacific and European writers in these works; as Figiel (1996) pointed out, these cultural models could effectively express perceptions from their native standpoint. The superb effort defined in the events showed that informal cultural experiences play a crucial part in the modern world success. The *Fāgogo* inspired the successful writers with unique works that Samoan people could well relate to and understand. The big challenge lies in how to understand and encourage the pedagogical merits found in *fāgogo* to benefit Samoan writers and storytellers of the present and future generations of Samoa.

### 3.5 Language and Education

The Government of Samoa in 2007, endorsed the importance of Samoan language and culture as a means of advancing the education of the Samoan people. It identified that a critique and analysis of Samoan language and culture could provide the basic knowledge and *fa’avae* or foundation for Samoan education. Recently, the call for strengthening Samoan language and cultural education was reiterated by the Samoan Education Policies of 2006-2015. The policy statement clearly specified “children should be fully literate in Samoan language and culture and have the opportunity to explore ideas in their first language before advancing to other languages” (Ministry of Education Samoa, 2006 p. 32). Interestingly, over the years, many educators have expressed the same insight for “Samoan first” (Tagaloa, 2006, as cited in Nunes). Obviously, there is an urgency to explore and analyze in depth the sources of language pedagogy including *Fāgogo* in the Samoan culture. Language is the first medium to learning, and its pedagogy, especially in the home and family, provided grounds for later practical and academic knowledge growth.

The prominent Samoan educator, Aiono Fanaafi (1996) advocated the significance of Samoan language and culture as the basis of Samoan knowledge, identity, pride and wisdom. Professor Aiono reflected on the significance of the Samoan language. In her own words,

*“Our language is a house of treasured goods; the source of pure water; the ten heavens of the arts*



*creation encircled by prophetic vision' (p. 8).*

The Samoan language has *utuvagana* (vocabulary) that is deep and full of meaning as demonstrated by Aiono's statement indicating the meaning that is contained and obtained from the language used in *Fāgogo*. The ability to express such fullness of Samoan-particular thought is rarely encountered in the *utuvagana* of the younger generations of Samoa today. These generations are often deprived of any exposure to *Fāgogo*.

The establishment of the Samoan Indigenous University "*Le Amosa o Savavau*" signified great respect for Aiono and her colleagues in awakening the importance and value of the Samoan language and culture. The principal aim of the university was to encourage Samoan people to maintain language and culture in traditional ways and to prevent further interference and dilution by 'Western' or other external ideas. "*O la ta gagana o le meaai ma le meainu*" (ibid. p. 22), literally the Samoan language is our nourishment and drink. The ancestors knew from the start that the language has a duty to the young people to feed their minds and their souls with *upu* (words) and *tala* (stories). The *upu* and *tala* would be meaningless without the *Fāgogo* that connected the body, mind and soul to the land and sea that support and sustain life. Aiono clearly verbalized the necessity to sustain Samoans with cultural forms, like *Fāgogo*, so they could use their inheritance delivered in *utuvagana* for creative expression and informational communication.

The former Head of State of Samoa, Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi (2003, 2004, 2006) focused his work and writings on specific Samoan contexts to highlight the power of knowing Samoan history, language, and culture in the governance of the Samoan people and the land. Traditions were researched to highlight the values and significance for education in Samoa. Although many Samoan traditions and their significance were investigated, Tupua acknowledged that there was more to find in rituals or cultural practice like *Fāgogo*. In his paper "In Search for Meaning, Nuance and Metaphor in Social Policy", an in-depth study into language and culture found ritual and practices gave context which then gave meaning and finally insight (Tupua, 2003 p. 49). He believed that Samoan knowledge and pedagogical ideas based on cultural rituals are eroding. Samoan people should understand the pedagogical significance of language and cultural rituals in their search for success in life.

Kepa's (2001) study into immigrant languages and education in New Zealand, argued that learning a foreign language required deep knowledge of cultural concepts, and the constant devaluing of cultural knowledge removed pedagogical anchors or foundations that help an immigrant to understand how to learn in a foreign place. The study concluded that there was benefit in using cultural knowledge and its pedagogies in any learning situation, but especially in formal school education.

### *3.6 Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Empowerment*

In framing understandings of *tomai fa'aleaganu'u* (Samoan cultural knowledge), similar ideas were drawn from the actions of the indigenous Māori in Aotearoa. Māori people retrieved and revived their language and culture by establishing educational initiatives such as Wananga in 1980, Te Kohanga Reo in 1982, and Kura Kaupapa in 1985. These institutions of learning taught Māori knowledge such as

whakapapa (genealogy), waiata (songs/poems) korero Māori (talks, stories in te reo Māori) and Māori pedagogies (Smith 1997, 1999; Hemara 2000, Macpherson, Spoonley, & Anae, 2001). Moreover, these educational developments directly supported Māori action in and aspirations towards reclaiming Tinorangatiratanga through re-instatement of the place of the Tiriti o Waitangi. The initiatives partially responded to increasing and raising academic achievement of Māori through a return to Te Reo e Tikanga Māori. Smith as well as Hemara argued that the re-instatement of ancestral knowledge and status may eventually alleviate a myriad of social, economic, and political issues which have plagued the indigenous Tangatawhenua o Aotearoa since 1880 (Walker 2000, 2005; Smith, Hohepa, & McNaughton, 1992). The current movement in universities focused on researching Māori knowledge by cooperating and collaborating with Māori people using research methodologies drawn from Maori language and cultural practices (Smith, 1999, Durie 2000, 2003, & Jones, 2007). There were no simple resolutions to the struggles of Tangatawhenua o Aotearoa; however, published research revealed that learning first about Māori historical strength and abilities, had empowered creative approaches for resolving disagreements with the Crown government of New Zealand.

The diverse Pacific peoples residing in New Zealand, Samoan people included, are experiencing a sense of loss of ancestrally based identity, language, and culture (Macpherson, Spoonley, & Anae 2001). According to Taumoevalua (2004), the declining number of Pacific islanders who could speak their home language is the most apparent sign of losing home cultural identity and practice. Studies in the education of Pacific groups in Aotearoa have highlighted the significance of culture in language learning. For example, Pacific children, and in particular, Samoan children, have shown great benefit from grounding their early years of learning in the Samoan language and culture (McCaffrey & Tuafuti, 2001, 2005; Podmore, Tapusoa, & Taouma 2006). The researchers found that the use of the home language and cultural practices provided essential footings for successful learning.

Manu'atu (2000) explained in her study of pedagogical possibilities for Tongan students in Aotearoa, that through the specific cultural sites of "*Kātonga Faiva*" and "*Pō Ako*", some insights and useful approaches to teaching of and learning by Tongan students could be drawn. Tongan students experienced *mālie* (deep pleasure of understanding since the mind and soul can relate and connect to the ideas, lyrics, songs and actions) in their "*Kātonga Faiva*" and "*Pō Ako*" since their cultural knowledge and Tongan language are central in creating and practicing the activities. The students accepted learning as they feel *mālie* and *māfana* (affection) during the events. In children's quest for formal academic success, intellect is enhanced through the home language and culture, and the knowledge embedded pedagogical practices (Manu'atu, 2000, 2004). The concept of *mālie* is the creation of peace and satisfaction within people. The *Fagogo* as an entertainment for children would be very significant in exploring *mālie* with Samoan children.

Thaman (1995) argued in the study of "Concepts of learning, knowledge and wisdom in Tonga and their relevance to education" that a continuing process of reclaiming indigenous discourses is achieved by placing greater emphasis on home cultures and vernacular languages in curriculum planning, teacher

education and research activities. Thaman suggested that indigenous societies lose cultural knowledge relevant to learning, hence the education system must contribute to the education of indigenous people and the significant ideas in their language through cultural practices.

Samoans must continue to research knowledge that is specific to them before it is lost forever. Now is a critical period in the education of Samoan people, since Samoa is becoming increasingly influenced by external force and today's generation have demonstrated a dramatic disinterest in Samoan language, values, and ancestral customs. The Samoan Ministry of Education language and culture specialist Ainsley So'o (2006 cited in Nunes) wrote that Samoan children are losing competency in their own language and exposure to their heritage. The loss of interest and competency are clear indications that revival and recapture of specific knowledge genuine to Samoan people and its culture may be necessary. *Fagogo* provides cultural knowledge that is specific to Samoan people, like the *Kātonga faiva* with Tongan students. Moreover, *Fāgogo* can be explored further for pedagogical ideas for Samoan children in Samoa, as in *Kātonga faiva* for Tongan students.

The Tangatawhenua of Aotearoa have returned to establishing Māori language and cultural institutions where cultural rituals are taught, and Māori pedagogies are obtained that have partially raised the academic achievements of Māori students. The significance of exploring *Fāgogo* as a specific ritual for Samoan children and people could also provide successful pedagogical ideas for Samoan children in their learning.

#### 4. Discussion

*"The Fāgogo are stories of language learning and understanding for generations that believe in the foundations of Samoan culture. They are stories that make all Samoans proud and lessen ignorance of Samoan language and culture" (Aiono, 2005).*

The uniqueness of *Fāgogo* goes beyond the entertainment value they offer. The *Fāgogo* in Samoa are distinctive and irreplaceable because Samoan people can identify with them and understand them. *Fāgogo* is fundamental to *fa'aSamoa* through its effect on expression and language learning. The individual aspects of *Fāgogo* should be thoroughly analyzed to uncover how they open 'windows' of opportunities to successful learning of cultural knowledge as well as academic success. Currently *Fāgogo* is rarely practiced in Samoan homes. Even while its demise can be counted as a blow to the Samoan culture; *Fāgogo* custodians are taking their knowledge to the grave.

The loss of language and culture of other Pacific nations is chronicled and now researched. Samoans sympathized as they have gradually found their way back to their historical identities, languages, and cultural practices. The lessons learned from those nations and peoples must stand to encourage us to sustain Samoan cultural knowledge, as it is our only strength when competing with other worlds unknown to us.

The research of *Fāgogo* gives the opportunity to bring insights into the deep culture of Samoa, its values, and beliefs. Amidst all the introduction and long history of crossings and people coming

together, is there a thick vein of distinctiveness that enables the Samoan arts to retain a unique character? For some it would be difficult to answer this question, but it lies within the way things are done, the structuring principles underlying the surface manifestations that people are conditioned to see as constituting art. In Samoa some of these structures are found in the abstract conceptualization of space, and in the ways rituals and traditions like *Fāgogo* are performed.

While many studies have identified the significance of first language and culture, none has sought a deeper analysis of the *fāgogo* as a site of pedagogical knowledge for Samoan children. Fairbairn-Dunlop (1987, 1994) came close “in searching for written *fāgogo*” as her work focused on presenting the art of *Fagogo* in written form, therefore offered little in-depth analysis of oral *Fāgogo* as a source of Samoan pedagogy.

Another point of significance is the contribution of the Samoan language, as a medium of instruction at primary school level, may be to overall improvement in literacy and numeric skills (Ministry of Education, 2006). *Fāgogo* is a fundamental source of language that enriches the *utuvagana* (vocabulary) of Samoan children at an early age as well as for the rest of their school life. It is hoped that findings of pedagogical ideas in *Fāgogo* may serve in preparation for policy recommendations and implementation strategies for literacy methodologies for Samoan children.

At another level, it provided the opportunity to re-think and reflect on one’s identity as a Samoan. Involvement and anticipation in the language and culture and experiences through teaching Samoan children is significant in positioning oneself in the *Fāgogo epistemology*. Therefore, one’s place in Samoan society is paramount to informing education policies and planning about *fāgogo* as a pedagogical tool to enable Samoan children to glean knowledge from the Samoan language and culture, which the education system emphasized as significant for learning language and culture.

The *Fāgogo* is specific to Samoan pedagogy, language and culture and its knowledge is kept alive by those living ‘inside’ the culture. Generally, there are not many Samoan people and elders who still have the deepest knowledge of *fa’aSamoa* let alone *Fāgogo* therefore it is crucial to seek that generation so they could impart knowledge to the younger generation. The significance of this is to portray the inner values exclusive to learning Samoan language and culture for Samoan children, thus *Fāgogo* should be revitalized before it ceased to exist.

While *Fāgogo* as a context captured the depth of Samoan language and culture in all its elements, no one had gone into a deeper analysis of *Fāgogo* as a conceptual framework for teaching and learning Samoan language and culture for Samoan children. This review and its outcome in identifying pedagogical ideas from *Fāgogo* will assist in implementing the aims of Samoan education policies in strengthening the teaching and learning of Samoan language and culture for young children in particular.

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